

AMIR M O H T A S H E M I



Safavid Blue and White Charger

Safavid Iran, probably Mashhad, First half of the 17th century

Fritware decorated underglaze with cobalt blue on a white slip ground

48.2cm diameter

Stock no.: A5794

Provenance: Gifted to Michael Archer (1936-2022) by Arthur Lane's widow in the mid-1960s. Thence by descent.

This monumental blue and white Safavid charger features an unusual repertoire of motifs and forms.

The moulded white cavetto is fluted with a flanged rim. Enclosing the central decoration is an 8-bracketed frame, borrowed from Kraak dishes. It consists of alternating fish scale design and an interlocking diaper pattern, which derives from a simplified version of the Chinese character 壽 (*shòu*), meaning 'longevity'.¹ The well is decorated with a large vase, from which emerge two veined Kraak-style flowers and two leafy peaches. Below the vase are bamboo foliage, and flying above is an insect. The reverse of the dish is highly unusual. It is entirely cobalt blue, but for the underside of the well which is white and marked with a blue potter's mark. It is a square seal mark with pseudo-Chinese characters, imitating a *nienhao* (reign mark).

The decorative scheme derives from Chinese export ceramics. Vase compositions contained within patterned frames are a common feature of Chinese ceramics, such as a Kraak dish made in the early

17th century in Jingdezhen, Eastern China (see Victoria & Albert Museum accession no. [CIRC.568-1921](#)). The fluted rim may be inspired by chrysanthemum petal dishes, which were made in large quantities in Jingdezhen during the Wanli period and exported throughout Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas. Two such examples are held in the Topkapı Palace Museum (accession nos TKS 15/2416 and TKS 15/2511).² Both have Kraak borders with alternating diaper patterns, with a vase of flowers in the central medallion. The cavettos of both are moulded, the former with fruits and the latter in chrysanthemum pattern. That these dishes are held in the Topkapı Palace demonstrates that they were exported to Middle Eastern clients and may well have provided the prototype for the present dish.

This dish shares characteristics with dishes produced in both of the main centres of production of Safavid ceramics, namely Mashhad and Kirman. Dishes produced in the first half of the 17th century in Mashhad are characterised by a central medallion decorated by a Chinese-derived design, such as flowers in a vase, waterfowl, or dragons. The design is enclosed by a 'Kraak' frame, whilst the cavetto is left blank. Dishes in this group almost always have square potters' marks, made up of a box with a hatched square in one corner and pseudo-Chinese characters in the other three corners.³ However, they tend to have incised cavettos, rather than fluted, as well as white undersides with a band of decoration above the foot ring. An example of such a dish is held in the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (accession no. [995.143.1](#)), and another in the V&A (accession no. [894-1876](#)). Dishes made in Kirman in the second half of the 17th century feature cobalt bases with a white, fluted rim. However, this group has incised floral decoration in the well. Examples from this group are in the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (accession no. [998.54.1](#)) and the Victoria & Albert Museum (accession no. [2805-1876](#)).

n.b. accession nos are clickable links where possible

[1] Macioszek, Amelia. 'Negotiating Appropriation – Later Safavid Adaptations of Chinese Blue-and-White Porcelain', *Art of the Orient* 8 (2019), pp. 75-92; p. 76.

[2] Illustrated in Krahl, Regina, Nurdan Erbahar, and John Ayers. *Chinese Ceramics in the Topkapı Saray Museum, Istanbul : A Complete Catalogue*. London: published in association with the directorate of the Topkapı Saray Museum by Sotheby's, 1986. Vol. II. p. 713, Cat. 1235 and 1236.

[3] Golombek, Lisa, Robert B. Mason, Patricia Proctor, and Eileen Reilly. *Persian Pottery in the First Global Age : The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. Arts and Archaeology of the Islamic World*. Leiden: Brill, 2013. p. 82.