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Afghan Candlestick from the 15th century

N-1-27

The candlestick is a representation of the art of Islamic metalworking, particularly as it flourished from the 12th to 16th century. Candlesticks of this fashion, the most common luxury implement of their time, were crafted from bronze given the limited supply of precious metals. Precious metals were typically reserved for inlays on the candlestick, with gold and silver used to decorate bronze metalwork. Candlesticks such as these would also commonly feature a number of extravagant figures and inscriptions. The inscriptions they featured would often pertain to their function, such as providing candlelight to a funeral or royal court. Inscriptions also commonly included the names and titles of rulers. Candlesticks may even have played a role within the confines of Muslim mausoleums, at least as suggested by the poet Kaqani in which he references a candlestick within the tomb of Muhammad.

Most famous among Islamic metalwork from this time period were pieces from the prestigious “Mosul bronzes” school of metalworking. Though high-quality candlesticks and other pieces came from all across the region, Mosul gained more notoriety than any one region. The reasons “Mosul bronzes” became so well-known among the metalwork community of the era were Mosul’s unusually rich supply of copper deposits, a direct mention by the poet Ibn Sa’id, and a number of artists from the region leaving their signatures upon candlesticks.

Despite their popularity, bronze candlesticks fell out of fashion in the 16th century, supplanted by oil lamps. Though their popularity waned, candlesticks did not totally fall out of circulation in this time. The miniature painting *Haft manzar*, painted by Bukhara Hatefi in around 1538, depicts three candlesticks. The stylization of two of these candlesticks suggests that further candlestick crafting in the region was taking inspiration from the Ottoman style of candlestick crafting.

Though the inspired metalworking of centuries past does not flourish today as it did then, several candlesticks from the era have survived the years, the finest of which have become treasures held in European churches.

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