



Medieval Persian Lustre Star Tile

Iran, probably Kashan, Late 13th century

Stonepaste, painted with blue, turquoise, and brown lustre over an opaque underglaze.

Stock no.: A5935

This eight-pointed stonepaste (also fritware; faience) star tile was made during the Il-Khanid Mongol reign (1256-1353 CE). Medieval Iranian lustre ceramics are generally attributed to the town of Kashan, central Iran, due to the presence of the *nesba* 'Qāshani' (of Kashan) on signed examples. However, recent scholarship has suggested multiple sites of manufacture, or workshops set up on site in palaces.

Star-and-cross dados, of which this tile was once a part, were used to decorate secular buildings, such as funerary monuments and palaces. Illustrations of the Persian court in the *Shahnameh* show star-shaped tiles on the floor and walls, such as Folio 202v from the 16th century *Shahnameh* of Shah Tahmasp, held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (accession no. [1970.301.30](#)).

The tile is decorated purely with vegetal motifs. At the centre is a large palmette, and in each of the eight corners of the tile is a split acanthus leaf. The central decorative area is separated from the inscription band by a cobalt blue border, from which grow further split acanthus palmettes, in every other corner. This tile bears many of the hallmarks of Kashan lustreware, as identified by Richard Ettinghausen: the background is decorated with small spirals starting from a dot, in reserve against a ground of golden lustre; the leaves of both the central palmette and the split acanthus palmettes are decorated with a row of dots along the outer edges; the cobalt blue split leaf is filled with crosshatching.¹ Five turquoise dots highlight the centre and four corners.

The outer border of the tile is painted with white slip and inscribed in characteristic brown naskh.

Inscriptions on Kashan tiles generally come from Quranic verses relating to the function of the tile, or more unusually couplets from epic poetry.² In this case, couplets from Firdawsi's *Shahnameh*:

بخور هرچ داری فزونی بده

تو رنجیده ای بهر دشمن منه

Enjoy all you have and give away what remains,

You have toiled, leave [nothing] for your enemies.

This couplet is found on other tiles of the period (see, for example, Louvre accession no. [OA 6319/11](#)).

A tile with similar use of cobalt blue leaves and a spiral background is held in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (accession no. [C.23-1934](#)), dated to c. 1260-1299. Others in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, are dated to the late 13th to early 14th century (accession nos [1024-1892](#), [672-1889](#)).

n.b. accession nos are clickable links

[1] Ettinghausen, Richard. 'Evidence for the Identification of Kashan Pottery', *Ars Islamica* 3.1 (1936), pp. 44-75; p. 45.

[2] Carboni, Stefano and Masuya, Tomoko. *Persian Tiles*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993. p. 17, cat. 12.