The Museum’s collections have been enriched in the past by several generous gifts from the late Horace Havemeyer, for many years a Trustee of the Museum. From 1929 to 1951 the Department of Near Eastern Art has been periodically the recipient of many important gifts in the field of Islamic pottery, miniature paintings, and oriental rugs. Particularly rich were the additions in the field of ceramic art, in which Mr. Havemeyer showed a great deal of interest. All together the Museum received eighty-nine pieces of pottery from Persia, Syria, Mesopotamia, and Turkey.

In his will Horace Havemeyer bequeathed to the Museum two Persian rugs and twenty additional pieces of Islamic pottery, which, together with previous gifts, constitute a part of the H. O. Havemeyer collection. The bequest is particularly rich in Rakka ware with painted decoration, mostly in black under a turquoise-blue glaze. Thanks to the Havemeyer bequest and an earlier gift of sixteen Rakka ceramics with lustered decoration, the Museum possesses today one of the richest collections of Rakka pottery in America.

Rakka, situated on the Euphrates river, in Upper Mesopotamia, was an important ceramic center during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries under the rule of the Saljuks. Its ruins were exploited for years by art dealers, who obtained many fine examples of pottery. The collecting of Rakka ware with lustered or painted decoration was fashionable in the early twenties and even before, both here and in Europe. Many outstanding pieces were acquired by the Havemeyer family, and these may be seen today in the Metropolitan Museum.

Among the Rakka pieces with painted decoration are fifteen vases and bowls decorated with arabesques, geometrical patterns, interlacings, and Arabic writing, both Kufic and Nashki. The patterns form an all-over design or are placed in compartments of various sizes. One of the most famous Rakka pieces in the world is a bowl with a design of two peacocks (see opposite page). The highly decorative design of the birds with magnificently stylized tails is a characteristic feature of the Saljuk art which flourished in Persia and Mesopotamia during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Besides Rakka ware in black and blue there is also a group with polychrome decoration under a transparent greenish glaze. The decoration consists of birds, human figures, animals, and arabesques painted in black, blue, green, and brown manganese. In this group is a noteworthy piece with a pair of birds (see p. 210). The heraldic composition combined with arabesques appears often in Saljuk decoration.

Other ceramics in the Havemeyer Bequest are of Persian origin. An outstanding piece is a bowl with lustered decoration of about 1200 (see p. 210) showing two seated female court entertainers, one of which is playing a lute. They are wearing rich silk garments which show designs of arabesque scrolls or of harpies, that is, of birds with human heads. The decoration is typical of the Saljuk pottery in Persia at the end of the twelfth and early thirteenth century. At that time, the most important ceramic centers were Rayy and Kashan. The Havemeyer bowl has all the characteristics of the Rayy school. Another outstanding piece in the Havemeyer collection is a large cobalt-blue storage jar with relief decoration (see p. 211). On the body and neck are running deer or flying geese placed in a naturalistic landscape with Chinese cloud motives. The Persian inscription contains a date: A.H. 681, which corresponds to A.D. 1282/83. The naturalistic style of decoration recalls the so-called Sultanabad pottery, in which the Chinese influences are apparent. These influences
were due to the conquest of Persia by the Mongols in 1256. Gradually Persian artists changed the style of their landscapes from semi-abstract to a more naturalistic one and rendered birds and animals in a realistic fashion. Such large jars were for a long time attributed to the kilns of Sultanabad, but new evidence points to Kashan as the main manufacturing center.

In the Havemeyer bequest are also two Persian rugs, one of the sixteenth century, the other an early seventeenth-century silk rug brocaded with silver and silver-gilt metal threads. The sixteenth-century floral cartouche rug (see p. 212) is not only a strikingly beautiful example of Persian rug-weaving but also quite unique. Both in design and technique this rug is related to the Persian vase rugs which are attributed to the looms of Jushagan (near Isfahan) or Kerman. The whole field of the rug is divided into compartments forming cartouches or sections of cartouches in various colors—yellow, brown, pink, brick red, salmon red, wine red, dark blue, light blue, and green. Within the compartments are placed single palmettes of the composite variety familiar to us from vase rugs. Among the floral motives one deserves special attention; its shape,
LEFT: Rakka bowl with painted birds. XII century. RIGHT: Bowl with lustered decoration: two court entertainers. Persian (Rayy), early XIII century
LEFT: Large storage jar (21 1/2 inches high) with relief decoration under a cobalt-blue glaze. Persian (Mongol), XIII century.

ABOVE: Rakka vase with painted decoration. XII or XIII century
Detail of compartment rug in yellow, brown, pink, green, and various reds and blues. Persian, end of XVI century

formed of curving leaves, suggests a vase.

The second rug is a so-called Polish or Polonaise rug, a type made in Persia in the time of Shah Abbas (1587-1629) and later, for export to European countries. The orange-yellow field of this rug shows numerous horizontal rows of arabesques combined with palmette devices and half palmettes.