RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE NEAR EASTERN COLLECTIONS

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The reopening of the Near Eastern galleries, on the second floor of Wing E, offers the Museum an opportunity to show to the public many new additions to its collections made during the war years. Although quite a number of these objects were purchases, many more were gifts from generous Museum friends, particularly Horace Havemeyer, Francis M. Weld, A. B. Martin, and the Kress Foundation, which presented the magnificent Anhalt carpet, announced previously and now to be featured in one of the large galleries (D 4).

Through the generosity of Horace Havemeyer the Museum’s collections of Islamic pottery and tiles have been enriched in the last few years with numerous fine examples from Persia, Syria, and Mesopotamia. Mr. Havemeyer’s private collection has been particularly famous for its very fine specimens of Rakka ware of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. His last gift, nineteen pieces of this ware, places our Museum in the front rank in this field.

Among the objects acquired through purchase, a superb Sasanian bronze ewer takes the first place. It comes from the collection of the late Joseph Brummer, and is known as the finest Sasanian bronze in existence.

The Museum’s Near Eastern expeditions to Ctesiphon in Mesopotamia, to Kasr Abu Nasr (near Shiraz in Iran), and finally to Nishapur in Eastern Iran, yielded many important finds of Sasanian and Islamic material. Particularly rich were the finds of early Islamic art in Nishapur, the city of Omar Khayyam. Many objects from the excavations of the two last seasons, conducted by Charles Wilkinson and Walter Hauser, are now shown for the first time in Gallery E 15. Among the pieces from Nishapur now being shown are important examples of ninth-century wall paintings (the earliest Islamic paintings from Persia), tenth-century stucco carvings from houses and palaces, ceramics, and glassware.

Silver bowl with carved decoration. Persian, Sasanian period, vi or vii century. The ornament shows the Sasanian stylization of a Hellenistic acanthus scroll. Rogers Fund, 1945
Bronze ewer, Persian, Sasanian period, vi century. From the Brummer collection. The palmette decoration is typically Sasanian. Fletcher Fund, 1947
Polychrome wall painting and carved stucco panel from Nishapur. Persian, IX and X centuries. These decorations were found by the Museum's Iranian Expedition.
ABOVE: Pottery with decoration painted in brown luster and cobalt blue. Mesopotamian, from Rakka, xii or xiii century. OPPOSITE PAGE: Bowl from Rakka (above) with underglaze decoration painted in black, blue, and purple, early xiii century; and Persian bowl painted in brown luster, from Kashan, second half of the xiii century. Several kinds of Rakka pottery are represented in Horace Havemeyer’s recent gift, from which the pieces on these pages come. During the Saljuk rule in the xii and xiii centuries Rakka on the Euphrates was known for its beautiful ceramic ware, which rivaled that of Persia. Combinations of elaborate arabesques and Kufic writing, as shown above, were used by Rakka potters with great effect. In the xiii and xiv centuries Kashan was one of the most important ceramic centers of Persia. After the destruction of Rayy (Rhages) Kashan became famous as the center for the manufacture of lusterware.
ABOVE: Panel of tiles with decoration in brown luster. Persian, from Kashan, xiii century. Gift of Horace Havemeyer, 1941. The potters of Kashan made magnificent lustered tiles for wall decoration in houses and public buildings, chiefly mosques. Several of the tiles above are dated in the month of Ramadan, 663 A.H. (June 1265 A.D.). Other famous products of Kashan were the large prayer niches, or mihrabs. Several complete ones still exist in Persian mosques and in museums.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Persian silk weave (above), Sasanian period, v or vi century, Fletcher Fund, 1946; and Syrian silk weave found in Egypt, Ayyubid period, xiii century, Rogers Fund, 1947. Iran under the Sasanids held a monopoly on the silk trade between China and the West. Sasanian silks became famous all over the Near East and influenced the style and design of Coptic, Byzantine, and medieval European textiles. Some were taken to Europe in Christian reliquaries and have been preserved in cathedral treasuries, for instance the treasury of Sens. The roosters, trees, and palmette leaves of the piece shown here are characteristic motives of Sasanian art. The second silk, with a design of griffins, foxes, birds, and arabesque trees, probably part of a garment, belongs to a small group of textiles made in Syrian manufactories (tiraz). Their style, which originated in Saljuk Persia, later influenced the patterns of xiv century Italian silks.
ABOVE: A sick horse and his rider. Tinted drawing in the style of Ustad Muhammadi, Persian, Safavid period, second half of the XVI century. BELOW: Lovers in a landscape. Tinted drawing in the style of Aka Riza, Persian, Safavid period, end of the XVI century. Among the miniature paintings bequeathed to the Museum by George D. Pratt in 1935 are a number of excellent Persian brush drawings, which, together with other drawings from the Museum’s collection, have now been hung in Gallery E 13 B. Brush drawing, often with touches of color, was an interesting technique of Persian artists during the XVI and XVII centuries. Some of their work, particularly in the earlier period, shows great refinement and delicacy. The virtuosity of brush characteristic of the later work was influenced by the art of calligraphy. The miniature above shows characteristic features of Ustad Muhammadi’s style: a scene from daily life, a realistic landscape. The one beneath is typical of the drawing style developed by Aka Riza.
Chingiz Khan dividing the vast Mongol empire among his sons. Indian miniature by Basawan and Bhim Gujarati. Leaf from a manuscript of Rashid ad Din’s “History of the World.” Period of the Mughal emperor Akbar (1556-1605). Gift of Francis M. Weld, 1948