

# AMIR MOHTASHEMI



## **Safavid Leopard Charger**

Safavid Blue and White Charger with Leopard

Iran, probably Mashhad, ca. 1630

Fritware decorated underglaze with cobalt blue over a white slip

43 cm diameter

Stock no.: A6094

A large Safavid charger with plain white gadrooned flange and well surrounding the centre which is decorated with a seated leopard. The reverse is plain, but for a ring of overlapping rounded waves around the foot ring and four pseudo-Chinese tassel marks (nienhao) on the base. This type of mark, classified by Golombek et al. as 'C3: Rectilinear Grid', has traditionally been associated with the later period (ca. 1680–1722), however, there are some known examples dating to the first half of the 17th century.<sup>1</sup>

This dish belongs to a larger group of Safavid blue and white ceramics decorated with animals – typically mythical creatures such as dragons, qilins, and simurghs – amongst fiery foliage and clouds in reserve against a cobalt blue ground. Examples generally measure between 42 and 45 cm in diameter. This group dates to the first half of the seventeenth century and was produced in the potteries in both

Kirman and Mashhad.<sup>2</sup> The composition appears to be based on 15th-century Chinese porcelain held in the Ardabil shrine, rather than contemporary Chinese imports.<sup>3</sup> Examples include a dish with a qilin amongst characteristic flaming foliage in the Royal Ontario Museum (no. [995.155.1](#)) measures 42.2 cm diameter. Through petrographic analysis it has been determined as a product of Mashhad, ca. 1630.<sup>4</sup> Another dish in the same collection (no. [909.25.4](#)) has also been attributed to ca. 1630, but this time to Kirman. It features a lion-faced dragon amongst fiery clouds, but this time with a highly decorated cavetto. The execution of this creature is similar to the leopard on our dish, with large expressive eyelashes and dots throughout the body. The only other known example of a seated leopard on a dish in this group is in the Museum Angewandte Kunst, Frankfurt (inv. V. 1).<sup>5</sup> It has a diameter of 45 cm and has been attributed to Mashhad, ca. 1600.

A sub-group of dishes with plain white flange and well, including the present example, has typically been associated with Mashhad. Examples from this group are held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (no. [24.47.4](#)) measuring 43.5 cm in diameter and featuring two fighting lions, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (accession nos [889-1876](#) and [485-1878](#)), featuring cranes and a qilin respectively.<sup>6</sup>

The sticker on the back, probably dating to the early 20th century, reads 'Persian Rice Dish. Centre blue ground with seated leopard, foliage, and clouds in white and blue; plain white ribbed sides and border. Four imitation Chinese marks on back. D. 16 ½ inches.'

[1] Golombek, Lisa, Robert B. Mason, Patricia Proctor, and Eileen Reilly. *Persian Pottery in the First Global Age: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Leiden: Brill, 2013, pp. 252–253.

[2] Golombek, Lisa. 'Dominant Fashions and Distinctive Styles', in Golombek et al. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 57–121: p. 57.

[3] See Pope, John Alexander. *Chinese Porcelains from the Ardebil Shrine*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1956, pl. 45, cited in Golombek, *Op. Cit.*, p. 81.

[4] Golombek. *Op. Cit.* p. 81.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 149, fig. 3.38.

[6] See also Crowe, Yolande. *Persia and China: Safavid Blue and White Ceramics in the Victoria & Albert Museum, 1501-1738*. Geneva: La Borie, 2002, cat. 46, p. 70.