



A VARIETY OF DECORATIVE STEEL OBJECTS IN THE ISLAMIC ART COLLECTION OF THE NÁPRSTEK MUSEUM

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ABSTRACT: This essay will look above all at the metalwork of the 19th century, which is often not included in many specialist publications on the development of arts and crafts in the Near East. Nevertheless, metalwork during this later period was still of a very high quality. In an attempt to meet demand, craftsmen increased the variability of their production, while preserving the same methods of working materials and the decorative techniques used. Although the best-known Islamic metalwork is now that involving copper and various copper alloys (mostly with zinc, i.e. brass), workshops also made decorative objects from other metals. Work using precious metals such as gold or silver is less well-known, because these objects have mostly not been preserved. Products made of iron and steel are also little known because the material corrodes easily. As a result, the work that we know tends to come from more recent times.

The objects made of iron (or steel) in the Islamic art collection of the Náprstek Museum come mostly from the area of Iran, and from the Qajar period in the 19th century. The Islamic collection of the Náprstek Museum contains a representative collection of decorative and utilitarian items made of iron and iron alloys, which confirm the variability of the material's use in the field of craftsmanship. The choice of items includes typical examples of Iranian production, mostly from the 19th century, and thus helps to create a picture of developments in metalwork in this area.

KEY WORDS: Islamic art – Islamic metalwork – decorative art – iron – steel – Iran – 19th century – Qajar – National Museum – Náprstek Museum, Prague – Museum of West Bohemia in Pilsen.

Introduction

Islamic craftsmanship in the Near East characteristically shows a high degree of skill in the way in which various types of metals and alloys are worked. A long

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tradition of working with these materials and a tendency to continue with or even to copy older patterns means that the high quality of this work has continued until the present day. This essay will look above all at the metalwork of the 19th century, which is often not included in many specialist publications on the development of arts and crafts in the Near East.² Nevertheless, metalwork during this later period was still of a very high quality. In an attempt to meet demand, craftsmen increased the variability of their production, while preserving the same methods of working materials and the decorative techniques used. Although the best-known Islamic metalwork is now that involving copper and various copper alloys (mostly with zinc, i.e. brass), workshops also made decorative objects from other metals. Work using precious metals such as gold or silver is less well-known, because these objects have mostly not been preserved. Products made of iron and steel are also little known because the material corrodes easily. As a result, the work that we know tends to come from more recent times.

Steel as a material

Iron, as one of the most widespread raw materials in the world, has a long history of being used in metalwork in the Near East. Iron was highly valued both in ancient times and later in the Middle Ages, partly because it was fairly difficult to gain from ores. Those who knew how to make it (such as the Hittites in ancient times) guarded the technology fiercely, and it was no different with steel making. Steel is an alloy of iron and carbon (with the amount of carbon being up to about 2.11%) and other elements. In ancient and mediaeval times steel was generally produced in bloomeries, and this was also the case in the Near East (Allan 2000: 41). A characteristic product that spread over the Near East during the Middle Ages in particular, and which made the Arab world famous in western Europe, was “Damascene”³ steel, used above all to make armour and weapons. This type of material, made out of high carbon steel also known as *wootz*,⁴ comes from southern India, probably Sri Lanka. Damascene steel had a characteristic appearance – a watered or marble pattern could be seen on the finished surface of the object. It is still not entirely clear how it was produced. Modern-day “Damascene” steel has a similar pattern, but it is created by pattern welding sheets of steel. The pattern is similar, therefore, but the production technique is different.

The use of steel in craftsmanship in the Near East, above all in Iran

It is clear that the strength and flexibility of iron and steel made them particularly suited to the production of weapons and armour, and this was so throughout the

² Islamic craftsmanship of the 19th century has been dealt with more in various specialist articles (see, for example, Melikian-Chirvani 1992). An interesting contribution to the issues involved in publishing and exhibiting the production of the 19th century is the catalogue of the Moravian Gallery in Brno for the exhibition *The Thousand and One Nights* (Dvořáková 2011).

³ Named after Damascus in Syria, which in Europe was wrongly considered to be the centre of production of this steel. In reality the products came from Iran or India, and were merely traded in Damascus (Allan 2000:76).

⁴ The word arose as a corruption of the Kannada language of the south western area of India, Karnataka, for steel – *ukku* (Wikipedia: History of metallurgy in the Indian subcontinent. [cit. 2012-12-15]. Available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_metallurgy_in_the_Indian_subcontinent>).

history of weapons production. As in mediaeval and modern Europe, however, steel was also used in the Near East to make other products, both purely utilitarian and purely decorative. Iron and iron alloys were used to make tackles for horses, and to make manufacturing and medical tools, writing implements, locks, clasps and so on. The importance of iron in mediaeval Islamic society was comparable to that of precious metals. Like objects made of precious metals, objects made out of iron and steel have not been preserved from older periods. Unlike gold and silver, however, which were often reworked for new purposes (Ward 1993: 10), iron products easily succumbed to corrosion. Nevertheless, we have written evidence from the Middle Ages of further products created from this highly-valued material (Ward 1993: 30 and 107). The products could, of course, with regard to their functionality, be very simple in style. Nevertheless, if the product was intended to represent the property and power of a distinguished owner, it would be flamboyantly shaped or decorated using various techniques. Above all this concerns weapons and armour that were not produced simply for battle purposes, but were made with a view to glorifying their owner. Over the last few centuries, the 19th in particular, traditional armour and cold weapons gradually lost their function during the rule of Islamic dynasties and became purely prestigious or even decorative items. In the 19th and 20th centuries they also became tourist souvenirs. These period influences naturally had an impact on the appearance of the products. The techniques used to create and decorate steel weapons and armour were forging, watering, incising, drilling, piercing, engraving, etching, inlaying, chiselling and overlaying with gold and silver and so on.

The same techniques that were used to decorate weapons and armour were used, entirely unchanged, by craftsmen in the production of other decorative objects. This article focuses on a group of iron, in some cases steel, objects that are now in the collection of the National Museum – Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American cultures in Prague. They are exclusively products from the Iranian region, mostly from the 19th century. Their decoration is usually pierced or chiselled. A further type of decoration typical of this type of decorative item is the technique of overlaying with precious metals. The future pattern was outlined on the roughened surface using an engraved or dotted line, and metal wire or leaf was then hammered into the areas thus outlined. The decoration was fixed and finished by heating the surface. On some items this roughened surface is visible, either clearly (bowls, cat. no. 1) or partially (peacock, cat. no. 11).

Steel decorative items in the collection of the Náprstek Museum

The objects made of iron (or steel) in the collection of Islamic crafts in the Náprstek Museum come mostly from the area of Iran, and from the Qajar period in the 19th century.⁵ The collection contains a large number of weapons and pieces of armour from the same material, but we will not deal with those in this article since they form a specific area of research. Metalwork, or steelwork, was no different from other crafts in that individual workshops specialised in the production of specific items (e.g. Allan 2000: 92–93). This essay will look at decorative items, although their decorative character does not have to mean that they were any less useful in everyday life (see, for example, the water pipe, cat. no. 8). These objects can be divided into several groups or

⁵ On the issue of classification see e.g. Melikian-Chirwani 1992:318.

subgroups according to their use or form. The working of the material and its decoration is the same, or at least similar, in the case of all the types of object.

The most numerous groups of objects consist of vessels – bowls and bottles – and steel instruments. There is a smaller group of animals, containing two purely ornamental figurines and one that functions as a casket. There is also a small but interesting group of Iranian water pipes (*qalian*) which have been preserved in the form of individual parts, unconnected to each other.

The objects entered the museum from the 1940s onwards in various ways, either as gifts or purchases from private individuals or, particularly later on, from antiquities shops. They also came as transfers from other museums, through the National Cultural Committee (NCC) which was set up in 1946 as a central organ for the administration of the state's cultural property (this was property nationalized after the Second World War from various sources). The same type of object entered the museum from regional museums in later years. The museum mostly acquired these objects without the necessary documentation, and in the catalogue (see below) they are collectively labelled "old acquisitions". In the case of four objects, no originator is given in the inventory registers.

Bowls and plates

The collection includes ten bowls of various shapes. They are smallish bowls on a low or high stand. All of them are overlaid with gold, and two of them also with silver. The decoration of the bowls (cat. no. 2 and inv. no. 18584) and saucer (cat. no. 3) is very similar, in the case of the bowls identical. The outer rims of the bowls are decorated with repeated suns, connected with plant patterns. Inside the bowls, in the very centre, is a circular plant pattern. The pattern on the saucer is similar, but it covers the entire visible upper surface of the plate. The sun is a symbol traditionally used in Iran as part of the official state propaganda, from the Middle Ages through the Islamic dynasties to the present day.⁶ The sun often formed part of the patterns on decorative items from the 19th century, such as brass incense-holders. The motif is repeated on other objects in this collection. The bowls, like the other objects, probably date from the 18th–19th century. There is a similar bowl and saucer in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, but they date from the 17th–18th century.⁷

The bowls on stands (cat. no. 5 and inv. no. 18577) are interesting, being decorated with the same technique but a slightly different pattern. One bowl (cat. no. 5) is decorated on the outside with a repeated garland motif, while the other has a rich plant pattern in star-shaped ornaments on the outside circumference and in a strip on the outside rim of the bowl. What the two bowls have in common is the decoration on their insides, popular not just in the Iranian area but all over the Near East in the decoration of both ceramic and metal vessels.⁸ This is a pattern of swimming fish.

⁶ In combination with a lion, the sun acted as the official symbol of Iran, especially during the Qajar era in the 19th century. The symbol appears on coins, and the Imperial Order of the Lion and Sun was bestowed during the Qajar era.

⁷ Accession Numbers: 81.1.667 and 81. 1. 668 ([cit. 2012-12-15] Available at <<http://metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/140000265>>, <<http://metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/140011096>>).

⁸ E.g. brass bowl, Cairo or Damascus, early 14th century (published in Ward 1993:112).

There are two shallow bowls, with the same dimensions, that are interesting and not clearly identifiable. They both have a silver and gold plant pattern at the bottom of the inside. The decorative technique has been less skilfully applied here than in the case of the other objects, and the roughened surface is clearly visible. This type of decoration is similar to the examples of metal decoration technique to be found in the collection of the Applied Art Department of the Museum of West Bohemia, for example.⁹ If these bowls had a function, they are most likely to have been the bowls of weighing scales.

Parts of water pipes

A particular subgroup of vessels consists of parts of water pipes. Whole water pipes are not usually found in the collections of Islamic metal objects that I have been able to see.¹⁰ Usually we find only their components, mostly their bases. This is also the case in the Náprstek Museum's collection, in which there are four such objects, made of steel. The steel bases of the water pipes are highly decorative, with their silver shine and gold decoration. The chief items here are two water pipe bases, cat. nos. 7 and 8. They are both decorated with overlaid gold, but there is further gold decoration in the form of chiselled ornaments in medallions and cartouches around the circumference of the base. Base no. 7 has plant motifs with birds, while cat. no. 8 has figural motifs – as well as plant decoration we can see musicians performing in an entertainment, surrounded by various types of vessel. This is a motif that was not just a favourite one throughout the history of Persian craftsmanship, but was also suited to the vessel in question, given that it served to please the senses. There is also a cup, cat. no. 9, which was probably originally also part of a water pipe. The decoration of the steel sheath of the cup is overlaid with gold and has a chiselled plant motif. It is very similar in decoration to the above-mentioned water pipe bases. Inside, however, it has a brass infill, and it is possible that the cup changed function at some point and became a small candle-holder. Its shape is the same as that of similar cups from Iranian metal water pipes (*qalian*).¹¹

Figurines and zoomorphic vessels¹²

The depiction of animals on artistic objects or their depiction in the form of individual figurines was popular throughout the Islamic world and throughout the history of Islamic craftsmanship. Of the depictions in the shape of animals, there is a well-known bronze figurine of a deer from the second half of the 10th century from the excavation of Medina Azahara in Spain, which originally probably formed part of a fountain. There is also the bronze Pisa griffin from southern Spain of the 11th century, which performed a similar function. In the same way, the Iranian brass incense-holders from the 19th century, some of which can be found in the collections of the Náprstek Museum (e.g. a peacock, inv. no. 19721, an elephant, inv. no. A2921 and a rooster, inv. no. A11379) were not separate sculptures but were objects with a particular function,

⁹ E.g. Inv. no. UMP 10157.

¹⁰ A metal pipe decorated with enamel has been preserved in the Moravian Gallery in Brno (q.v. Dvořáková 2011:124 – 125).

¹¹ For analogies see Allan 2000:451.

¹² I have already mentioned the theme of depicting animals in Islamic art in connection with the publishing of objects from the collection of B. Forman in Annals No. 26 (2005, see Bibliography), where the figurine of the dove, cat. no. 12, is also published.

with which their decorative form was connected. Another item of this kind is the figurine of a duck (cat. no. 10), which also served as a casket. The upper part of the body with head and wings lifts up with the aid of a hinge on the duck's breast. Both parts can be secured with a lock. The bottom part of the body, with the legs, is essentially a vessel. The surface is now covered with a heavy patina, but the decoration, although much worn, can still be seen. It was probably executed in silver. The wealth of ornamentation conveys the visual appearance of a duck, with feathers, eyes and beak.

There is a further group of animals which, unlike the previous ones, lack any clear function. This consists of two figurines of a peacock¹³ and one of a dove. These figurines really were made in 19th century Iran purely as decorative items for the home,¹⁴ and as such they found their way on to the western market.¹⁵ However, figurines of other animals were also made, such as elephants¹⁶, deer, camels etc. (Allan 2000: 430).¹⁷ These ornamental figurines are decorated with plant or geometric ornamentation executed in



Fig. 1 Figurine of elephant, steel overlaid with silver and gold. Iran, 19th century, height 19.5 cm, length 34 cm (Museum of West Bohemia in Pilsen, inv. no. UMP 4842).

¹³ The peacock has negative connotations in Islamic tradition (in connection with Adam being driven out of Paradise), but in Persian tradition it is connected with the idea of Paradise itself. Its spread tail feathers allude to the national symbols – the sun and figures from Shiite history.

¹⁴ See Allan 2000:430.

¹⁵ The figurines of an elephant and peacock from the Museum of West Bohemia (inv. nos. UMP 4842 and UMP 4836) were bought in Russia.

¹⁶ In the collection of the Museum of West Bohemia in Pilsen (UMP 4842).

¹⁷ In addition to animals, fruit was also produced, and had no additional function other than the decorative. Similar figurines and objects continue to appear at auctions of Islamic art (e.g. Christie's 2 May 2003 and 2 October 2012 London, South Kensington; Sotheby's 5 October 2011 and 25 April 2012 London).

gold or silver. In the case of birds, the decoration often depicts details such as feathers, eyes etc. Inscriptions and figural subjects do not appear as often on these animals. The area of a peacock's spread tail feathers is usually decorated all over, in our case with the motif of a sun inside a plant pattern.

Although most of these figurines were purely decorative, and their production reflects demand on the Iranian art market of the 19th century, in some cases, as James Allan indicates, the doves may have been used during the holiday in the month of Muharram (Allan 2000: 433).

Other decorative items in the collection

In this group I have included objects of which there are only a few in the collection. An example is the small group of bottles with lids (cat. no. 13). They have broad bases, large round bodies and a flaring neck topped by a cupola-shaped lid with a pyramidal finial. This is a type of vessel found, with variations in form and material, all over the Near East. It is also found in miniature. The bottles were made of ceramics and various metals. The bottle in the Náprstek Museum's collection is made of brass (e.g. inv. no. 18107). The same form is found with a brass incense-holder (inv. no. A15432a). Originally this was probably a type of wine bottle. The steel vessels again have chiselled decoration, overlaid in gold with a plant pattern, mostly in cartouches. They were probably not used, but served to decorate homes.

A further group consists of a pair of candlesticks (cat. no. 14) approximately 26 cm high, with a heavy base, a domed hand protector and a wide, flat edge. Both candle holders are decorated with the same chiselled technique, complemented by gold overlay. The chiselled decoration consists of naturalistic plant and figural motifs, with inscriptions on the flat upper edge. Probably the most decorative item in the collection is a richly-decorated box for a mirror. The stand, a narrow leg on a domed base, holds a box reminiscent of a flower, with two mirrors in it, one inside and one on the inside of the lid. The entire surface is decorated with openwork and chiselling, and overlaid with silver and gold decoration. This item is Qajar production from the 19th century (Allan 2000: 471).

A further interesting object made of the same material is a bell (cat. no. 15). Bells of various shapes were used in Iran to decorate animals, but were also worn by people at the royal court or by dervishes (Allan 2000: 323–327). This bell, too, is decorated with a chiselled plant decoration with inscriptions and overlaid with gold.

Scissors and other implements

In addition to items designed to decorate interiors, the Náprstek Museum also contains a significant number of implements, above all a total of 54 pairs of scissors, but also two awls and four pairs of tweezers. The most numerous items in the implement collection are paper scissors (e.g. cat. no. 21), which are not overlaid with gold, but decorated using a pierced or chiselled decoration and riveted together. The decoration is either geometric or plant-based, or there are inscriptions. Most of the scissors without doubt come from the 19th century. Their size corresponds to their practical purpose, so they could be kept in small cases – penboxes (*qalamdan*) which were made of various materials (such as wood or papier mâché), but also of iron, among other things.¹⁸

¹⁸ E.g. the penbox in the collection of the Museum of West Bohemia in Pilsen, inv. no. UMP 4606.

A further type are long narrow scissors, probably also used for paper, but which did not fit in an average-sized penbox.¹⁹ These scissors (cat. nos. 19 and 20) are richly overlaid with gold decoration over the entire surface. The technique of this decoration corresponds to that seen on steel figurines, for example. The last type consists of larger scissors with no surface decoration in precious metals (cat. nos. 17 and 18), which thanks to their thicker construction and greater weight could be used for tougher materials than paper, such as textiles.²⁰ These scissors are decorated in the same way as small paper scissors, with piercing and chiselling. The collection further contains awls – the one here (cat. no. 23) has bone on the handle and a gold-overlaid surface.



Fig. 2 Penbox, iron overlaid with gold. Iran, 19th century, length 20.8 cm, width 3.5 cm (Museum of West Bohemia in Pilsen, inv. no. UMP 4606).

Conclusion

The Islamic collection of the Náprstek Museum contains a representative collection of decorative and utilitarian items made of iron and iron alloys, which confirm the variability of the material's use in the field of craftsmanship. The choice of items includes typical examples of Iranian production, mostly from the 19th century, and thus helps to create a picture of developments in metalwork in this area.

¹⁹ I consider the usual size of *qalamdan* to be around 22 cm in length, max. 25 cm. Part of the inside of the case could be taken up by a built-in ink bottle, however. Of course larger penboxes were produced, but I assume that this type of scissors was kept in another kind of case.

²⁰ See Allan 2000: 371.

Catalogue

The Islamic collection of the Náprstek Museum contains, in addition to weapons and armour, nearly ninety further objects made of iron or steel. The following catalogue does not contain all the inventory numbers, but only items representing the various groups of artefacts that are the subject of this essay.

Bowls

1. Pair of bowls (scales?)

Probably Iran, 19th century

Purchased from Ing. A. Valšík, 1944

Diameter 13 cm, height 2.3 cm

Inv. nos. 3788 and 3789

A pair of shallow bowls with raised rims. In the middle of the bottom of each is a medallion with plant ornamentation, overlaid with silver and gold. The shape and size suggest that they may have been used as scales.



2. Bowl

Iran, 18th–19th century

Old acquisition (NCC)²¹

Diameter 22.2 cm, height 9.9 cm

Inv. no. 18583

A deep bowl on a low stand. The decoration is overlaid with gold. The inside of the bowl has a rosette in the middle with a plant ornament. The inner rim has a simple double line. The outside of the bowl is decorated with a repeated motif of suns joined by garlands.



²¹ National Cultural Committee.

3. Saucer

Iran, 18th–19th century

Old acquisition (NCC)

Diameter 25.5 cm, height 4.5 cm

Inv. no. 18585

A small plate overlaid with gold floral decoration. The upper surface is decorated with a plant pattern in two concentric circles around a central rosette, and around the perimeter of the plate. The edge is also decorated with motifs of suns joined by garlands.



4. Bowl on stand

Iran, 18th–19th century

Acquisition unlisted

Diameter 22.3 cm, height 14.8 cm

Inv. no. 43560

A deep bowl on a stand. The decoration is executed in gold overlay. The inside of the bowl has a rosette in the middle, surrounded by several goldfish. The inner edge is decorated with a motif of trefoils arranged in a strip around the circumference of the bowl, and four medallions with a plant pattern. The outer edge of the bowl is decorated with a rich plant pattern with flowers and tendrils. The outside of the body of the bowl has four ornaments in the shape of eight-pointed stars with a plant pattern.



5. Bowl on stand

Iran, 18th–19th century

Purchased from R. Hořejší, 1961

Diameter 25.5 cm, height 17.5 cm

Inv. no. A38

A deep bowl on a stand. The decor is executed in gold overlay. The inside of the bowl has a rosette in the centre, surrounded by several goldfish. The inner edge of the bowl has two simple lines running round it. The decoration on the outside of the bowl takes the form of simple lines in the shape of arches ending in pointed buds.



6. Bowl

Iran, 19th century

Purchased from antiquities shop, 1988

Diameter 12.7 cm, height 4.8 cm

Inv. no. A19612

A deep bowl overlaid with gold. The decoration is on the outer edge of the bowl, and consists of a band of six cartouches with inscriptions in *nasta'liq* script.



Parts of water pipes

7. *Qalian* (water pipe) base

Iran, 19th century

Old Acquisition

Height 28.4 cm, diameter 13.4 cm

Inv. no. 18576

A water pipe base in the shape of a bottle with a cylindrical body and a high neck. The decoration consists of plant motifs and birds chiselled in oval medallions on the body and neck of the vessel, the contours being overlaid with gold.



8. *Qalian* (water pipe) base

Iran, 19th century

Old acquisition (NCC)

Height 21.5 cm, diameter 12.5 cm

Inv. no. 19498

A water pipe base, oval in shape, ending in a pyramid in its lower part. The decoration features plant and figural motifs, composed into medallions of various sizes. Four large chiselled medallions on the body of the vessel contain figures in the middle of an entertainment (a group of musicians with instruments, surrounded by various other vessels). The contours of the decoration and the top are overlaid with gold.



9. Cup – part of water pipe

Iran, 19th century

Purchased from antiquities shop, 1989

Height 6.2 cm, diameter 7.6 cm

Inv. no. A25855

This cup, from a qalian water pipe, is chiselled on the surface and overlaid with gold. The chiselled plant decoration is composed into four oval medallions. The brass inner piece appears to have been inserted later, changing the object's function. The cup probably later served as a candle-holder.



Figurines and zoomorphic vessels

10. Casket

Iran, 19th century

Old acquisition (NCC)

Height 33 cm, length 34 cm

Inv. no. 19772

A casket in the shape of a duck. The upper part of the duck, with head and wings, can be lifted up – at the the duck's breast is a hinge and at the back a catch. The surface of the duck is overlaid with silver decoration, capturing details such as feathers and eyes. The decoration is noticeably worn.



11. Peacock

Iran, 19th century

Old acquisition (NCC)

Height (overall) 51.7 cm, width
of tail 31.2 cm

Inv. no. 48517ab

This figurine in the shape of a peacock with a crown on a base, with an open tail, is made up of three parts. The surface of the peacock is overlaid with silver and gold decoration, which is well-preserved and captures the wings and the head with eyes. The figurine has a plant pattern on the breast and back. The tail has three layers – two steel plates with a copper one in between. The plates are connected by brass rivets. The front of the tail is decorated in openwork, overlaid with silver. In the central part of the tail the decoration consists of a large medallion of the sun amid plant ornaments with rosettes. The collection in the Museum of West Bohemia in Plzeň (UMP 4836) has a peacock with almost the same decoration, but the tail is decorated with completely pierced openwork with no underlay.



12. Dove figurine²²

Iran, 19th century

Purchased from antiquities shop, 1987

Height 23.6 cm, length 14.3 cm, width 21.5 cm

Inv. no. A18482

A figurine in the form of a dove with a raised head and an open tail. The surface of the statue is overlaid with silver and gold ornamental decoration. From the point of view of aesthetics and craftsmanship this is an exemplary, precisely-executed individual figurine.



²² The object has already been published in *Annals*, 2005, No. 26 (see Bibliography: Mleziva, 2005.)

Other decorative items in the collection

13. Bottle

Iran, 19th century

Acquisition unlisted

Height 42.5 cm, diameter 14 cm

Inv. no. 16249

A vessel with a round body, standing on a large diameter base. The neck of the vessel is long and narrow, flaring towards the end. The bottom third of the neck has a wide ring. The bottle has a lid ending in a pyramidal stem. The all-over pattern with plant motifs is composed into large cartouches with cusped arches. The plant decor is chiselled and the contours of the pattern are overlaid with gold decoration.



14. Candle-holder

Iran, 19th century

Acquisition unlisted

Height 26.4 cm, diameter 15 cm

Inv. no. 18593

A candle-holder on a gradated base with a wide, circular bottom. Underneath the part that holds the candle is a domed hand protector. The candlestick has a wide, flat edge decorated with an inscription in *nasta'liq* script. The plant and figural decoration composed into the medallions is chiselled and overlaid with gold. The chiselled surfaces have naturalistically-depicted plants with golds or human busts.



15. Bell

Iran, 19th century

Old acquisition

Height 15 cm, diameter 15 cm

Inv. no. 19497

A bell with a semicircular clapper and simple heart-shaped handle, decorated with chiselling and overlaid with gold. Around the bottom edge and at the top under the handle are cartouches with inscriptions in *nasta'liq* script. The outside of the bell has chiselled cartouches with plant motifs. The contours of the chiselled decoration are outlined with a gold line.



16. Mirror casket

Iran, 19th century

Purchased from Ing. M. Tomek,
1950.

Height 33 cm, length 34 cm

Inv. no. 40396

A casket with two mirrors, on a stand that has a domed base and a narrow leg. The casket, reminiscent of a flower, contains two mirrors – one inside the casket and one on the inside of its lid. The whole surface of the top of the casket lid is decorated with openwork and chiselling and overlaid with silver and gold decoration. The openwork part is underlaid with red foil, and the individual metal segments are fastened to each other with brass rivets.²³ The front of the casket has, as well as plant patterns, an inscription in *nasta'liq* script. The rest of the object is also decorated with a chiselled pattern and overlaid with silver and gold decoration.



²³ See also the peacock tail, inv. no. 48517.

Scissors and other implements

17. Scissors

Iran, 18th–19th century

Gift, M. Trčková, 1958

Length 22.2 cm, width 10 cm

Inv. no. 16239

Large scissors connected with a rivet. The centre of the scissors has chiselled decoration with figural motifs of animals – hares and wild beasts hunting deer. The handles of the scissors have a cursive inscription, probably indicating the original owner and the date.

18. Scissors

Iran, 19th century

Gift, M. Trčková, 1958

Length 26 cm, width 11.2 cm

Inv. no. 18148

Solid scissors connected with a rivet. The handles are in the shape of the S-shaped bodies of dragons with open jaws. The central part has a pierced decoration in the form of an inscription in the *nasta'liq* script.



19. Scissors

Iran, 19th century

Purchased from antiquities shop, 1987

Length 26.8 cm, width 4 cm

Inv. no. A18417

Long narrow scissors, connected with a rivet. Each side is overlaid with gold floral decoration.

20. Scissors

Iran, 19th century

Purchased from antiquities shop, 1977

Length 28 cm, width 4 cm

Inv. no. 46450

Long narrow scissors connected with a rivet. The entire outer surface of the scissors and the inside of the blades is overlaid with gold ornamental decoration with plant motifs.



21. Scissors

Iran, 19th century

Acquisition unlisted

Length 15.5, width 2.3 cm

Inv. no. A2991

Small paper scissors connected with a small rivet. The surface has a pierced decoration. The scissors were designed to be used by scribes and kept in a penbox (*qalamdan*).



22. Tweezers

Iran, 19th century

Gift, M. Trčková, 1958

Length 11.5, width 4.6 cm

Inv. No. A3068

Tweezers, simple in form, decorated with overlaid plant pattern.



23. Awl

Iran, 19th century

Gift, M. Trčková, 1958

Length 14 cm

Inv. no. A3070

An awl with a handle made out of two sheets of bone riveted to the body of the implement. The surface of the steel part is decorated with an overlaid gold plant pattern.



Photographs by Jiří Vaněk and Ivana Michnerová

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