Fragmentary **Visions**

Curated by the Exhibition Seminar,
Art and Art History Department
under the direction of Eiren Shea,
Assistant Professor of Art History

February 3 – May 6, 2023

Published on the occasion of the exhibition
Fragmentary Visions
February 3 – May 6, 2023

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Acknowledgments

Many people helped us with the various stages of planning, designing, and executing our exhibition and accompanying catalog. Special thanks to Susan Baley, the Director of the Grinnell College Museum of Art; Daniel Strong, Associate Director and Curator of Exhibitions, and Tilly Woodward, Curator of Academic and Community Outreach, for their kindness and eagerness to work with our team which made this exhibition possible.

We are especially grateful for the efforts of Jocelyn Krueger, Collections Manager, and Milton B. Severe, Director of Exhibition Design, whose professionalism and attention to the details of both hardware and archival information have been both essential to our planning and an inspiration throughout the process.

We are indebted to Dr. Anne F. Harris, President of Grinnell College, for her interest in our exhibition and her extraordinary generosity in inviting us to the President's House, as well as her gracious authoring of the foreword of this catalog. Karen Dillon helped facilitate our partnership with President Harris.

Dr. Helen C. Evans, Curator for Byzantine Art Emerita at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Dr. Elizabeth Dospěl Williams, Curator of the Byzantine Collection at Dumbarton Oaks; and Dr. Elias Saba, Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies and History, all provided essential insights into how to approach different parts of the Kelekian collection for this exhibition.

LeaAnn Henry from the Grinnell College Communications and Marketing office and Daniel Strong provided crucial support in helping us publish our catalog.

Thanks also to Jodi Brandenburg, Museum Guard, and all the student employees of the GCMoA, who help assure the smooth running of all exhibitions.

Finally, our greatest appreciation is for Professor Eiren Shea, Assistant Professor of Art History, who provided immense support in every aspect of the exhibition. From her insightful lectures on our collection's history to her meticulous editing of our catalog, *Fragmentary Visions* wouldn't have been possible without Prof. Shea's material and emotional support these past several months. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you.

Previous Exhibitions of the Exhibition Seminar

Art and Art History Department, Grinnell College

Thirty-Three Views of the Floating World: An Exhibition of Japanese Prints
Professor Anne Burkus
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Print and Drawing Study Room, Burling Library

Diversity and Change: Images of the Country and City in 19th and 20th Century Art
Professor Susan Strauber
17 November–15 December 1989
Print and Drawing Study Room, Burling Library

The Artist's Vision
Professor Tony Crowley
3 May–20 May 1991
Print and Drawing Study Room, Burling Library

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Professor Susan Strauber
30 April–5 June 1993
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The Inventive Perspectives of Giovanni Battista Piranesi
Professor R. Timothy Chasson
4 May–22 May 1995
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Professor Victoria Rovine '86
1 May–31 May 1997
Print and Drawing Study Room, Burling Library

Ghost Dance: Exhibiting Paradox. Edward S. Curtis Photogravures
Professor Jenny Anger
28 January–17 March 2000
Print and Drawing Study Room, Burling Library

Walking a Tightrope: German Expressionist Printmaking 1904-1928
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Giovanni Battista Piranesi: Grandeur and Fantasy. Visions and Views of Rome
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Professor Jenny Anger
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Faulconer Gallery

Against Reason: Anti/Enlightenment Prints by Callot, Hogarth, Piranesi, and Goya
Professor J. Vanessa Lyon
3 April–2 August 2015
Faulconer Gallery

En Voyage: Hybridity and Vodou in Haitian Art
Assistant Professor Fredo Rivera
25 January–18 March 2018
Faulconer Gallery

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"Membra Disjecta"

by Anne F. Harris

When Horace wrote of membra disjecta in the 1st century B.C.E., he initiated a poetics of the fragment that has extended over multiple artistic genres and time periods and can today be vibrantly experienced in the exhibition *Fragmentary Visions: Grinnell's Kelekian Collection*. Fragments — membra disjecta as members or pieces that have been strewn or thrown — exist as such because they have been broken off from the whole, be they lines of poetry found in a manuscript fragment torn from a whole manuscript, sherds of ceramics that indicate a lost vessel, or textiles that once adorned objects or clothed bodies. They are parts that speak *from* the whole in both senses of the preposition: as parts of a greater whole *and* as separate from it.

The discipline of art history has long preferred whole or integral works or collections of art for its analysis. But the curators of this show and authors of this catalogue have purposefully valorized fragments for what they can tell us about history, upheaval, categorization, value, collecting, and those relationships that emerge around a shared love and understanding of objects that have survived being strewn across kingdoms, countries, and continents over hundreds of years and untold numbers of human handlers.

Each of the objects that you will discover in these pages and within the exhibition had a long and complex trajectory in arriving to rest at Grinnell College in Grinnell, Iowa. The phrase "at rest" is apt to describe the acquisition and care of these works of art in the Grinnell Museum of Art, but it is inept in describing the restlessness of membra disjecta — of the fragments that have survived through circumstance and happenstance to be re-membered into a new assembly with new viewers. There is a vitality to the fragment in its varied trajectory, accumulated history, and multiplicity of audiences that this show invites its visitors to understand and experience.

The common thread in the trajectories of these membra disjecta is friendship. Specifically, the enduring friendship between Clinton Rehling (Grinnell College class of 1939) and Nanette Rodney Kelekian, captured in their extraordinary letters and the agreements and arrangements they crafted to house manuscript, ceramics, and textile

fragments unhoused by better-known museums. An unlikely place for works of art whose less fragmentary companion pieces are housed at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Walters Gallery, Grinnell College has become a cherished home for these works in the access they provide to undergraduate students, both as audiences and as curators — as with this marvelous exhibition.

What happens when membra disjecta come together? What occurs when they are re-membered into a new collection? As you will see in the curatorial work and care of the students and campus partners who have gathered these objects anew, a remembered collection prompts questions of categorization (what makes an object an *Islamic* work of art?); of networks (how do commerce and collecting reconfigure works of art?); of contextualization (how does one construct a new context for a decontextualized object?); of value (what is the different value of the fragment?); and of relationships (what drives the human actors in the trajectories of membra disjecta?).

With these questions in mind, this exhibition invites bold new ways of seeing. It offers engaging and innovative ways of understanding fragments, of re-placing membra disjecta into new assemblages and wholes. The essays to follow reframe these works of art by demystifying them through an understanding of their human history from the makers, artists, users, merchants, admirers, buyers, collectors, and audiences who treasured these works and gave them value. Viewers and readers are invited to pay close attention to the humanization of these objects through the many traces of human use: thumbprints on manuscript pages, wear on linens, and cracks in ceramics. The goal of this demystification is to establish a new intimacy, a new understanding of these works of art — these membra disjecta whose journeys underscore the human relationships of works of art and collections and draw attention to the geo-politics of art and collecting.

Above all, the curators and authors of this exhibition have sought to create conditions of possibilities for new relationships — starting with your relationship to these works of art — and expanding in ever encompassing circles to engage materials, collectors, history, interventions, fragmentation and re-membering over hundreds of years and thousands of miles. This exhibition is an act of empowerment for the fragmentary art object in its enduring ability to create connection and meaning.

Dikran Kelekian and the Making of "Islamic" Art

by Verda Karaoglu

Introduction

In this essay I will introduce the major themes of the the exhibition, *Fragmentary Visions: Grinnell's Kelekian Collection*. In it, I answer the following questions: What does "Islamic art" really mean? How did antique dealing start in major "Islamic" cities? How did these "Islamic" objects make their way to the West and how were they perceived and treated? And what does this multifaceted history of "Islamic art" leave us with today?

The Various Definitions of "Islamic Art"

Islamic art is usually defined as the art made by artists and artisans whose religion is Islam, and for patrons who lived in predominantly Muslim lands, for purposes and context somewhat related to a Muslim setting. Geographically, it loosely encompasses the art produced an enormous area stretching around the Mediterranean from Spain and North Africa into West and Central Asia. This definition of Islamic art is unsustainable by default as it is exclusionary to many regions Islam has also expanded to including equatorial Africa, eastern Europe, southeast Asia, southern Russia, northern India, among others. While these regions comprise a significant amount of the Muslim population of the world, even then the mass emigration of Muslim people to Europe and the Americas is disregarded, and the art of the Islamic diaspora is not taken into account. Thus, "Islamic art," a concept arbitrarily constructed, seems to be principally dependent on (even in the 21st century) how close an object's excavation point is to the Kaaba.

The difficulties of defining the scope of "Islamic art" aside, there are also a lot of problems faced in attributing religious contexts to what are otherwise secular objects. There is no doubt that some art in our collection is clearly made for purposes of the faith, such as our Qur'an pages, but what exactly is it that makes our *Large Dish with Coy Gazelle* "Islamic"? The framework of *Fragmentary Visions* argues that "Islamic" art is taxonomically arranged to fit in a Western system of cultural development. Regardless, despite the controversy surrounding its use, the convenience of the term "Islamic art" still prevails in academia and in museums. Most of what is studied by scholars of "Islamic art" is limited to metalwork, ceramics, and textiles (including carpets) — art that in traditional categorization of Western art history is considered minor, decorative, or artisan. Architecture is less studied in the sphere of "Islamic art" than it is in Western art history despite Muslim architecture being as significant as Western architecture. Few examples of sculpture exist.[1] On the whole, it is a little unclear, both geographically and categorically, what "Islamic art" actually refers to. Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom sum it up nicely, stating that "Islamic art" seems to be most easily defined by what it is not: "neither a region, nor a period, nor a school, nor a movement, nor a dynasty, but the visual culture of a place and time where people (or at least their leaders) espoused a particular religion."[2]

There are, of course, authors that challenge this view. The Iranian philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr claims that all "Islamic art" manifests a sense of spirituality, that is, seeing "Islamic art" as sharing a common "inner reality" that translates to Islam.[3] While universalist views can offer a lot of inspiration to contemporary artists, who freely adopt these ideas without necessarily taking into account the historical context

[1] While some scholars may attribute the lack of existing sculpture to the iconoclastic nature of Islam, figurative works across different media have been prevalent in the secular sphere of Islamic art production for centuries. For more information, see: Department of Islamic Art, "Figural Representation in Islamic Art," In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000).

[2] Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, "The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field," *The Art Bulletin 85*, no. 1 (2003), 167.

[3] Blair and Bloom,"The Mirage of Islamic Art," 158.

that comes with it, they are not very useful to historians interested in the dynamic qualities of regional change.

To impose other definitions on this art, such as ascribing it to a geographic context, also come with similar problems. To what extent is the art and architecture of a particular region indebted to a specific religion, ethnicity, or geography for its distinct qualities? When does *Turkish* architecture, for example, stop being *Ottoman, Anatolian* or *Eastern Mediterranean*? Political boundaries created by imperialist and colonialist powers are also yet another issue. Should Syrian art be classified as belonging to the Syrian Arab Republic, or the Roman Empire? Blair and Bloom explain that other ways to define art, dynastically for example, have been popular and successful at being politically correct and avoiding the pitfalls of nationalism.[4] The inevitable flaw of dynastic categorization, however, is that this inherently implies that artistic change was imposed on the artists and artisans from the top and attribute most kinds of examples of "Islamic art" to the rulers and courts.

Contemplating possible ways we could have categorized the objects in *Fragmentary Visions: Grinnell's Kelekian Collection,* our team asked, how does a religion-based classification serve us instead of a geographic or cultural one like those of European art? In what ways can we find meaningful categories to compartmentalize our exhibition? Ultimately, our team decided on approaching the collection by medium and compartmentalized both our catalog and our exhibition space in relation to three media: ceramics, manuscripts, and textiles. This decision was convenient, ultimately because of our relatively small collection size. For lack of a better term, "Islamic art" is still used throughout this essay to refer to certain artifacts, though in quotations, to signal that we acknowledge the legitimate discourse surrounding it.

Historical Trade in Antiquities and Contemporary Relevance

Studying the history of antique dealing is vital in understanding the scholarly and curatorial practices of nearly all Near Eastern[5] artifacts. Documentation and evidence

[4] Blair and Bloom, "The Mirage of Islamic Art," 159.

[5] There isn't a clear-cut definition for the region we are referring to here. Though the origins of the various definitions defy the scope of this research, generally speaking, *Near East* and *Middle East* denote roughly the same transcontinental territories today, which include the Arabian Peninsula, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Turkey.

on antique dealing for artifacts produced under the Fatimid, Ayyubid, Mamluk, or the Ottoman empires are limited and usually consist of Western travelogs, private correspondence, museum archives.[6] Despite what is commonly assumed, though, the commodification of these historical objects cannot be reduced to looting or plunder. Financial dynamics much broader and nuanced in relation to globalization have historically been determining factors in "Islamic art" dealing, which is in fact a very recent phenomenon. To depict a larger picture of the history of collection and dealing of said antiques, this essay briefly discusses the origins of collecting practices in Cairo, Egypt and Damascus, Syria.

The culmination of the Western interest in these "Oriental curiosities" in Cairo constitutes a primary example as to how globalization changed the trajectory of the arts of the "Islamic" world. International attention directed at Near Eastern antiques started gaining traction primarily in the late 1800s when antique dealer Joseph Cohen, a *gayrimuslim* (non-muslim citizen of the Ottoman Empire) born in Smyrna, launched the "Turkish and Persian bazaar" in Khan el-Khalili (a famous historic bazaar in central Cairo) in 1889.[7] This new business venture has been widely successful because of Cohen's exclusion of any imitative work as that has been historically dismissed as unoriginal, cheap, or otherwise unworthy of study.[8] Trading of "Islamic" antiques, however, did not become systematic until late 1890s, despite diverse types of transactions taking place. Some of the early trade occurred legally — licenses from the state could be acquired for aspiring dealers and the trade usually happened in the antique dealer's home. Many transactions made on site in the object's original setting however, were illicit. Architectural pieces from mosques were often acquired through bribery or theft, such as the stained-glass windows of al-Ashrafiya that were exhibited in Paris at the *Exposition Universelle* of 1867.[9]

6 Mercedes Volait, *Antique Dealing and Creative Reuse in Cairo and Damascus* 1850-1890 (Leiden, Brill Publishers, 2021), 55.

7 Mercedes Volait, *Antique Dealing*, 75.

8 Labeling imitative objects of less refined craftsmanship as irrelevant or undeserving of attention has historically been the norm in the field of "Islamic art." The *Fragmentary Visions* collection does include objects that are not necessarily the first of their kind, and are clearly modeled after master examples. Our scholarship attempts to give them the appropriate attention they traditionally lacked in academia (see other catalog essays for more detail).

9 Volait, *Antique Dealing*, 65.

Though Damascus had established commercial roots earlier than Cairo, the Damascene history of foreign trade progressed rather similarly to that of Cairo. European commerce in Damascus was already flourishing around the 1840s, with 120 large merchant houses dominating international trade.[10] As a result, the introduction of European, primarily British, goods of all types in the Syrian market was inevitable around the 1850s, which resulted in an economic crisis, as foreign goods were cheaper and more exciting. The economic crisis is directly tied to the establishment of international antique dealing in Damascus. Selling antiquities to Europeans offered both the advantage of providing commodities that had locally fallen out of fashion a second life as well as meeting the accelerating European demand for Middle Eastern objects. Soon, antique selling became a booming business enterprise in Damascus, as it was in Egypt. The quick exhaustion of authentic products and the pressure to adhere to the growing foreign demand later on gave rise to alternative commerce in curios, such as revival furniture (contemporary furniture productions imitating the styles of the past), which rose to significant global fame, most popularly in the shape of *kursi*s (the equivalent of a modern day coffee table/stool).[11]

Demand for "Islamic Art" Antiques in the West

The majority of the art dealers of the time, local and international, were early advocates of the conservation of "Islamic" monuments, as most people at the time did not consider selling artifacts as incongruous to heritage preservation. Many notable collectors, however, saw the mainstreaming of "Islamic" objects that came with the establishment of trade to be the end of their fruitful procurement of such goods. As more Orientalist painters started depicting artifacts for sale in their paintings, less original and more imitative works meant to lure European tourists started to appear in bazaars.[12] The early 1900s saw the most desired "Islamic art" pieces in the hands of Western dealers in recently-modernized cultural hubs like Paris, London, and New York. By the first quarter of the 20th century, international expositions held across the

[10] Volait, *Antique Dealing*, 65.

[11] Volait, *Antique Dealing*, 75.

[12] The meaning of "Orientalism" in this essay is from Edward Said: "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience." Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 1.

United States further stimulated curiosity about Muslim culture by reconstructing the "Orient" through their exhibition rooms modeled after Syrian-Ottoman interiors (for example, the "Damascus Palace" in the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis in 1904).[13]

Consequently, the study of art and archeology of the "Islamic" world did not attract critical interest in the West until the twentieth century. Some of this is attributed to Hegel's widely accepted portrayal of a historical evolution of art that largely dismissed Asian art as rudimentary.[14] Regardless, scholarship efforts gained momentum during the first half of the twentieth century as more private collections and museums across Europe started to include Near Eastern artifacts. Inquiries into archeological "Islamic" expanded, as "Islamic art" in the West was commercially re-evaluated. As private collections grew, the academic study of the material started to take shape, and professors of "Persian and Mohammedan art" (the earliest name given to such scholars) started to emerge.[15] Thus, it is safe to say that the academic discipline and collecting practices have always had a very interwoven, reciprocal relationship. As Linda Komroff explains, "what was collected initially dictated what was studied, and what was studied helped to refine collecting patterns."[16] After all, discipline so heavily influenced by its materiality will be, without a doubt, shaped by what is most convenient and profitable — which was, in this case, an all-embracing delineation of "Islamic art" as a by-product of European interest.

Dikran Kelekian

The collectors and scholars of late 19th and early 20th centuries were heavily dependent on Middle Eastern dealers of "Islamic art," who played an active role in exporting, landing, and selling material to museums and collectors. These dealers were the experts in the field as they were the ones setting up exhibitions, organizing expositions, buying and selling objects, excavating, and writing catalogs. The foremost

[13] Marilyn Jenkins-Medina, "Collecting the 'Orient' at the Met: Early Tastemakers in America," *Ars Orientalis 30* (2000), 71.

[14] Stephen Vernoit, "The Rise of Islamic Archaeology," *Muqarnas 14*, (1997), 1.

[15] Benedict Cuddon, "A Field Pioneered by Amateurs: The Collecting and Display of Islamic Art in Early Twentieth-Century Boston," Muqarnas 30 (2013), 15.

[16] Linda Komaroff, "Exhibiting the Middle East: Collections and Perceptions of Islamic Art", *Ars Orientalis 30* (2000), 2.

"Islamic art" dealer of the early 20th century was, arguably, Dikran Kelekian, an Armenian dealer from the Ottoman Empire born in what is today's Kayseri, Turkey, in 1867, as the son of a banker and into a family consisting of the notable *gayrimuslim* elites of the Ottoman Empire. In his youth, Kelekian attended the American Robert College of Constantinople, where he studied the history of the Near East and improved his English, French, and Ottoman Turkish (in addition to his native Armenian). Kelekian is the reason that Grinnell College's "Islamic art" collection exists, as the artifacts he brought to the United States were eventually donated to Grinnell College by his step-granddaughter Nanette Rodney Kelekian. One of the main objectives of this exhibition is understanding the ways he shaped the collecting practices of "Islamic art" in the United States and across the world.

Setting up his first business in the antiquities in Istanbul in 1892, Kelekian came to the United States a year later, just before the World's Columbian Exposition was held in Chicago in 1893. Serving as a commissioner for the Persian Pavilion of the exposition, he earned a "Premium Award" for his work in four categories: "Collective Exhibit of Persian Antiquities, Assyrian Antiquities, Antique Coins, and Oriental Arms."[17] Kelekian's first American venture was an evident success, and he soon established shops across the world, including in New York, Paris, London, and Cairo.[18] Kelekian sourced objects at field sites in Egypt, Iran, and Syria, and channeled them through his depot in Cairo, from where they were shipped to the United States or France.[19] In 1900, he served as a jury member for the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris, and in 1903, he lent a significant number of his works for *Exposition des Arts Musulmans* at the Musée des Arts Decoratifs in Paris.[20] Opening his first gallery, Le Musée de Bosphore, that same year in New York City, Kelekian quickly developed close relations with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, lending them various objects such as textiles, pottery, and manuscripts.[21] Throughout his career that lasted over six decades, Kelekian played

[17] Luiza Decamargo, "Dikran Kelekian and Eastern Decorative Art Objects in America," (Master's thesis, the Smithsonian Associates and the Corcoran College of Art and Design, 2012), 6.

[18] Marianna Shreve Simpson, "'A Gallant Era'": Henry Walters, Islamic Art, and the Kelekian Connection," Ars Orientalis 30 (2000): 95.

[19] Decamargo, "Dikran Kelekian," 8.

[20] Simpson, " 'A Gallant Era,'" 95.

[21] Komaroff, "Exhibiting the Middle East," 6.

a significant role in the creation of "Islamic" holdings of what would become major American museums: not just the Met, but also the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Walter Arts Gallery, and the Freer Gallery of Art.[22] In 1904, he exhibited a hundred of his objects at the *Louisiana Exposition* in St. Louis in the "Imperial Persian Pavilion," despite not all works included being Persian. Regardless, Kelekian seems to have been recognized by the Shah of Iran for his efforts to promote Persian arts and culture, which is made clear by the St. Louis catalog, which refers to him with an honorary title as "Dikran "Khan" Kelekian," followed by the explanation "the Commissioner-General for Persia."[23]

Kelekian is later known to have refined his specialties: Persian and Turkish rugs, Persian ceramics, Coptic textiles, and other antiquities from the Near East. He continued forming collections, publishing catalogs, curating exhibitions, and dealing art works for the rest of his life. As one of the first art dealers in New York City to specialize in Near Eastern goods, Kelekian's success is attributed to his keen sense of business and perception of a growing Western interest in collecting and studying Oriental objects. It is important for our purposes to acknowledge that, while Kelekian at once created and captured a market, he worked with hegemonic understandings of the East when it came to his customers in Paris or New York and contributed to the imagined, inauthentic representations of the Orient — many of which are explored throughout in this essay.

Biases within Academia and Exhibition Practices

Conflation of Arab, Ottoman/Turkish and Persian art under the label "Persian" was widespread at the end of the nineteenth century, an inevitable drawback of reductive categorizations rampant in "Islamic art." Kelekian himself, in an open letter he wrote to the Soviet Government, states that he believes Persian art to be the "source of all decorative arts," and claims that Persian art has influenced the art of all neighboring countries including "Armenia, India, Balochistan, Afghanistan, Georgia and Turkey."[24] He argued that the only country that had relatively influenced Persian art was Egypt,

[22] Simpson, «'A Gallant Era,'» 93.

[23] Simpson, «'A Gallant Era,'» 95.

[24] Dikran Kelekian, "A Note on the Congress of Persian Art and Archaeology," *Parnassus 8*, no. 2 (1936): 27.

especially in ceramics, and even Egyptian art could not surpass the "enchantment and beauty" of Persian art.[25] The notorious Persian bias among collectors of the early 20th century is attributed by some to racial theories promulgated in the 19th century, which claim that Persians are originally Indo-European, and thus superior to non-Aryan Arabs and Turks.[26] Though this attribution might be considered a stretch by some scholars, the bias was so ubiquitous that Kelekian's *The Potteries of Persia*illustrates many objects that are not Persian whatsoever: Syrian tiles, a luster-painted Fatimid jar from Egypt, Iznik pottery, and many other Syrian objects of the Ottoman period.[27]

Unfortunately, the Persian bias was not the first of its kind. Biases perpetuated by both dealers/collectors and a generally uninformed Western audience dominated the early exhibition history of these objects from the Muslim world. "Partially filtered through the veil of commerce", the historiography of "Islamic art" has traditionally lacked sensitivity to multiculturalism.[28] The pretext of authenticity was often conveyed through false recontextualization, with a lot of the Oriental ambiance created in many American and European expositions.[29] Some examples include the infamous 1867 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris, which had Ottoman and Egyptian quarters adjacent to each other, with their layouts made deliberately irregular to create an "authentic and picturesque appearance," despite both Cairo and Istanbul launching new governmental policies to standardize their network of streets and redesign their urban environment around the 1860s.[30] It seems that the French exposition planners turned to the past to characterize the Ottoman Empire and Egypt so that they adhere to an outdated standard of what the West associated with the "Islamic" world. Another example is the 1900 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris, which was very evident in its hierarchical classifications of the display of "Islamic" nations. The displays of the Persian and Ottoman empires, which were sovereign nations at the time, were limited to a singular shared building, whereas the Trocadero park — a location much more prevalent at

[25] Kelekian, "A Note," 27.

[26] Komaroff, "Exhibiting the Middle East," 7.

[27] Jenkins-Medina, "Collecting the 'Orient'," 75.

[28] Komaroff, "Exhibiting the Middle East," 2.

[29] Komaroff, "Exhibiting the Middle East," 3

[30] Zeynep Celik, *Displaying The Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-Century World's Fairs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 57.

the exposition — hosted the colony nations: Egypt, a then British colony, and the French colonies of Algeria and Tunisia.[31] This was clearly an attempt at representing the French colonial tactics of assimilation and contrast as the Algerian and Tunisian architectural pieces directly faced the Eiffel Tower. On the whole, these exhibition pavilions evoked mystery and curiosity, yet they were painfully ahistoric, as multiple regions, time periods and cultures were confined into a few buildings that were supposedly very typical and representative of "Islamic" structures.

Similarly, museum practices across the world have also taken questionable approaches towards the arts of the Muslim world for decades. The *Collection from the Orient* of the General Art and Industry Exhibition in Stockholm, 1897, had every available surface (walls, floors, and ceilings) filled with objects — an exhibiting practice that is rather bizarre and unheard of when it comes to exhibiting "Western" art.[32] In contrast, the Great 1910 Exhibition in Munich escaped the intentionally cramped, "authentic" form of display by going in the opposite direction and being "expansive", with whitewashed walls and a spacious display. While the organizers this time were criticized for their lack of contextualization, the Munich exhibition's attempt to organize the works by medium (and by formal elements within each medium) was meant to free "Islamic art" from market forces, uncovering its potential as an art form — not just commercial and/or decorative.[33] In contrast, Metropolitan Museum of Art's Islamic gallery opening in 1975 did not follow the Munich exhibition's footsteps and inevitably ended up evoking a shop-like display. Regardless, having attempted rather innovative forms of exhibition, the Met was revolutionary for their display of manuscript illuminations which were exhibited beneath table level behind plexiglass, offering chairs for the audience to sit on, imitating the intimate way these manuscripts were intended to be viewed. Their one major drawback was that the works were not distinguished by medium. Works of separate use and material, such as pottery, metalwork, arts of the book, and textiles, were all displayed next to each other as an attempt at drawing specific visual connections in the way they utilize arabesques and

[31] Celik, *Displaying the Orient*, 90.

[32] David J Roxburgh, "Au Bonheur Des Amateurs: Collecting and Exhibiting Islamic Art, ca. 1880-1910," *Ars Orientalis 30* (2000): 18.

[33] Roxburgh, "Au Bonheur Des Amateurs," 31; Komaroff, "Exhibiting the Middle East," 3.

geometrical patterns. This exhibition style, unfortunately, also echoed the 19th century exhibition practices and retail context.

Contemporary "Islamic art" exhibitions and their displays do a relatively better job in representing a clear view of the nature and meaning of the art. In 2011, the Met reinstalled their "Islamic art" galleries, organized them chronologically and opened them under a new name: *The Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia* — reflecting the shift away from seeing "Islamic art" as a unicum in favor of recognizing the characteristics of different regions. For the Met, secularizing their framework when it comes to the arts of Middle East and Asia was clearly both an academic and a political decision within a post-9/11 context. Regardless, this display tactic is a major step forward in the way it dereligionizes major secular objects from the MENA region, representing a shift away from Orientalism. Nonetheless, contextualizing religious objects in a meaningful way is just as important in exhibiting "Islamic art" as it is to dereligionize, secular ceramics and textiles. Following that idea, a striking example of good scholarship is the 2016 exhibit, "The Art of the Qur'an" in the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery of the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., which was very successful in presenting core Islamic material in a respectful setting. While much of the criticisms towards the "Islamic art" exhibitions undertaken in this essay were directed towards the planners' inability to view works of the Near East independent of their religious connotations, the Smithsonian exhibition's conscious effort to put forth the spiritual aspects of the works is noteworthy and well-done, only due to the inherently Islamic nature of the exhibit.

Conclusion

Today, looking at "Islamic art" through the publications of private collections and museums is helpful for contemporary scholars, although many museums have still yet to make their collections available online. "Islamic art", due to its sheer variety in size and material, is also more difficult to catalog considering many objects that need to be included in the same catalog are probably stored in separate places. While well-resourced museums such as the British Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art have undertaken digitization projects and have published catalogs on various mediums

of “Islamic art,” smaller museums rarely have access to funds or opportunities to publish their collections. Before the current exhibition, little to no literature has been produced about the Kelekian material in the Grinnell College Museum of Art. This exhibition, *Fragmentary Visions,* is not only the first to show off the rich artistry and the complex history of these objects, but it also does not fail to recontextualize and appropriately attribute historical, geographical, and cultural recognition to the very heterogeneous array of works it has: secular, distinctively religious, and somewhere in between.

In conclusion, *Fragmentary Visions* is a contemporary attempt at appropriately representing the art of the “Islamic” world. Striving to escape the contextualization of non-Western objects in a museum setting, we hope to stay away from Orientalist visions that conjure department store-like retail spaces, and instead offer you images from a very rich and vivid past one fragment at a time.

Arts of the Book: Illustration, Illumination, and Intervention

by Marina Busby

Introduction

The art historical category "Arts of the Book," in the framework of "Islamic" art, refers to manuscripts, or books made by hand of paper or parchment. Manuscripts often take the form of folios adorned with calligraphic script and sometimes with illustrations or illumination. The manuscripts in the Grinnell College Museum of Art (GCMoA) Kelekian collection were made in the Middle East, Northern Africa, and Central Asia between the 14th and 19th centuries.

The paper and parchment works in our collection reflect upon the collecting practices of the late 19th and early 20th century dealers. Dikran Kelekian and his contemporaries set precedents for the art that would eventually be included under the rubric of "Islamic" art. The quality of the objects in the GCMoA Kelekian collection is more varied than those displayed in major museums in the US and Europe, with a number of objects that might be considered common, or of lower quality, included in the collection. To better understand these objects, we must also understand the handling and interventions they have gone through. Many of the manuscripts in the GCMoA collection are the result of processes of dismemberment caused by, in the words of Margaret Graves, the "fetishization of the individual, autonomous object in art collecting," which led dealers and collectors to enhance individual folios for greater profit.[1]

[1] Margaret S. Graves, "Fracture, Facture and the Collecting of Islamic Art," in *Faking, Forging, Counterfeiting: Discredited Practices at the Margins of Mimesis*, ed. Daniel Becker, Annalisa Fischer, and Yola Schmitz, (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2018), 96.

The GCMoA Kelekian collection includes illuminated books and pages of poetry, bound and unbound pages from the Qur'an, and illustrated pages of epic poetry from the *Shahnama* (The Persian "Book of Kings"). The geographic, temporal, and subject range of our collection allows us to introduce different aspects of manuscript production from the Islamic world, as well as explore the results of collecting practices and dealer interventions.

Calligraphy, Poetry, and Manuscripts

The selections of calligraphy and poetry manuscripts are one of the larger and most comprehensive groupings in the GCMoA collection. Geographically, the manuscripts included in *Fragmentary Visions* hail from Egypt, Iran, and Central Asia, and, chronologically, range from the 14th through the late 17th centuries. They exhibit multiple types of calligraphy, with *naskh* (also called *naskhi*) script most represented. Most of the pages included in the exhibition are done in black ink on paper with polychrome and gilding used in illustrations and illumination. Our selection of calligraphy, poetry, and illuminated manuscripts exhibits the variety in Islamic manuscripts and the differences in content presentation and purposes in different objects.

In the history of calligraphy script, Kufic script, which the name derives from its origin in the city of Kufa, is one of the oldest types of Arabic calligraphic script and gained popularity through its use in transcribing the Qur'an. The form of this script is elongated, angular, and uniform, with a horizontal orientation. On paper works Kufic script is almost always used to transcribe the Qur'an.

The script most represented in our exhibition is *naskhi*, or *naskh*, script, a style used to transcribe texts more naturalistically, making it easier to read both for audiences at the time these manuscripts were produced and benefitting modern scholars with the legibility the text.[2] This calligraphic style gained more popularity over its predecessor, the Kufic script, because of its accessibility. Its widespread use in poetry, Qur'ans, and various other manuscripts is one of the reasons why so many examples in the GCMoA collection are written in *naskhi* script.

[2] Sheila S. Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 165-167.

That some of these manuscripts may have been used in a practical or quotidian way is something we see in a *Manuscript page of Naskhi script* (**Fig. 1** 1994.089) included in the exhibition. This page, which is attributed to 14th century Egypt, uses polychrome and black ink with some gilding on the beautiful ornamentation in the margins. Also in the margins, we can see that someone has made personal notes on the text. This bit of handwriting enlivens the page and highlights that what we as a modern audience see as art was at one point a page that was used by an individual.

A distinction of this grouping is the key difference in illuminated versus illustrated manuscripts. Illumination refers to the addition of decorative geometric or floral motifs among the writings of a calligraphy text. Illustration on the other hand, refers to the addition of an image to a text.[3] A subtle, lovely example of illumination of our collection can be seen on *Persian Manuscript page folio*, 4 columns of *naskh* script (**Fig. 2** 1994.091.001) which includes geometric patterning and colorful floral patterns in the borders of the columns. Although this folio might not otherwise be noteworthy for its calligraphic

Fig. 1 1994.089

[3] Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 21.

style, its illuminations make it stand out from unadorned pages, and made it more interesting for art collectors. This page, and others like it, have historically not been as interesting to art historians as more sought-after luxury objects. As a result, illuminated folios have not been studied as extensively in an art historical context as illustrated manuscripts.

Qur'an

The Qur'an, the central text of Islam, and the reason why calligraphy is so central to Islamic art, is well-represented in *Fragmentary Visions*. We include pages from seven different Qur'ans from the GCMoA collection that demonstrate the range in calligraphic style and decoration that is seen in this holy text. The Qur'an is "God's revelations to the Prophet Muhammad in the early 7th century," and tends to exist in the lens of art history as the epitome of Islamic calligraphy.[4]

The Qur'an is written by hand in black ink on parchment or paper with occasional additions of gilding or polychrome. Qur'an pages are often illuminated, even in less expensive editions, but never illuminated due to proscriptions on the depiction of God

Fig. 2 1994.091.001

[4] Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 3.

within Islam.[5] Illumination in the Qur'an serves a practical purpose as well as making the book more beautiful. In Qur'ans, illuminated markings are used to divide sections and verses within the text, acting as a type of punctuation. Although the Qur'an is also traditionally written in Arabic, while it has also been translated into other languages.[6]

The 36-page Pocket Qur'an (**Fig. 3** 1994.099) is an exemplary object made for quotidian use and is therefore especially interesting to us in the context of this exhibition. Made in 16th or 17th century North Africa, we see traces of its use in the thumb marks on the edge of its pages and in how its binding has been worn down. Compared to more luxurious Qur'an's, this object may not have traditional art historical appeal, but the power this object has to give us, as a modern audience, a glimpse into daily life of a practicing Muslim, is incredible and something that is lost from the more decorative, less functional Qur'ans.

Shahnama

Differing from the Qur'an, but still an essential sub-category of greater "Islamic" calligraphy pages, is the *Shahnama*, or the Persian "Book of Kings." Written by the poet Firdausi around 1000 CE, it is an epic poem recounting the tales of historical and mythological Persian kings. From its inception the *Shahnama* has been highly celebrated and has thus been transcribed again and again over time, with different ruling groups commissioning editions of the work to legitimize their rule. It is often intricately decorated with both illumination and illustration, which has made it of great interest to art historians.

However, almost all the *Shahnama* pages in our collection have undergone substantial interventions. Someone, possibly a dealer, cut paintings from a different source and pasted them onto calligraphy unrelated to the original context of the painting, and often covering many lines of the text. Major interventions like the ones seen here were fairly common at the beginning of the 20th century because of the desire for more visually pleasing objects that could then be sold for more profit because of their art historical interest. We can see the evidence of this intervention in

[5] Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 21.

[6] Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 23.

Fig. 3 1994.099

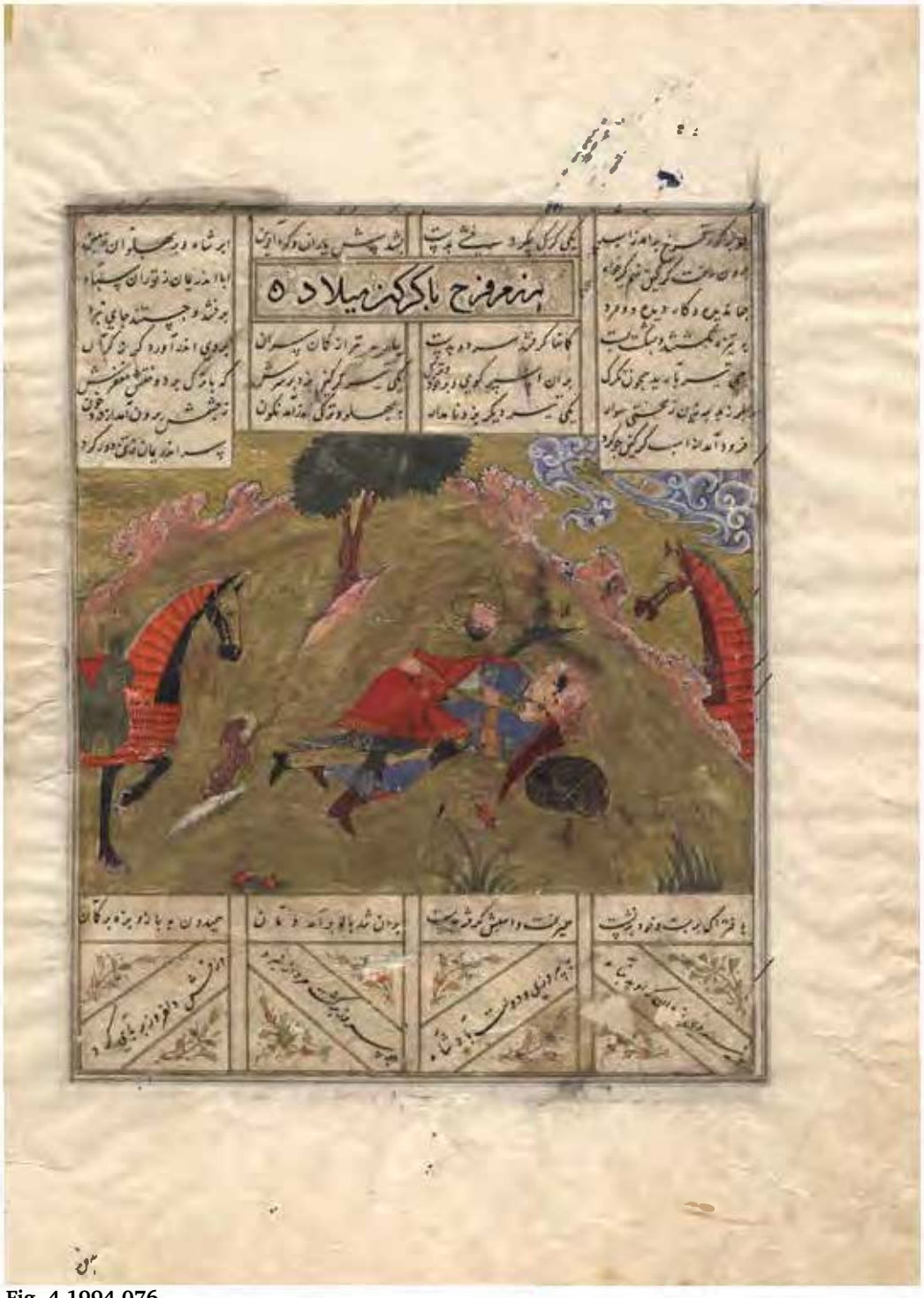

Fig. 4 1994.076

our manuscript pages that show less precision in applying the pasted painting block where the underlying calligraphy peeks out from the borders of the image revealing the presence of verses underneath.

Major interventions can be seen quite clearly on the late 15th century *Combat between Two Horsemen (Verso)* (**Fig. 4** 1994.076) in which the pasted portion is not just the painted block but the entire lines of script around it. The pasted page does not fit within the borders of the sheet it was pasted on and therefore shows hints of the letters existing underneath on all sides of the image. Another form of intervention common in manuscript pages is also evident on the page. At some point, someone who handled this work made the decision to add to the painting and extend with their own ink the figure of the horse's hind leg and tail. Upon inspection this addition is quite obvious due to the difference in style, material, and extension past the image border. However, this intervention could have been deemed an improvement at some point in the life of this object in an attempt to raise its value on the art market.

Conclusion

"Islamic" art manuscripts or "Arts of the Book", whatever name one wishes to apply to paper or parchment objects, have been categorized by art historians by their calligraphic script, usage, decoration, and more. In *Fragmentary Visions* these works are similarly categorized but with the addition of making clear the history of interventions. We hope to highlight how our manuscript pages are simply parts of a whole that were divided and spread through the art market due to the actions of dealer interventions. This does not dimmish their value to us as we examine and appreciate that each folio page, pasted clipping, and additional ink enriches the history of many of these works that might otherwise be considered "common" objects.

Privilege of the "Completed" Ware: An Overview of Kelekian Ceramics

by Melena Johnson

Ceramic is a remarkably durable medium; it takes thousands of years for it to break down. In the words of Oliver Watson, "Pottery *survives* like no other material."[1] The condition ceramics survive in, however, is a different matter. The ceramics featured in this catalog, all from Grinnell College's Kelekian collection, are divided evenly between "whole" objects and fragments – seventeen of each. Our intention in the curation of our exhibition is to situate the broken alongside the complete, for them to complement each other and provide our audience with an atypical perspective on the life cycle of ceramics. Much of this essay is focused on technical knowledge of the production of these ceramics, because, as the late art historian Arthur Lane put it, "it could hardly be otherwise, for at every stage one is aware of the exploring hand on the clay, the active mind devising new means to pass color and glaze successfully through the ordeal of fire."[2] The latter portion of this essay focuses on the privilege of the "completed" ware, and our dedication to "fragmentary visions."

We believe we can trace the production of at least two-thirds of this catalog's ceramics to pre-modern Iran, a powerhouse of ceramic creation and innovation. We think it is likely that twenty of the ceramics in this catalog were produced in Kashan and Nishapur – two of the largest Persian ceramic manufacturing centers. This catalog also features three additional Iranian wares we have not affiliated with a city; three other ceramics lack evidence for their cities of origin, but were excavated from Rayy,

[1] Oliver Watson, "Ceramics and Circulation 800-1250," in *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture v.1*, ed. Gülru Necipoğlu, Finbarr Barry Flood, and Dana Arnold (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 478.

[2] Arthur Lane, *Early Islamic Pottery* (London: Faber & Faber, 1947), 47.

a site north of Tehran. In addition to our Persian ceramics, our exhibition includes six vessels from Syria, four of which are from Raqqa. Finally, there is a single ceramic cited as being from the Eastern Mediterranean, and another is allegedly from Corinth. This selection, a total of thirty-four ceramics, was chosen to illustrate the extensive variety of material that Dikran Kelekian collected.

Ten of our ceramics have been categorized as earthenware and twenty have been categorized as fritware. Earthenware is a type of nonvitreous pottery which is fired at less than 1200° Celsius. It can be either glazed or unglazed, although it absorbs water easily when unglazed. Earthenware was one of the earliest types of ceramics produced, and it has been made in almost every part of the world. Based on analysis of glaze, form, and decorative motifs, we hypothesize that four of our earthenware ceramics are from Kashan, two are from Nishapur, two are from Raqqa, and two are from Iran, but we are unsure of their precise place of production.

Over half of our ceramics are fritware, which is a type of vitreous material made with an artificial body consisting mostly of ground quartz, with glass, white clay, and sometimes potash added to create a body imitative of Chinese porcelain.[3] *Encyclopaedia Iranica* notes that, "the most important event in the history of medieval Persia was the introduction of an artificial body… possibly inspired by technology first developed in Egypt, whence some potters immigrated at the collapse of the Fatimid dynasty."[4] Fritware was produced in a variety of locales, including Kashan and Nishapur.[5]

Similarities are often drawn between fritware, which was quite light in color when unglazed, and Chinese porcelain, which was prized for its signature translucency and would not be produced outside of China until the 18th century. Chinese ceramics were imported to the Middle East along the Maritime Silk Roads, as boats could handle the weight of ceramic cargo easier than methods of land travel. As Yuka Kadoi notes, "[t]here is little doubt that Chinese ceramics… continuously influenced Iranian pottery and played a decisive role in the development of all Middle Eastern ceramics."[6]

[3] Ernst J. Grube, "Ceramics xiv. The Islamic Period, 11th-15th centuries," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* V/3, 311-327.

[4] Grube, "Ceramics."

[5] Ibid.

[6] Yuka Kadoi, "Ceramics," in *Islamic Chinoiserie: The Art of Mongol Iran* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 39.

Fritware is the most prominent example of this relationship. However, even prior to the invention of fritware, Islamic potters created opaque, white-glazed earthenware in attempts to mimic porcelain. Chinese wares undoubtedly impacted the evolution of certain types of Persian and Middle Eastern ceramics but the relationship is not as simple as it looks at first glance.[7] Excavations in recent decades have complicated the chronology and ideas about "influence" have shown that Islamic potters were not always directly responding to or taking inspiration from imported Chinese ceramics.[8]

The body of the ceramic is important to note, but more visually appealing is a ceramic's glazing. Though the most widespread ceramics in the pre-modern era ware was unglazed and undecorated, all the ceramics in this catalog are glazed.[9] Glazing involves coating a ceramic in a vitreous substance, either as underglaze or overglaze. Underglaze refers to a layer of painted decoration underneath one layer of transparent glaze, which is subsequently fired. Overglaze is more expensive, because the potter paints over an already glazed and fired ceramic, then fires it a second time at a lower temperature. Different glazing techniques allow for a wider variety of decoration. Our exhibition includes examples of lusterware (cats. 32-34, 37, 39, 42, 44, 46-48, 50-53), splashware (cat. 54), silhouette ware (cats. 35, 55, 56) and "Kubachi" ware (cat. 36).

Mina'i ware, a type of overglazed ceramic, was developed in Kashan (Iran), and involves a second layer of glazed fritware at a lowered temperature.[10] This technique provided potters with greater control of the glaze and access to more colors, since many glazes were too unstable at typical firing temperatures (and thus, used not at all or used with varying success).[11] Lusterware is type of decoration first used on pottery in 9th century Mesopotamia.[12] Luster, or metallic oxide, was painted onto a glazed ceramic and then fired to fuse the very thin layer of metal to the glaze beneath.

7 Kadoi, "Ceramics," 64-65.

8 David Whitehouse, "Ceramics xiii. The Early Islamic Period, 7th-11th Centuries," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* V/3, 308-311.

9 Whitehouse, "Ceramics."

10 Nora, Dana and Oliver Watson. "Illuminating the Imperceptible, Researching Mina'i Ceramics with Digital Imaging Techniques." Journal of Imaging 7, no. 11 (Nov 2021).

11 Marilyn Jenkins, "Islamic Pottery: A Brief History," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 40 (Spring, 1983): 18.

12 Elsie Holmes Peck, "Like the Light of the Sun: Islamic Luster-Painted Ceramics," *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 71, no. 1 (1997): 18.

Both mina'i wares and lusterware were luxury ceramics.[13]

Splashware, named for the splashed look of its colorful glaze, was thought to be inspired by Tang "three color" ware from China. However, art historian Ernst Grube notes that, "[this] similarity between Chinese and Islamic mottled wares may be largely fortuitous."[14] Not only is there a large gap in time between the production of the two types of wares, but it is also unlikely that Tang three color wares were widely circulated outside of China, as they were predominantly used as funerary objects.[15] Silhouette ware was developed in Iran in the 12th century, and involves painting slip or a thin layer of frit under transparent glaze.[16] Slip is liquified clay, and once it had been allowed to dry on the vessel, it was incised into, meaning the design is in relief. Lastly, so called "Kubachi" ware, a style of fritware, was invented in Safavid Persia, and not in Kubachi (Dagestan) – it takes its name from the town in the North Caucasus because a large quantity of "Kubachi" ware was discovered there.[17] Our gateway object is blue and white "Kubachi" ware and is the most modern ceramic in the collection.

Glaze is vital to the strength and longevity of a ceramic, fusing to the ware and making it less prone to chipping. Even glazed ceramics, however, are liable to breaking apart into fragments. In the ceramic context, these fragments are called sherds.

Sherds are displayed in museums far less frequently than complete ceramics. Many sherds are only ever seen by ceramics researchers, kept by institutions for educational purposes and unfortunately tucked away from the public. In her essay, "Fracture, Facture, and the Collecting of Islamic Art," Margaret Graves delves into the complexities surrounding the "fetishisation of the individual, autonomous object in art collecting."[18] The privilege of the "completed" ware is its visibility and higher value. Paradoxically, many of these "complete" wares are reconstructions. Graves explains: "Medieval ceramics are by their very nature usually recovered in fragmentary

[13] Peck, "Like the Light," 24.

[14] Grube, "Ceramics."

[15] Ibid.

[16] Myriam Ekhtiar and Rashmi Viswanathan, "Cat. 71. Cup," in *Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, (New York, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 113.

[17] Jinette Jimenez, "Kubachi Dishes," *Archaeology at Brown* (2020).

[18] Margaret S. Graves, "Fracture, Facture and the Collecting of Islamic Art," in *Faking, Forging, Counterfeiting*, ed. Daniel Becker, Annalisa Fischer, and Yola Schmitz (Bielefield: Transcript Verlag, 2018) 96.

form, and yet most museum display pieces in this medium are presented as whole objects. In the vast majority of cases they were acquired that way from dealers or agents rather than being reconstructed within the institutions that now hold them."[19] Reconstruction, repairs, fakes, forgeries – these interventions into a ceramics' physical state are the reality of Islamic art collecting. This reality, regrettably, is not one that museums are keen to advertise. Therefore we are pleased to be displaying sherds in equal proportion to "whole" ceramics. We want to be honest about the conditions of these wares, because there is no shame in the life cycle of a ceramic.

The objects in our collection are noteworthy for their representation of objects made by artisans of varied skill levels. On one hand, we have objects clearly made by knowledgeable and skilled craftspeople. On the other, we have objects created perhaps by a novice or apprentice, or someone experimenting with a new technique. It is our responsibility to consider the past life each ceramic might have lived, and study it even if it is not the finest ware. The quality of the object leads one to wonder what circumstances it was created under – whose hands shaped it, glazed it, and learned from it? The same goes for the question of interventions. We are drawing awareness to the human hands these ceramics have passed through on their journey here. This journey is not one that we can confidently trace, like the techniques outlined earlier. But the goal of our exhibition is to answer what we can and raise questions about what we cannot.

[19] Graves, "Fracture," 99.

Beyond Coptic: The Textiles of Grinnell's Kelekian Collection

by David Gales

The term "Coptic" comes with a lot of historical baggage, some of it well-earned, some of it misconstrued. The problem with "Coptic Egypt" is that it exists as a tangled knot of cultures, histories, and peoples. Coptic artwork is a point of convergence, and within it you can see traces of and inspirations from a variety of places including the arts produced in the Roman, Sassanian, and Byzantine Empires, as well as those of North Africa, Central Asia, and the Eastern Mediterranean more broadly. This convergence is demonstrated clearly in textiles woven in Late Antique Egypt. According to Han Jungim, "[the] textile culture of Egypt was created by the Copt," and it was during their presence in Egypt that weaving blossomed.[1] Between the 3rd and 12th centuries, Egyptian weaving techniques evolved dramatically, due in part to the introduction of a more advanced loom. As Jungim explains:

> [the Copts] emerged in the Egyptian dynasty, and later under the Roman Empire they were incorporated into the early Christian history and survived until the Arabic conquest. As a result, they absorbed the influences of Sassanian Persian, Byzantine, and finally Islamic styles. Those textiles contained their own indigenous materials, technologies, and designs.[2]

Looking at Coptic textiles is not just looking at "Egyptian" works. An analysis of these textiles allows us to examine and analyze the artistic, technical, and cultural influence of many different peoples: "the designs consist of human heads or figures, animals,

[1] Han Jungim, "A Study on the Characteristics of the Designs on Coptic Textiles of Ancient Egypt," *Journal of Fashion Business* 15, no. 3 (2011), 113.

[2] Jungim, "A Study," 114.

flowers and trees combined with geometric, architectural or symbol motifs; sometimes human or animal forms alone, or purely abstract patterns. Inscriptions in Greek, Coptic, Arabic, or Kufic are scarce."[3] By examining these textiles as a point of cultural confluence, we can attempt to eke out as much knowledge and value from each fragment as possible, while also learning something about the collecting practices of the art archaeologists and dealers who unearthed these pieces in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The majority of Coptic textiles produced during the 5th-7th centuries, the approximate time in which the fragments in the Grinnell collection were produced, featured color-saturated tapestry embellishments on plain-woven tunics, cloaks, and other clothing.[4] *Fragment: Two Birds Drinking from a Baptismal Font* (**Fig. 5** 1985.006.518), for example, is a typical Coptic work--even in its degraded state, we can clearly see the high-saturation colors that were used in the original weaving. The vivid greens and reds have been preserved remarkably well despite the fragment's threadbare state, likely due to the hot, dry climate of the Egyptian desert. The material is a mix of wool and linen, corresponding to other examples of Coptic textiles found in Egypt.

Fig. 5 1985.006.518

[3] Mariquita Villard, "Coptic Textiles from the Kelekian Collection," *Parnassus* 3, no. 4 (1931), 31.

[4] Jungim, "A Study," 114.

While it is difficult to know with certainty what the larger textile *Two Birds* looked like, given what we know, the most likely possibility is that it was cut from a tunic or cloak. Cutting up textiles was common practice amongst art dealers in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Textiles were desired for their ornamental value, not for their worth as a whole object, and cutting them into fragments meant dealers could make more money from a single garment than if it was sold whole. Unlike ceramics, textiles were not valued as complete objects, but worth more in a portable, eye-catching, fragmented form. When dealers acquired an unearthed Coptic tunic, the context of the excavation and the context of the larger article of clothing was completely ignored. As the Copts tended to leave most of the tunic unembellished, only decorating specific parts of a garment, the decorated parts, such as *Two Birds*, would be cut away and the undecorated linen sections discarded.

In addition to the Coptic pieces in Grinnell's collection, we also have a Mughal and a Persian textile fragment included in *Fragmentary Visions*. What unites these seemingly disconnected pieces?

On a superficial level, there are commonalities in the visual themes of the Coptic, Mughal, and Persian fragments. The vegetal motifs, abstract patterns used as embellishment, and geometric composition remain somewhat consistent across time and space. However, more than any other commonality, the connecting theme between each of these works comes from the very name of the exhibition itself: *fragments*.

Despite their disparate origins, each of the fragments in Grinnell's Kelekian collection is unified by their born-again origin under Dikran Kelekian's collecting practices. As Kathrin Colburn notes, most of these textiles "came to light during haphazard excavations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the absence of contextualizing information, scholars have traditionally depended on dimensions, composition, and certain iconographic criteria to date and categorize weavings."[5] In other words, the scholarly world is flying blind with the majority of textiles sold during this period.

Lack of context for the original context of these textiles is not inherently the worst thing in the world, although it is a relatively critical setback in analyzing the pieces to

[5] Kathrin Colburn, "Loops, Tabs, and Reinforced Edges," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 73 (2019), 204.

begin with, especially without access to tools such as carbon dating and dye analysis. However, I would contend that the thornier obstacle to circumvent is the physical fragmentation of Kelekian's textiles. Because so many of the works were cut up, we didn't just lose the *historical* context, we also lost the *material* context. We are left to speculate as to the original purpose of many of the fragments left today, although some remain clear, and information can still be gleaned from them.

Fig. 6 1985.006.519

Tunic Front Fragment (**Fig. 6** 1985.006.519) is a relatively straightforward example in which enough of the textile has been kept in one piece that we can infer that it is the decorative front to a Coptic tunic. Most of the works donated to Grinnell in the Kelekian bequest are not as complete or as large as this one; we might expect it to have ended up in a large collection such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art along with many other objects sold by Kelekian. However, this work does bear some irregularities that indicate why a larger institution may not have been interested in it. For one, there is obvious staining on the bottom half of the fragment, almost certainly bodily fluids left behind by the corpse who wore the tunic – almost all the Coptic textiles circulating in collections today were excavated from tombs. Secondly, the fragment has been rather shoddily repaired, likely by modern hands: thick, amateur stitching can be seen marring the center of the work, and it does not appear to be in-line with the weaving patterns of the tunic at all.

Not every piece remained so intact, though. *Two Birds* is a threadbare fragment of a much larger textile, for example. But despite that, it can still be used to illustrate Coptic color usage. The *Clavus* (**Fig 7** 1985.006.520) in Grinnell's collection is another example of a fragment that was cut from a larger work. The straight edge on the left side of the fragment indicates that *Clavus* was cut from the tunic using by modern hands, as opposed to being accidentally ripped during the period of Late Antiquity when it was made. Because dealers in Coptic textiles sold grave goods, some of them (those from unlooted tombs) were in very good condition, and quite possibly complete. The fragments that so many museums and collectors have ended up with were cut up by dealers in the 20th century, including this clavus.

Fig 7 1985.006.520

The decorative program of the *Clavus* illustrates a common motif in Coptic textiles: plants, animals, and other vegetal patterns used to invoke prosperity and the fruitfulness of nature. According to Henry Maguire, these garments were more than just visually thematic: "such portrayals of nature were more than mere illustrations of abundance and plenty; they were also magical amulets intended to attract the prosperity that they evoked."[6] The combination of plants around the border of the clavus and lions running through the center band work together to call upon that natural prosperity, reinforced by the bright colors omnipresent in the work.

[6] Henry Maguire, "Garments Pleasing to God: The Significance of Domestic Textile Designs in the Early Byzantine Period," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990), 217.

It is important to note the non-Christian nature of the visual themes present in the Coptic works here. Although the Copts were a part of the Christian Church, their work was not often explicitly Christian in purpose or in motif. The Copts more commonly adapted to the visual language of the predominant cultures in Egypt at the time, evolving an artistic style in active dialogue with the peoples they interacted with.

Even while absorbing inspiration from the arts of different people and places, the Copts developed their own unique visual styles. The thick black linework visible in *Tapestry Fragment* and *Tunic Fragment*, for example, is characteristic of Coptic textiles from the 6th and 7th centuries.[7] The stripes and circles seen in these pieces are, according to Jungim, "assumed to come from Rome."[8] Even the basic concept of the Coptic tunic was heavily adapted from Roman and Egyptian styles of clothing and adornment, and the high-warp handloom that was used for early Coptic textiles was directly taken from Roman textile techniques as well.[9]

As previously established, one of the major challenges in analyzing textile fragments is that we do not have enough information to fully contextualize each piece. As a result, much of the analysis of textile fragments is guesswork. That being said, I hope to have shown the advantages of looking closely at these pieces, despite (and even because of) their piecemeal state. Fragments, unlike whole objects, can provide us with unique insights into the interventions and dealership practices of the people who handled the objects before us. They force us to look closely at the weave, the colors, the patterning, the motifs; in other words, they draw the viewer in and expect a level of attention to detail that a museum-goer may not provide to an overwhelmingly large wall tapestry. Fragments are not only informative, but deeply intimate, and there is immeasurable value in what they can show us.

7 Jungim, "A Study," 116.

8 Jungim, "A Study," 117.

9 Jungim, "A Study," 121.

Figures

Figure 1
Manuscript Page in Naskh Script. Mamluk period, 14th century. Egypt. Polychrome, black ink, and gilding on paper. 45.9 x 33.3 cm. 1994.089.

Figure 2
Persian Manuscript page folio, 4 columns of Naskh script. 15th century. Shiraz, Iran. Polychrome and black ink on paper. 34.3 x 21.6 cm. 1994.091.001.

Figure 3
5th Juz of the Qur'an (36 pages). 16th-17th century. North Africa. Manuscript, black ink on paper. 14.29 x 9.21 x 1.27 cm. 1994.099.

Figure 4
Combat Between Two Horsemen from Firdowsi's Shahnama (Book of Kings). Mid 14th–early 16th century. Central Asia. Polychrome, black ink, and gilding on paper. 30.5 x 22.5 cm. 1994.076.

Figure 5
Fragment: Two Birds Drinking from a Baptismal Font. Coptic period, 4th-5th century. Egypt. Red, green, blue, yellow wool on undyed linen. 19 x 61 cm. 1985.006.518.

Figure 6
Tunic front fragment. Coptic period, 7th-8th century. Tapestry, polychrome wool on plain weave linen. 32.39 x 45.72 cm. 1985.006.519.

Figure 7
Clavus. Coptic period, 6-7th century. Egypt. Tapestry, polychrome wool on red ground. 50.8 x 10.8 cm. 1985.006.520

Catalog Entries

1. *Battle Scene in Front of Palace Ramparts*. Late 16th century. Central Asia. Manuscript page, Polychrome, black ink, and gilding on paper. 21 x 12.5 cm. 1994.070.

2. *King Khosrow in the Red Palace*. 15th century. Central Asia. Polychrome, black ink, and gilding on paper. 23.2 x 13.7 cm. 1994.071.

3. *King Khosrow on Horseback Greeted by an Old Man from Firdowsi's Shahnama (Book of Kings)*. 15th century. Central Asia. Polychrome, black ink, and gilding on paper. 23.2 x 13.7 cm. 1994.072.

4. *Garden Scene*. 15th century. Central Asia. Polychrome, black ink, and gilding on paper. 23.2 x 30.5 cm. 1994.073.

5. *Battle Scene from Firdowsi's Shahnama (Book of Kings)*. Mid 14th–beginning of the 16th century. Central Asia. Polychrome, black ink, and gilding on paper. 20.4 x 16.2 cm. 1994.075.

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6. *Combat Between Two Horsemen from Firdowsi's Shahnama (Book of Kings)*. Mid 14th–early 16th century. Central Asia. Polychrome, black ink, and gilding on paper. 30.5 x 22.5 cm. 1994.076.

7. *Two Wolves Fighting, Sheep, and Goat on Mountain*. 19th century. Central Asia. Polychrome and black ink on paper. 34.7 x 27.5 cm. 1994.077.

8. *Qur'an Page in Kufic Script*. 10th-11th century. Eastern Mediterranean. Black ink on parchment. 15.88 x 19.05 cm. 1994.084.

9. *Manuscript Page in Naskh Script*. Mamluk period, 14th century. Egypt. Black, red ink, and gilding on paper. 21 x 15 cm. 1994.085.

10. *Manuscript Page in Naskh Script*. Mamluk period, 14th century. Egypt. Black ink and gilding on paper. 27.8 x 18.1 cm. 1994.086.

11. *Qur'an page in Muhaqqaq Script*. 14th century. Iran or Iraq. Polychrome, black ink, and gilding on paper. 27.94 x 19.69 cm. 1994.087.

12. *Manuscript Page in Naskh Script*. Mamluk period, 14th century. Egypt. Polychrome, black ink, and gilding on paper. 45.9 x 33.3 cm. 1994.089.

12

13. *Persian Manuscript page folio, 4 columns of Naskh script*. 15th century. Shiraz, Iran. Polychrome and black ink on paper. 34.3 x 21.6 cm. 1994.091.001.

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14. *Text in Naskh script with floral illumination in gold, red and blue.* 15th century. Central Asia. Gold, red and blue pigment on two manuscript pages from the same book. 24.8 x 34.3 cm. 1994.092.

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15. *Calligraphy panel in Naskh script*. 17th century. Central Asia. Manuscript page, blue ground. 28.5 x 19.5 cm. 1994.094.

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16. *Calligraphy panel.* Mughal period, 1656. Hyderabad, India. Polychrome, black ink, and gilding on paper. 37.5 x 32.7 cm. 1994.096.

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17. *5th Juz of the Qur'an* (36 pages). 16th-17th century. North Africa. Manuscript, black ink on paper. 14.29 x 9.21 x 1.27 cm. 1994.099.

18. *Manuscript*. Late 17th century text and borders, 18th-19th century binding. Central Asia. Lacquered cover, polychrome, black ink, and gilding on paper. 18.73 x 11.43 cm. 1994.100.

19. *Manuscript in Naskh Script*. Late 17th century. Central Asia. 21 x 13.5 x 2.5 cm. 1994.101.

20. *Shahnama (Book of Kings) single page (Recto)*. 16th century. Iran or Central Asia. Polychrome and black ink on paper. 21.59 x 26.67 cm. 1994.074.001.

21. *Shahnama (Book of Kings) page (Recto)*. Mid 14th-early 16th century. Shiraz school, Persian. Polychrome and black ink on paper. 20.4 x 16.2 cm. 1994.075.001.

22. *Combat between two horsemen (Verso)*. Late 15th century. Shiraz school, Persian. Polychrome and black ink on paper. 30.5 x 22.5 cm. 1994.076.001.

23. *Qur'an page (verso)*. 10th-11th century. Unknown Mesopotamian. Polychrome and black ink on paper. 15.9 x 19.05 cm. 1994.084.002. *(no image)*

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24. *Tunic fragment*. Coptic period, 7th century. Egypt. Tapestry, wool with polychrome motifs. 24.13 x 31.75 cm. 1982.011.394.

25. *Tunic front fragment*. Coptic period, 7th-8th century. Tapestry, polychrome wool on plain weave linen. 32.39 x 45.72 cm. 1985.006.519.

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26. *Clavus*. Coptic period, 6-7th century. Egypt. Tapestry, polychrome wool on red ground. 50.8 x 10.8 cm. 1985.006.520

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27. *Tapestry fragment*. Coptic period, 6th century. Egypt. Tapestry, polychrome wool with undyed linen. 20.3 x 94.6 cm. 1985.006.517.

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28. *Fragment: Two Birds Drinking from a Baptismal Font*. Coptic period, 4th-5th century. Egypt. Red, green, blue, yellow wool on undyed linen. 19 x 61 cm. 1985.006.518.

29. *Warrior leading a bound prisoner.* Safavid period, Early 17th century. Iran. Silk, compound weave. 39.4 x 68.6 cm. 1985.006.526.

30. *Textile Fragment*. Mughal period, early 17th century. India. Silk, cut velvet weave. 24.8 x 77.5 cm. 1985.006.527.

31. *Dish with Kufic Script, depicting seated royal couple.* 13th century. Kashan, Iran. Earthenware with brown luster glaze. 10.2 x 45.7 cm. 1984.003.560

32. *Bowl.* 12th century. Raqqa, Syria. Earthenware, luster-painted over transparent glaze. 9.8 cm x 24.1 cm. 1985.006.530.

33. *Ewer.* Late 12th century. Raqqa, Syria. Fritware, underglaze blue and turquoise with luster over transparent glaze. 24.8 cm x 12.5 cm. 1985.006.531

34. *Bowl.* 13th century. Raqqa, Syria. Earthenware, underglaze blue and turquoise with luster over transparent glaze. 8.57 cm x 19.05 cm. 1985.006.534.

35. *Pitcher with Naskh inscription around shoulder.* Late 13th century. Excavated from Rayy, Iran. Fritware with light brown luster glaze decoration. 23.5 x 14.6 cm. 1985.006.538.

36. *Silhouette-Ware Plate.* Seljuk period, late 12th-early 13th century. Kashan, Iran. Earthenware with black slip and turquoise glaze decoration. 7.3 x 31.8 cm. 1985.006.539.

37. *Large Dish with Coy Gazelle.* 17th century. Iran. "Kubachi" ware, underglaze blue decoration with overglaze patterning. 6 x 33 cm. 1985.006.542.

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38. *Pottery fragment: Seated nobleman and servant.* 10th–13th century. Kashan, Iran. Fritware, luster-painted over opaque white glaze. 13 x 14.1 x 5.1 cm. 1985.006.543.

39. *Pottery fragment: Foliate design.* 10th –13th century. Nishapur, Iran (?). Earthenware with white slip and splashed polychrome glazes. 17 x 14.2 x 2.4 cm. 1985.006.544.

40. *Pottery fragment: Royal personage and attendants in foliate composition.* 10th-13th century. Kashan, Iran (?). Fritware, luster-painted over opaque white glaze. 20 x 13.5 x 2.3 cm. 1985.006.545.

41. *Pottery fragment: Bird surrounded by foliate design.* 10th-13th century. Kashan, Iran (?). Earthenware with blue and red underglaze decoration. 10.1 x 11.2 x 2.9 cm. 1985.006.546.

42. *Pottery fragment: Bird form with two medallions in border.* 10th-13th century. Nishapur, Iran (?). Earthenware with white slip and incised with polychrome glaze *(sgraffito)*. 9.9 x 11.4 x 3.8 cm. 1985.006.547.

43. *Pottery fragment: Figure on horseback.* 10th-13th century. Kashan, Iran (?). Fritware, luster-painted over opaque white glaze. 7.2 x 11.8 x 4.3 cm. 1985.006.548.

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44. *Pottery fragment: Radiating linear design from circle with Arabic script.* 10th-13th century. Kashan, Iran (?). Earthenware with blue and black underglaze decoration. Ceramic. 9.4 x 10 x 3.4 cm. 1985.006.549.

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45. *Seated figure, pottery fragment.* 10th–13th century. Kashan, Iran (?). Fritware, luster-painted over opaque white glaze. 11.2 x 11.3 x 2.1 cm. 1985.006.550.

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46. *Pottery fragment: partial view of leopard.* 10th-13th century. Iran (?). Earthenware with underglaze blue decoration. 8.5 x 11.5 x 3 cm. 1985.006.551.

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47. *Seated figure, pottery fragment.* 10th-13th century. Kashan, Iran (?). Fritware, luster-painted over opaque white glaze. 7.62 x 2.5 cm. 1985.006.552.

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48. *Fragment, glazed, figure surrounded in foliate design.* 10th-13th century. Kashan, Iran (?). Fritware, luster-painted over opaque white glaze. 10.5 x 6 x 1.2 cm. 1985.006.553.

49. *Handle fragment from vessel decorated with standing courtiers in dotted robes*. 10th-13th century. Kashan, Iran (?). Fritware, luster-painted over opaque white glaze. 15.2 x 2.9 x 1.3 cm. 1985.006.554.

50. *Glazed fragment with Leopard against Foliate Background*. 10th-13th century. Iran (?). Earthenware painted in underglaze blue, turquoise and black. 9.8 x 7.9 x 2 cm. 1985.006.555.

51. *Glazed pottery fragment with head and shoulder of courtier*. 10th-13th century. Kashan, Iran (?). Fritware with luster-painted over opaque white glaze. 7.6 x 9.8 x 1.2 cm. 1985.006.556.

52. *Glazed Pottery Fragment with seated courtier*. 10th-13th century. Kashan, Iran (?). Fritware with luster-painted over opaque white glaze. 6.1 x 5.9 x 0.9 cm. 1985.006.557.

53. *Glazed pottery fragment with seated courtier*. 10th-13th century. Kashan, Iran (?). Fritware with luster-painted over opaque white glaze. 5.6 x 6 x 0.4 cm 1985.006.558.

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54. *Glazed pottery fragment: Courtier on horseback*. 10th-13th century. Kashan, Iran (?). Fritware with luster-painted over opaque white glaze. 8.4 x 8.7 x 2.2 cm. 1985.006.559.

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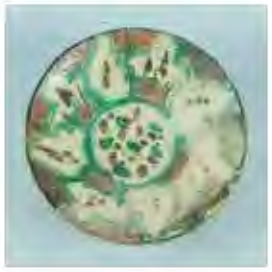
55. *Flaring Bowl*. Samanid period, 9th-10th century. Nishapur, Iran. *Sgraffito* splashware with radiating trefoils around a central medallion. 29 x 9.5 cm. 1985.006.528.



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56. *Silhouette-Ware Ewer with Nashki script on shoulder*. Seljuk period, Late 12th-early 13th century. Excavated from Rayy, Iran. Fritware with black slip under turquoise glaze. 12.5 x 20.3 cm. 1985.006.540.

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57. *Silhouette-Ware Bowl*. Seljuk period, Late 12th-early 13th century. Excavated from Rayy, Iran. Fritware with black slip and turquoise glaze. 21.5 x 8.3 cm. 1985.006.541.

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Glossary

***Bihari* script** — a variation of *Naskh* script, *Bihari* script was a favored script used in the production of manuscripts in northern India, including Qur'ans, between the 14th and 16th centuries.

Compound weave — A weave type that has at least two wefts or two warps, and often two of both. They are usually woven on a drawloom. Many compound weaves in the premodern period were made with silk.

Coptic — a Christian minority who lived in Egypt prior to the Arabs conquest in the 7th century and continued to live in Egypt after the conquests. Objects described as "Coptic" can also be referred to as "Early Byzantine" or "Late Antique."

Drawloom — A complex pattern loom probably first developed in China that required two people to operate: a weaver and an assistant (called a drawboy). Early versions of the drawloom have been uncovered from Chinese tombs of the Han dynasty (ca. 1st century CE). The technology later spread to Central Asia and India, and to Europe by the medieval period, marking a moment when textile production increased exponentially.

Earthenware — A type of nonvitreous ceramic, fired at less than 1200° C. It can be glazed or unglazed, though without glaze its porosity makes it absorb water. Earthenware is thought to be the earliest known type of ceramic and has been made around the world.

Fritware — A type of vitreous ceramic, which can be glazed or unglazed. Its body is made with frit — mostly quartz with ground glass and white clay added to create a white biscuit reminiscent of porcelain. Frit is fired at less than 1000° C, a lower temperature than clay bodied ceramics.

***Kufic* script** — an early form of Arabic script which became a preferred script for transcribing the Qur'an in the early Islamic period. Kufic script is characterized by its horizontal orientation and angular form of its letters.

Lusterware — A type of ceramic that has been painted with luster, which is a kind of metallic oxide. After firing, the luster fuses to the glazed surface and creates a metallic sheen, often gold or silver in color.

***Mina'i* ware** — A type of ceramic that has been glazed twice, or enameled. This glazing technique was developed to broaden the range of colors available for ceramic decoration and prevent the decoration from becoming too unstable during firing. Mina'i was the first type of ceramic to use the technique of overglaze.

***Muhaqqaq* script** — one of the six central Arabic scripts, *muhaqqaq* means "clear" and is thought to be one of the most beautiful of the Arabic calligraphic scripts. Its use was especially widespread in the Mamluk period (13th-15th centuries) to transcribe pages of the Qur'an.

***Naskh* script** — One of the six central Arabic scripts, *naskh* (also called *naskhi*) script is a calligraphic script developed for writing and copying administrative documents and the Qur'an among other texts. It is known for its easy legibility.

Qur'an (Koran) - the Qur'an is the central religious text of Islam. It is a collection of revelations from God to the Prophet Muhammad.

***Shahnama* —** The *Shahnama,* or the Persian "Book of Kings," is an epic poem written by the poet Firdawsi around 1010 CE. It features tales of a number of pre-Islamic Persian kings and heroes.

Silhouette ware — A type of ceramic with incised decoration. The technique is similar to underglaze, where a potter paints decoration and then applies a transparent layer of glaze — the difference with silhouette ware is that the layer underneath the glaze is typically slip, a thin layer of the ceramic body. The vessel needs to dry, and can then be cut into, leaving the desired decoration in relief.

Splash ware -- A type of ceramic characterized by polychrome glaze that appears to be splashed upon the vessel.

Tapestry weave — A weaving technique in which the warp (vertical lines) are often one color, but the weft (horizontal lines) add different colors at will to create patterns and images, creating a similar effect to painting.

Velvet — A fabric woven of silk in a pile weave, consisting of a ground fabric and an extra set of yarns woven (or tied) in.

Vitreous — a descriptor meaning "glass-like." After glaze has been fired, it becomes hard and glassy, as does unglazed stoneware.

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