MA ST E R PIE C E S
from the Department of Islamic Art
in The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Distributed by Yale University Press, New Haven and London
This catalogue is published in conjunction with the reopening of the Galleries for
the Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia on
November 1, 2011.

This publication is made possible through the generous support of Sharmin and
Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani.

Published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Mark Polizzotti, Publisher and Editor in Chief
Gwen Roginsky, Associate Publisher and General Manager of Publications
Peter Antony, Chief Production Manager
Michael Sittenfeld, Managing Editor
Robert Weisberg, Assistant Managing Editor

Edited by Cynthia Clark and Margaret Donovan
Designed by Bruce Campbell
Bibliography by Penny Jones
Production by Jennifer Van Dalsen
Map by Anandaroop Roy

Floor plans by Brian Cha (fig. 1) and Constance Norkin (fig. 27)

Typeset in LTC Deepdene, Poetica Std, and Lotus Linotype by Eriksen Translations
Inc., Brooklyn, New York
Printed on 130 gsm Magno Satin
Printed and bound by Die Keure, Brugge, Belgium

Front jacket/cover illustration: Detail of Rosette Bearing the Names and Titles of Shah Jahan,
from Four Folios from the Emperor’s Album (cat. 250 a–d)
Back jacket/cover illustration: Detail of Pair of Doors (cat. 113)
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62. Princely Figure with Winged Crown

Iran, mid-11th–mid-12th century
Stucco; modeled, carved, polychrome-painted, gilded
H. 47 in. (119.4 cm)
Cora Timken Burnett Collection of Persian Miniatures and Other Persian Art Objects,
Bequest of Cora Timken Burnett, 1956 57.51.18

63. Princely Figure with Jeweled Crown

Iran, mid-11th–mid-12th century
Stucco; modeled, carved, polychrome-painted, gilded
H. 56 3/4 in. (144.1 cm)
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Lester Wolfe, 1967 67.119

Cat. 62
Inscription in Arabic in kufic script on tiraz band, left sleeve:

On tiraz band, right sleeve:

[Anxious is he] over you, [gentle] to the believers.
(most likely from Qur’an 9:128)

Cat. 63
Inscription in Arabic in kufic script on tiraz band with cartouches, on right and left sleeves:

Dominion [belongs to God]

Nearly lifesize, these two stately figures with Turkic “moon faces” wear embroidered and highly embellished coats or kaftans over an undergarment and pants. The kaftans’ upper sleeves are embroidered with tiraz bands whose inscriptions are only partially visible. Both figures have long, flowing hair and wear elaborate crowns; one is adorned with a winged palmette (cat. 62), while the other (cat. 63) is richly decorated with jewels. In addition, each figure’s right hand firmly grips the hilt of a slightly curved sword or saber. Although their posture recalls standing Sasanian royal and Umayyad caliphal figures, it was also typical at a later date for images of palace guards. A symbol of royalty, the mandil or the royal napkin, can be seen in the right hand of the second figure and may have been held in the right hand of the first one, although it is missing now. The plaster figures were highlighted in different colors, among them ultramarine, red, orange, and black; minute traces of gold foil remain on such raised elements as the flowers, jewelry, and headdresses. Even though these figures arrived at the Metropolitan Museum at different times, their technique, style, size, and decoration suggest that they once belonged to the decorative program of the same palace complex, which has yet to be identified.

Initially dated to the later Seljuq period, about the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, these carvings have several features that suggest an earlier dating between the mid-eleventh and mid-twelfth century. After the decline of the Abbasid Empire in the early tenth century, Iran saw a revival of pre-Islamic, Sasanian, and even Soghdian forms and images of royalty. These images were intended to shed a favorable light on new dynasties of Iranian and Turkish origin as revivers of past glory. Images of winged crowns, such as the one seen on cat. 62, are markers for this revival style.

The calligraphic design, especially with respect to the tiraz brassards of cat. 63, allows an approximate dating. Beginning in the early tenth century, the pointed triangular fins of the short vertical letters of such inscriptions evolved to reach the height of the long vertical shafts of the letters, as seen here. This style was popular from the eleventh century until the middle decades of the twelfth century. A mimbar panel in the Metropolitan Museum dated a.h. 546/1151 a.d. (cat. 65b) displays a fine example of this calligraphic style.

Several similar but much smaller figures, which presumably came from western Iran, were acquired by a number of museums prior to World War I. In northern Mesopotamia and Seljuq Asia Minor, large reliefs of humans and princely figures were made of stone rather than stucco, and differed in style. The closest parallels in terms of imagery are offered by frescoes in Central Asian palaces in Bust (present-day Afghanistan) and Samarqand. The fresco murals in Bust at the Lashkari Bazaar palace complex are dated to the reign of the Ghaznavid ruler Mas’ud I (r. 1031–41).
Depicted are forty-four standing courtly figures in three-quarter view, all with Turkish Asiatic “moon-face” features and clothed in kaftans of blue and red. The scene appears to be a royal audience, in which courtiers or guards turn to a central figure that is now missing.\(^4\) Quite similar are the murals in a pavilion in Samarqand from the Qarakhanid period (992–1212), dated to the mid-twelfth century.\(^5\)

The Metropolitan’s two extraordinary, large polychrome stucco sculptures of princely figures probably once served as centerpieces of a larger courtly scene of stucco revetments that complemented a palace complex in Iran about 1050 to 1150. \(^{SH}\)

2. Riefstahl 1931.
3. Sourdel-Thomine 1978. For Ghaznavid inscriptions, see Flury 1925, esp. pp. 83–84, no. 12, for the tomb of a certain As‘id ibn ‘Ali, which Flury dated to the early twelfth century.
4. Casal 1978. Some of the figures carry a kind of rod or mace over the right shoulder.

Provenance
Cat. 62: Cora Tinkin Burnett, Alpine, N.J. (by 1940–d. 1956)
Cat. 63: Mr. and Mrs. Lester Wolfe, New York (by 1966–67)
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