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An Amulet from Afsharid Iran

SHEILA S. BLAIR

One of the most interesting objects in the Islamic gallery at the Walters Art Museum is a small carnelian amulet made in Iran on 28 June 1748. Its lengthy inscriptions reflect the uncertainty of the time, in which appeals were made to God, the prophet Muhammad, the fourteen immaculate ones venerated by Shi'ites, and the four orthodox caliphs venerated by Sunnis. Its mixture of forms and designs shows that the Afsharid rulers of Iran, though often at war with their neighbors, appropriated their rivals' artistic tastes and styles.

One of the smallest—yet most interesting—objects on display in the splendid new installation of Islamic art at the Walters Art Museum is a carnelian pendant made in 1748, probably in Iran (fig. 1).¹ Like many examples of Islamic art, the pendant is decorated with writing. Its inscriptions not only tell us what function the pendant filled and when and where it was made, but also transform this everyday object into a consummate work of art. The carnelian pendant thus provides a window into daily life and popular practices during the turbulent times of its creation.

The pendant is carved from carnelian (also spelled cornelian), a hard reddish and translucent mineral that has been used as a gemstone since Antiquity.² Carnelian was widely used in classical times by the Romans, who obtained it in West Asia and the Indian subcontinent. It continued to be used in Islamic times, and, by the fifteenth century, it was by far the most common type of hardstone used for jewelry, seals, and amulets, sometimes called talismans.³

To make the pendant, the stoneworker shaped the hardstone to form a small articulated oval measuring 5.03 cm. wide, 3.65 cm. high, and 3.3 cm. thick (fig. 2). He drilled a channel through the flat top edge of the hardstone, and the projecting wings, now broken, would have provided a place for a chain or cord from which to suspend the object as a pendant. The back side is flat, but the front is rounded or in cabochon. While the carver left the back plain, he covered the front side of the pendant with writing. The inscriptions are executed in several techniques and styles

and contain different sorts of text carefully fitted together in bands and cartouches, like a jigsaw puzzle.

The largest texts are contained in two boxes at the top and center of the pendant (see fig. 3 for a schematic representation showing the location of the various inscriptions). The script in both these boxes is formed by incising the outlines of the letters and filling the background with a tiny floral design so that the letters stand out in reserve. The two words in the box at the top (IA) invoke God's name (*yā allāh*). This short text is followed by the longer text in the center (IB), a common phrase from the Koran invoking God's majesty and power (*in allāh 'alā kull shay qadīr*). This phrase occurs eleven times in the Koran in this exact form (2:20, 2:106, 2:109, 2:148, 2:259; 3:165, 16:77, 24:45, 29:20, 35:1, 65:12), as well as many other times in shorter or variant forms. The large texts on the pendant can be read together, as a single statement: "O God, truly God is powerful over all things." In invoking God's name and power, these two large inscriptions immediately identify the function of the object as an amulet invoking God's protection on the wearer.

The shape of the pendant confirms its talismanic function. Amulets made in the Islamic lands were carved in many shapes—circles, rectangles, hearts, or pyramids—but most were oval. For example, of the thirty-six amulets in the Cabinet des Médailles of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris that are carved with positive inscriptions (as distinct from the thirteen amulets carved with negative inscriptions that read backwards and hence were meant to be used as seals), twenty-one, or almost 60%, are oval.⁴ Many, like the amulet in the Walters, have a pierced opening at the top for a chain or cord. One, made of green glass with inscriptions rather crudely carved on both sides (fig. 4), has the same articulated oval shape as the carnelian amulet in the Walters, with flat top and bottom and rounded sides.⁵ There are similar examples in the Ashmolean Museum and in the unpublished collection of The British Museum.⁶

The carver of the carnelian amulet in the Walters called attention to the importance of the reserve texts (IA and IB) in several ways. He made the letters bigger than those of the other texts. He also made the letters legible by carving them in reserve against a darker ground. He further accentuated the rhythm created by the letters. In the top box, he emphasized the vertical strokes of *alif* and *lam*, written in a thick round script known as *thuluth*. In the middle box, he turned the last letter in each of four large words (the *nūn* [n] in *in*, the *alif maqsūra* [a] in *'alā*, the *lam* [l] in *kull*, and the *yā'* [y] in *shay*) into a large bowl. The swooping tails add internal unity and pattern to the design. The carver further varied the thickness of the strokes in these letters to add a sense of movement. These features are typical of the hanging script known as *nasta'liq*, which was developed in Iran in the fourteenth century and became particularly popular there for transcribing Persian poetry from the fifteenth century onwards.⁷ A similar composition, with swooping tails to the final letters, is found, for example, on a sheet of decorated calligraphy done by the scribe and illustrator Isma'il Jalayir in the mid-nineteenth century.⁸ The use of this style of script immediately suggests an Iranian provenance for the amulet.⁹

To make these patterns with the letters, the carver had to manipulate the text, particularly in the middle box. He squeezed the second and last words of the phrase (*allāh* and *qadir*) into the upper corners above the other four words. He even had to change the spelling. He spelled *allāh* without the initial *alif*, making the initial *alif* of *in*, the vertical stroke on the left of the rectangle, do double service as the initial *alif* of two words. Clearly, he expected his audience to know the phrase, recognize it, and recite it, rather than read it literally. He made pattern take precedence over meaning.

In contrast to the large texts carved in reserve, the other texts on the pendant are incised in a fine, even script known as *naskh*, quite legible despite its diminutive size. The incised texts fall into two parts, based on meaning and placement. The first text (II) incised on the carnelian amulet continues in the same vein as the reserve text and is written in successive tiers around the central rectangle (see Table 1 for a transcription and translation of the text). It begins beneath the central rectangle in the first cartouche on the right and continues around the first row of cartouches immediately surrounding the central rectangle (IIa). The text (IIb) continues around the second row of cartouches, also written in a circle. The text then moves to the fields surrounding the rectangular floral border, beginning with the field below the rectangle (IIc) and moving clockwise around the three other fields (IId-f). Whereas the cartouches each contain a phrase, the text in the field is written in lines, with each phrase or word separated by a small circle or other mark. To read the full text, the viewer needs to turn the pendant in a clockwise direction three times.



Fig. 1. Carnelian pendant. 5.03 x 3.65 x 3.3 cm. [actual size]. Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, acc. no. 42.1205.

The cartouche layout of the beginning of the incised text calls to mind the typical talismanic design of a magic square, in which single characters, words, or phrases are set in a checkerboard pattern. The magic square (Arabic *wafq*) is first documented in a group of writings attributed to Jabir b. Hayyan (known in Europe as Geber) and thought to have been compiled in the late ninth or early tenth century. From the twelfth century, manuals on magical formulas and procedures proliferated. The master of the art was Abu'l-'Abbas Ahmad b. 'Ali b. Yusuf al-Buni al-Qurashi (d. 1225), who composed a treatise on the construction of magic squares and talismanic designs based on the letters composing the Beautiful Names of God. His treatise may have circulated on a popular level, and only two written copies are known to have survived: one dated 16 Dhū'l-Qa'da 828/24 September 1425 and a second copied at Valljevo southwest of Belgrade on 29 Jumada 963/10 May 1556.¹⁰

Magic squares have become typical on talismanic charts, shirts, and plaques made in the Islamic lands in the last few centuries.¹¹ The squares could be filled with numbers, written in numerals or alphanumerics (*abjad*), in which each letter of the alphabet stands for a numerical value. The squares could also be filled with single words or phrases. The words might spell out a verse from the Koran, but one of the most common texts on these talismanic objects was the Beautiful Names of God (*al-asmā' al-husnā*),¹² and this is how the text incised around the middle of the carnelian amulet in the Walters opens.

The small incised text on the amulet begins in the bottom right by invoking God's name (*yā allāh*), the same phrase carved in reserve at the top of the amulet. Next comes the traditional list of ninety-nine Beautiful Names, all of them also invoked with O (*yā*). These names are already mentioned in an early hadith, or prophetic tradition, transmitted by one of Muhammad's companions, Abu Hurayra. According to this tradition, God had ninety-nine names, a hundred less one, for He, the odd number (the Unique) likes to be designated by these enumerated names one by one; whoever knows the ninety-nine names will enter paradise.



Fig. 2. View of the pendant, magnified five times.

The repetition of these ninety-nine names has become one of the most diligent devotions in Islam. Pious Muslims repeat them and meditate on them, often with the help of ninety-nine beads strung together like a rosary (*subḥa*). These ninety-nine names have become particularly important for mystics and are often included as part of the *dhikr*, or recitation by Sufis. The fourteenth-century Persian mystic 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Qashani, for example, included them in his glossary of Sufi terms under the heading Servants of God.¹³

Since these ninety-nine names do not all occur in the Koran, the list has never been absolutely fixed and is liable to contain variants. Most lists, including the one on the Walters' amulet, begin with the thirteen names mentioned in Koran 59:22–24. They are written on the amulet in cartouches running on the bottom and left side of the central rectangle: *yā rāḥmān* (O Merciful), *yā rāḥīm* (O Compassionate), *yā malik* (O King), *yā quddūs* (O Holy), *yā salām* (O Peace), *yā mu'min* (O Faithful), *yā muhaymin* (O Protector), *yā 'azīz* (O Mighty), *yā jabbār* (O Repairer), *yā mutakabbir* (O Great), *yā khāliq* (O Creator), *yā bārī* (O Maker), and *yā muṣawwir* (O Fashioner).¹⁴

The subsequent order in the list of ninety-nine Beautiful Names often varies. Most names are grouped mnemonically. The next six in the standard order are governed by euphony: *ghaffār* (Forgiver), *qahhār* (Dominant), *wahhāb* (Bestower), *razzāq* (Provider), *fattāh* (Opener), and *'alī* (Knower). They are written in the first row of cartouches above the central rectangle. Other names are grouped by assonance, associations of verbal forms, or pairs having both a correlative and paradoxical sense. For example, *auwal* (First) is typically paired with *akhir* (Last), *zāhir* (Evident) with *bātin* (Hidden).

The list of Beautiful Names incised on the Walters' amulet contains the standard ninety-nine, with only a few variations. The name following the common first thirteen, inserted before the six euphonic names, is *sittār* (Veiler), not often included in the standard list. By contrast, *rashīd* (Director), the second to last name on the standard list, is omitted on the amulet. There also seems to be one extra name, bringing the total to one hundred names, or 101 including the name of God (*allāh*) at the beginning. The unusual name is written on the amulet in the fifth cartouche

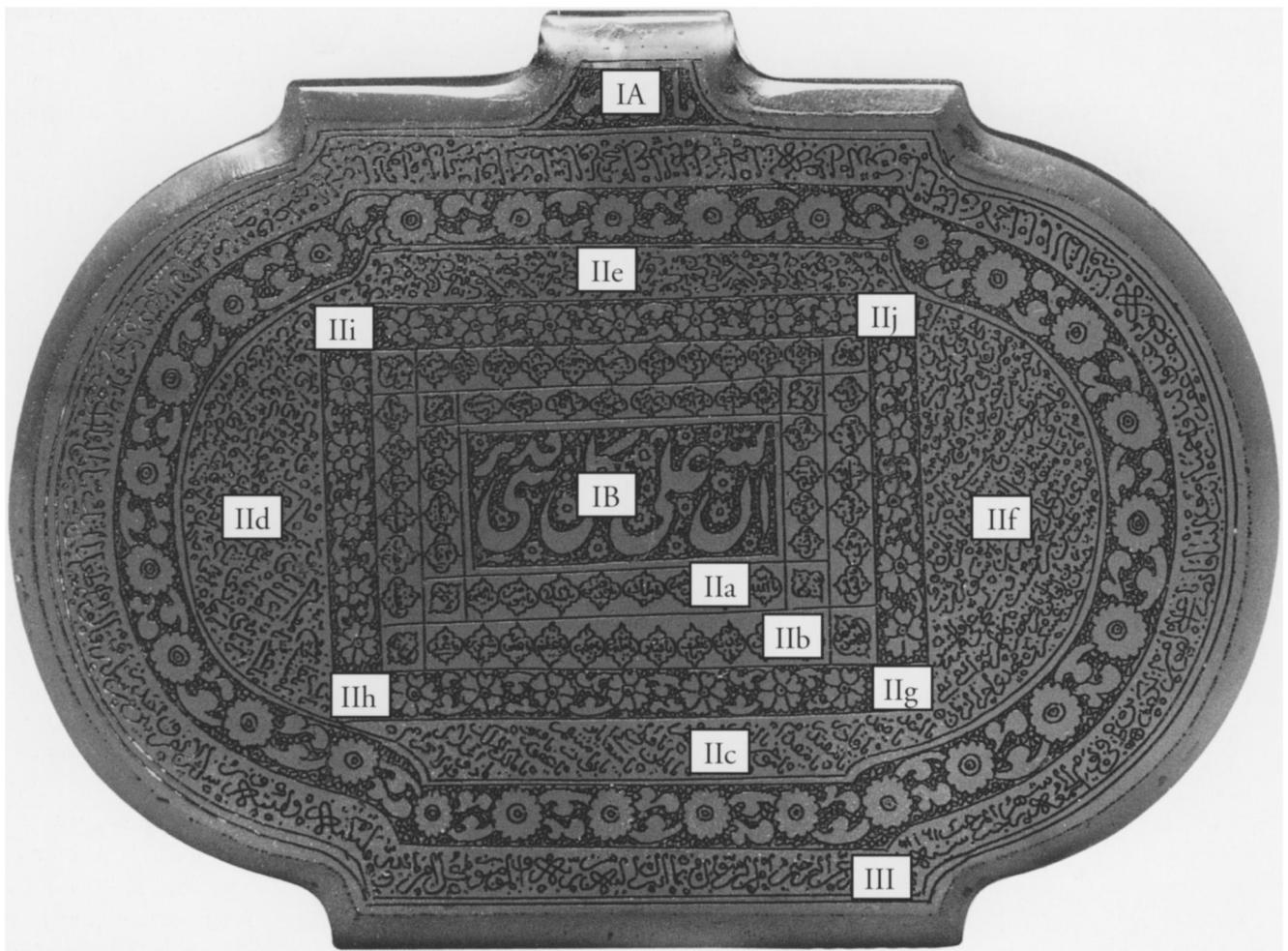


Fig. 3. Pendant, with marks showing the location of the different inscriptions and knots.

from the right in the bottom line: it seems to contain the word *qubbād*. This is the name of one of the kings of ancient Persia; it is not part of the standard list of God's name and its inclusion on the amulet is a puzzle.

The list of God's Beautiful Names ends midway in the field to the left of the central rectangle on the amulet (IId). Most of the rest of the space in the fields (IId-f) is taken up with the Noble Names (*al-asmā' al-sharīfa*), ninety-nine pious names and epithets of the prophet Muhammad that are meant to parallel the ninety-nine Beautiful Names of God. The Prophet's names are not invoked with *yā* (O), and rather than the circle used to mark the end of each of God's names, the Noble Names are followed by the letter *ṣad*, an abbreviation for the *taṣliya*, the phrase "May God bless him and give him peace" that must follow every mention of the Prophet in written or spoken discourse.¹⁵

The list of the Prophet's Noble Names is even more variable than the list of God's Beautiful Names. It typically begins with four variants derived from the root *ḥ-m-d*,

meaning praise: *muhammad* (He who is worthy of Praise), *ahmad* (More praiseworthy), *hamid* (Praising), and *mahmūd* (Praised). The list continues with more names, all taken from the Koran and grouped in many of the same ways as the Beautiful Names of God. Some Noble Names rhyme. Some pairs play on the same idea, such as *munīr* (Radiant) and *sirāj* (Lamp), both mentioned in Koran 33:46. Some pairs are variants on the same Arabic root, such as *ḥādin* (Guide) and *mahdi* (Rightly guided), both of which derive from *ḥ-d-i*. A few pairs are opposites, such as *fātiḥ* (Opener) and *khātim* (Seal or End) or *bashīr* (Bearer of good tidings) and *nadhīr* (Warner). A few are identical with the names of God, such as *awwal* (First) and *ākhir* (Last) or *zāhir* (Evident) and *bātin* (Hidden), but most refer only to the Prophet. Some come from the Prophet's country or family, such as *makki* (Meccan), *madini* (Medinan), *'arabī* (Arab), *bijāzi* (From the Hijaz), *abtāhī* (Belonging to al-Batha, the area around Mecca), *nizārī* (From the Nizari tribe), *qurayshī* (From the Quraysh).



Fig. 4. Green glass amulet from the Bibliothèque nationale, after Kalus, *Catalogue des Cachets, Bulles, et Talismans Islamiques*, no. III.1.23

clan), and *mudarī* (From the Mudar tribe). Some refer to the mystical letters found at the beginning of chapters, or suras, in the Koran, such as the letters *yā'-sīn*, found at the beginning of sura 36, *tā'-sīn*, found at the beginning of sura 27, and *ḥā'-mīm*, found at the beginning of suras 40–46.

Reciting the Prophet's Noble Names became a popular practice in Islam. The fourteenth-century historian al-Safadi composed a long poem in which he enumerated the ninety-nine names of the Prophet. Mystics often invoked these names, which served as talismans to ward off evil. For example, Sayyid Baqir, a seventeenth-century Suhrawardi mystic from Ucch (now in Pakistan), included a chapter on the virtues and divine grace of Muhammad's ninety-nine names in his treatise *Jawāhir al-awliyā* (Jewels of the Saints).¹⁶ In more recent times, the list was elaborated in popular tradition: an Arabic manuscript dated 1268/1851–52 gives 201 names, and other sources mention four hundred or even one thousand.¹⁷

The Noble Names do not occur on many surviving amulets, perhaps because of their length.¹⁸ Calligraphers, however, sometimes made up the Noble Names into calligraphic pictures. One example is the so-called Muhammadan Rose, a floral design with the ninety-nine Beautiful Names of God, the ninety-nine Noble Names of the Prophet, and the names of the Ten to whom Paradise was promised (*al-'ashara al-mubashshara*).¹⁹

Finally, after listing the two hundred names of God and the Prophet, the inscription incised around the center of the Walters' carnelian amulet ends in the middle of the right field (IIIf) with the names of the so-called fourteen immaculate ones (Persian: *chahārdah ma'sūm*): Muhammad, his daughter Fatima, and the Twelve Imams who succeeded him. These are the fourteen inerrant or immaculate personages venerated by Twelver Shi'ites.²⁰

After the death of the Prophet in 632, the nascent Muslim community split over how to choose his successor.²¹ Eventually, two major positions emerged regarding the nature of authority over the Islamic community. One position, ultimately accepted by the majority of believers, was that of the caliphal loyalists. By the middle of the eighth century, they came to call themselves the “people of tradition and unity,” in Arabic *ahl al-sunna wal-jam'a*, or, more simply, *sunnis*. Sunni Muslims comprise the overwhelming majority of the more than one billion Muslims in the world today.

The other major position regarding the nature of authority over the Muslim community is represented by the partisans of Muhammad's nephew and son-in-law 'Ali. This group is collectively known as Shi'ites, from the Arabic word *shi'a* meaning “party” or “faction.” Shi'ites initially pointed to 'Ali's justice, religious knowledge, and closeness to the Prophet, arguing that any head of the community should be a direct descendant of Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and her husband 'Ali. Their doctrine evolved so that by the eighth century most Shi'ites also held that the caliph, or Prophet's successor, would also be a divinely guided, infallible religious teacher, or *imam*. They believed that only such a leader could guide the Muslim community to achieve the justice and salvation promised by the Koran.

Shi'ites differ over the names and number of direct successors to Muhammad, but the largest group, known as Twelver Shi'ites, believe that the twelfth imam went into hiding in the year 940 and that, until he reappears on Judgment Day, he is represented on earth by a viceroy, who reinterprets the *shari'a*, the rules and regulations that govern the day-to-day lives of Muslims, for every age. Twelvers comprise the largest group of Shi'ites in modern times, making up most of the population of modern Iran and sizeable minorities in neighboring countries.



Fig. 5. Amulet, dated A.H. 1161/A.D. 1748. 5.8 x 4.2 x 6 cm. London, The British Museum, BM 1866 12-29 101.

Although Iran is now a Shi‘ite country, Twelver Shi‘ism became the state religion there only in the sixteenth century, under the rule of the Safavid dynasty (1501–1722). During this period, theosophers such as Mulla Sadra (d. 1640) elaborated the cosmic function of the fourteen immaculate ones. These figures became a major focus of popular piety and are often mentioned in formulas invoking divine blessing. Their names are inscribed, for example, on an amulet dated [1]161/1748 in The British Museum (fig. 5), on three undated amulets in the collection of the Cabinet des Médailles, on eight undated amulets in the Ashmolean, and on several talismanic plaques from the same period.²² The presence of these names is often taken to be an indication of Persian provenance and adds weight to the stylistic evidence in attributing the Walters’ amulet to Iran.²³

Curiously, the names of the fourteen immaculate ones appear on the carnelian amulet in juxtaposition to those of their rivals. The central rectangle is surrounded by a reserved band of six-petaled flowers separated by pairs of leaves. Cartouches in the four corners (IIg–j) have the names of

the four orthodox caliphs: Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman, and 'Ali. These four people were the first successors to Muhammad, chosen by the consensus of the community. In later times, some Muslims looked back, through somewhat rose-colored glasses, to their successive reigns as a “Golden Age” in which faith, justice, and the pristine Islamic values flourished. Hence, these caliphs became known to Sunni Muslims as *al-khulafā' al-rashīdūn*, or “rightly guided” caliphs. Shi‘ites, by contrast, traditionally curse the names of the first three caliphs, whom they consider usurpers and murderers of the fourth and, in their view, only legitimate caliph, 'Ali.

Inscribing the names of the four orthodox caliphs on objects became a hallmark of the arts produced under the Ottomans, rulers of Anatolia and much of the eastern Mediterranean from the late thirteenth century to 1922. From 1501, they were the Safavids’ great rivals. The Ottomans often had the name of the four orthodox caliphs inscribed on tile panels (fig. 6), ceramic vessels (fig. 7), and many other types of art.²⁴ On these objects, the four names

were often written in a line or set in cartouches, but in one type of work the four names were typically disposed in the four corners: calligraphic works bearing a description of the Prophet. Known as *hilya* (literally, decoration or adornment), these calligraphic specimens contain a verbal description of the prophet Muhammad giving both his physical and his mental characteristics. The description of the Prophet was written in a large central medallion, with pendant circles in the four corners inscribed with the names of the four orthodox caliphs. This arrangement of the *hilya* (fig. 8) became standard under the Ottoman master calligrapher Hafiz Osman (1642–98) and was reproduced until modern times.²⁵

Ottoman calligraphers adapted the calligraphic tradition of inscribing the names of the four orthodox caliphs in medallions for other media as well. The names, together with those of Muhammad, 'Ali, Hasan, and Husayn, were reproduced on eight wooden roundels designed in 1859 by Mustafa 'Izzet to be hung below the dome in the interior of the congregational mosque converted from the great church of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. The largest of their type, these wooden roundels measure eight meters (twenty-five feet) in diameter. The compositions were enlarged by squaring, and smaller versions of these sacred names survive on both cardboard and wood.²⁶

To understand why the carnelian amulet in the Walters is inscribed with the names of both the fourteen immaculate ones, typical of Shi'ites, and the four orthodox caliphs, typically pronounced by their rivals, the Sunnis, we must turn to the other text incised around the border of the amulet (III). Slightly larger than the text incised in the middle of the amulet (with the *alif* measuring approximately 1 cm., about twice the size of the *alif* in the central text), the border text is separated from the rest of the decoration by a band of floral motifs set in reserve against a dark ground. The floral band, composed of many-petaled, lotus-like flowers alternating with pairs of stylized leaves, serves to set off the border inscription and distinguish it from the other incised text in the center.

As with the reserved text, the carver of the carnelian amulet in the Walters elaborated the script in the border band to enhance the meaning of the message. The main artistic touches are the knots added to final *ha'* in eight places around the border. The knots are not spaced symmetrically. Nor do they seem to be placed semantically: many are used on the pronoun *ha'* (him), meaning Muhammad or God, but two at the end are used on the *tā'* *marbūta*, or feminine ending, of the words *al-jum'a* (Friday) and *sana* (year). Rather, the carver seems to have added these knots wherever space was available.

Despite their random placement, the knots may have had magical significance. Many objects made in the Islamic lands were decorated not only with magical writing, often

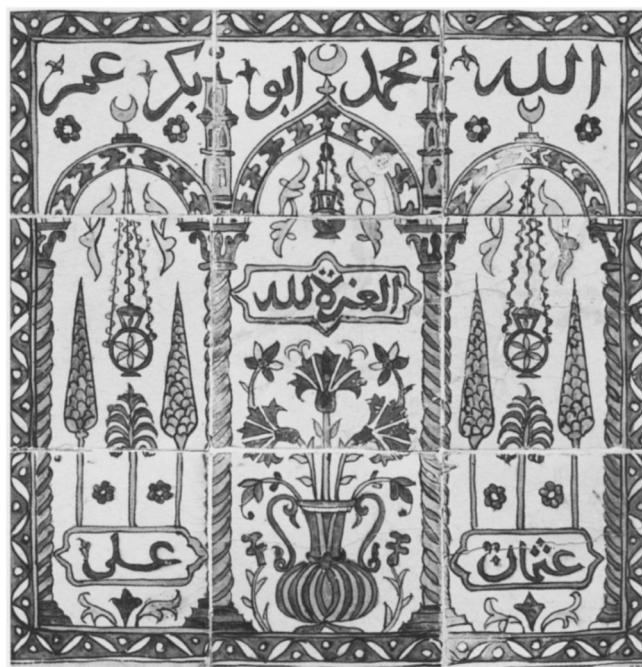


Fig. 6. Tile plaque with names of the Four Orthodox caliphs. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 15.76.3.

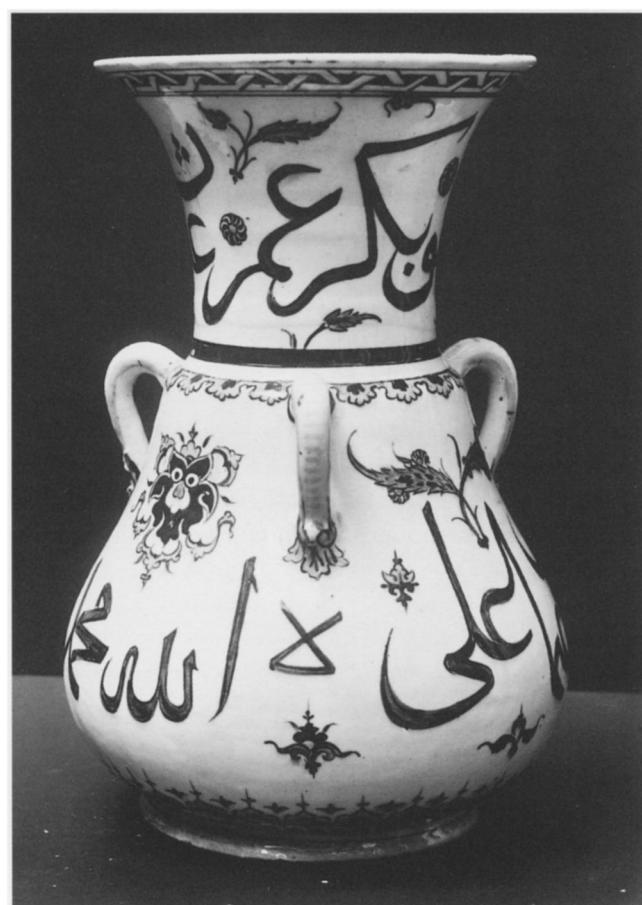


Fig. 7. Ceramic vessel in the form of a mosque lamp, ca. 1580. 32 x 17.8 cm. Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, acc. no. 48.1301.



Fig. 8. *Hilya* [verbal description of the Prophet Muhammad] calligraphed by Hafiz Osman. A.H. 1103/A.D. 1691. 47 x 34 cm. Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, T559.4.

arranged in squares, but also with the five- or six-pointed star, commonly known as the seal of Solomon. Solomon is known in Islamic lore for the power he exercised over the evil *jinn*, “shape-shifting,” supernatural creatures. The *jinn* (whence the English word genie) are mentioned frequently in the Koran (e.g., 6:100, 6:112, 6:128, 18:50, 55:14–15, etc.), and one entire sura (72) is entitled *jinn*. For Muslims, the *jinn* have bodies composed of vapor or flame and are intelligent but imperceptible to human senses, capable of appearing in different forms and of carrying out heavy labors. Although accepted in official Islam, the *jinn* became particularly popular in folklore and occur extensively in *The Arabian Nights*.²⁷ Solomon exercised his power over the *jinn* through a talismanic ring engraved “the most great name” of God, and many designs with a sealed knot seem to have magical connotations.²⁸ The engraver may well have intended the knots he added to the tails of the letter *ha'* in the border inscription around the Walters’ carnelian amulet to recall the Solomonic knot and evoke the power Solomon exercised over the *jinn* through his talismanic ring.

The border text begins at the lower right of the flat, bottom edge of the amulet. It opens with the invocation to God known as the *basmala*, from the words *bism allāh al-rahmān al-rahīm* (in the name of God the Merciful and the Compassionate). Muslims invoke the *basmala* in all sorts of daily activities, from reading the Koran to giving a lecture or beginning a journey. This phrase is also found at the beginning of all but one sura in the Koran (the exception is Chapter 9), and here too on the carnelian pendant, the *basmala* is followed by a Koranic text.

The border text on the pendant comes from the second chapter of the Koran, called *al-Baqara* (The Cow). The longest chapter in the Koran and one of the latest to be revealed, it is often thought to sum up the entire teaching of the Koran, which Muslims accept as God’s revelation to the prophet Muhammad.²⁹ The sura takes its name from the parable of the cow or heifer (*al-baqara*), mentioned in verses 67–71, which illustrates the insufficiency of carping obedience. When people lose faith, they put off obedience with various excuses. Even at last when they obey the letter of the law, they fail in spirit and become fossilized, but their self-absorption prevents them from realizing that they are spiritually dead.

The text on the pendant contains the last two verses (285–86) from sura 2, which sum up the nature of faith illustrated by the parable:³⁰

The Messenger believes in what was sent down to him from his Lord, and the believers; each one believes in God and His angels, and in His Books and His Messengers; we make no division between any one of His Messengers. They say, ‘We hear, and obey. Our Lord, grant us Thy forgiveness; unto Thee is the homecoming.’

God charges no soul save to its capacity; standing to its account is what it has earned, and against its account what it has merited.

Our Lord take us not to task if we forget, or make mistake. Our Lord, charge us not with a load such as Thou didst lay upon those before us. Our Lord, do Thou not burden us beyond what we have the strength to bear. And pardon us, and forgive us, and have mercy on us; thou art our Protector. And help us against the people of the unbelievers.

The Koranic quotation takes up most of the border band, ending about three-quarters of the way down the right lobe on the amulet. The carver marked the end of the Koranic text with three signs: a circle, the Arabic letter *tā'*, and a circle inscribed with a small cross-shape or *x*. Although classical Arabic was not written with punctuation in its modern sense, some marks were used to indicate divisions between paragraphs, sentences, or sections.³¹

The circle was commonly used to represent the letter *ha'*, for the word *intahā*, meaning “it is finished.” One of the earliest marks known, the circle may have been adopted from old Persian or Pahlavi, for it occurs on papyrus documents written in this language to indicate divisions between sentences. Scholars writing Arabic adopted it in Islamic times to separate one hadith from another. The circle is used in modern printed editions of the Koran to separate one verse (*āya*) from another.

The second mark at the end of the Koranic verses on the amulet, the Arabic letter *ta'*, had a similar meaning. An abbreviation for *mutlaq* (free or independent), it was traditionally used when transcribing the text of the Koran to indicate a full-stop. It is also used in non-Koranic codices transcribed in Persia and India to indicate the word *fagat*, literally meaning “only” and used as a synonym for *intahā* (end). It is also written on invoices to indicate the grand total and prevent fraudulent additions at the end of a document.³²

These two marks, the circle and the *ta'*, are standard, and the carver used them elsewhere in the Koranic text on the amulet, but the third mark, a circle inscribed with a small cross-shape or *x*, is more unusual and appears only in this place on the amulet. It may be a variant of the dots or other marks added to an empty circle upon reading a hadith. According to the great traditionalist al-Katib al-Baghdadi (d. 1071), the scribe should leave the circle empty so that a dot or some other mark could be placed in it during collation. If the hadith were read or heard several times, the circle could contain several dots,³³ and the two slashes here may indicate that the text contains two Koranic verses.

Whatever the literal meaning of the two strokes, the mark, like the circle and the letter *ta'*, signifies the end of the Koranic text and separates it from the dating information that follows. This part of the inscription reads: “Friday in the month of Rajab the venerated (*murajjab*) during the year 1161 *h(ijriyya)* (of the hijra).” This lunar year ran from 2 January to 21 December 1748.

Rajab is the seventh month in the Muslim lunar year. In pre-Islamic times, it was observed as a holy month in spring when sacrifices were offered to pagan deities in gratitude for increased flocks and herds. It was also the month of peace during which tribes in the Arabian peninsula refrained from raids and warfare. Due to this legacy, Rajab is often called *al-āsamm* (the deaf), because no sound from weapons was heard during that month, or *al-āsabb* (the pouring), because the unbelievers of Mecca used to say that mercy poured forth in that month. It was a time of devotional practices, exertions, and fasting.

These pre-Islamic practices continued in Islamic times, but Muslim scholars had various, and often contradictory, opinions about their correctness. Strictly orthodox scholars stressed that there was no valid tradition concerning the

virtues of Rajab. Others, particularly the pious and devoted, favored the widely circulated, popular traditions, in which the Prophet is said to have emphasized the virtues of Rajab and encouraged carrying out various practices deemed laudable and correct. Fasting during Rajab was thought to be particularly commendable, and very high rewards were promised to people who did so. For many, Rajab became one of four sacred months (the others are the first month, Muhamarram; the eighth month, Sha'ban; and the twelfth month, Dhu'l-Hijja, during which Muslims undertake the fifth pillar of Islam, the *hajj*, or pilgrimage to Mecca), and there even developed a popular rivalry between Rajab and the following month Sha'ban as to which should be more highly revered.³⁴

The carnelian amulet clearly belongs to the popular tradition of venerating Rajab, for in the border inscription the month is labeled *murajjab* (venerated or awesome), an adjective derived from the same triliteral root (*r-j-b*) as the name of the month. This was a somewhat unusual choice of adjective to use in an inscription, but one attested in a few examples, particularly from later Islamic times.³⁵ Such an adjective may be rare in epigraphy because it reflects popular, rather than literary, tradition.

For many, Rajab came to be associated with certain events in the Prophet's life. His mother is said to have conceived him on the first evening of the month. According to another tradition, the Prophet was born in Rajab, though his birthday is usually celebrated on the 12th of the month of Rabi' al-Awwal. More importantly, the 27th of Rajab came to be celebrated as the day of the *mi'rāj*, the Prophet's mystical ascension to heaven, or of the *isrā*, his visionary night journey. Hence, many Muslims spend the night of the 27th in vigil. In some places, particularly those areas that were converted to Islam more recently and therefore where indigenous traditions are stronger, this day is celebrated with popular festivities. In Indonesia, for example, Muslims celebrate the night of Muhammad's journey with lights and even fireworks.³⁶ In East Africa, Muslims spend the preceding three days listening to a recitation of a prose version of the story, first in Arabic and then in a Swahili translation, followed by a day of fasting.

The amulet, however, cannot have been made to commemorate the Prophet's journey, for the inscription gives the date of a Friday in Rajab during the year 1161, and in that year the 27th of Rajab fell on a Tuesday. Rather, the amulet was made for one of the other nights of the month that are considered to be replete with God's graces. God is said to grant every supplication made by the believer on the first night of the month, but the amulet cannot commemorate that day either, for it fell on a Thursday in the year 1161. During that year there were five Fridays in Rajab: the 2nd, the 9th, the 16th, the 23rd, and the 30th.

The first Friday night of Rajab, known as the night of the prayer for extensive and desirable gifts (*salāt al-raghā'ib*), is one of the most celebrated of the month. To mark this day, the believer fasts on the preceding Thursday and then fills the evening with prayers and supplications containing hundreds of invocations, prostrations, bowings, and recitations of suras from the Koran. The central inscription incised on the amulet accords with such a dating to the first Friday night in Rajab: one of the ancestors of Sayyid Baqir, the Suhrawardi mystic who wrote the treatise on Muhammad's ninety-nine names, considered it particularly valuable to recite these names after evening prayer, for doing so would cause that person to enter Paradise.³⁷ Therefore, the amulet was probably made as a gift to mark that first Friday, and hence it can be dated precisely to 2 Rajab 1161, corresponding to 28 June 1748.

This date makes the carnelian amulet in the Walters one of earliest dated amulets to survive from the Islamic lands. Most published amulets date from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.³⁸ A few are earlier. For example, of the thirty-six Islamic amulets in the Cabinet des Médailles in Paris, one of the first collections to be published, the two earliest pieces date from the mid-eighteenth century. One (fig. 9), a heart-shaped amulet of yellow chalcedony, is dated [1]173/1759–60. Approximately the same size as the one in the Walters, it is decorated with two texts in round scripts, one carved in reserve and the other incised, like those on the Walters' amulet. The other dated amulet in the Cabinet des Médailles (fig. 10), a small oval of white chalcedony, is inscribed [1]171/1757–58. Half the size of the one in the Walters, it is incised with the same common Koranic praise that is carved in reserve in the center of the Walters' amulet (Koran 2:20, etc.), saying that God has power over all things.

In addition to these two published examples, the collection of The British Museum contains a white chalcedony amulet that is dated to the same year as the one in the Walters, [1]161/1748, (fig. 5). Heart-shaped with a flat top and base with straight sides, it is slightly larger than the one in the Walters and contains three texts: the outer margin with sacred names circumscribes two texts with Koranic verses. The inner margin contains Koran 2:255, the so-called Throne Verse (*āyat al-kursī*), considered the most sublime statement of God's majesty and power. In the center is a shorter Koranic text containing the last two verses from sura 68, known as Chapter of the Pen (*Sūrat al-Qalam*) and thought to be the first of God's revelations to Muhammad. The verses (68:51–52) state that unbelievers, when they hear God's message, might take a Muslim to be mad, but that truly God's revelation is a message to all the worlds.

Although a few amulets are dated sporadically in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries,³⁹ these four

examples from the mid-seventeenth century comprise a rare group of dated amulets. The amulet in the Walters is further distinguished because of its precise date, giving the day of the week and the month as well as the year. It is the only example I know with such a specific date. This date, along with the lengthy inscriptions on it, helps us understand why the Walters' amulet was made. To put the amulet in context, we must examine the turbulent historical and religious situation of the time.

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the power and authority of the Safavids as rulers of Iran had dribbled away under a series of increasingly inept and ineffective shahs. In 1722, the Afghans invaded. Safavid resistance soon collapsed, and, in the ensuing strife and upheaval, power passed to Nadir Shah, a Turcoman chieftain of the Afshar tribe from the province of Khurasan in northeast Iran.⁴⁰ Nadir began by ridding the country of its Afghan invaders, and, after consolidating his power, he proclaimed himself shah in 1736. Whereas the Safavids had claimed legitimacy as teachers of religious law who exercised their personal judgment (*ijtihād*) until the ultimate return of the Mahdi, or Hidden Imam, Nadir Shah had no such claim to religious authority. At his coronation, therefore, he announced a new religion, an attenuated form of Shi'ism with the sixth imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq, as its spiritual head. To appease the Ottomans, his undefeated enemies on the west who still controlled Baghdad, and to end the traditional Shi'ite-Sunni hostility between Persia and Turkey, Nadir Shah insisted that Shi'ites abjure the traditional practice of cursing the first three of the four orthodox caliphs, a practice particularly hateful to Sunnis.

Nadir Shah's new religion was a bust: it made no one happy, and it did not achieve its desired aim of détente with the Ottomans. Rather, Nadir Shah's persistent need for money to wage continual warfare was one of the things that drove him into his brilliantly successful campaign against India in 1738–39. Nadir Shah defeated the Mughals, the supremely wealthy dynasty that had ruled the Indian continent since 1526, and gained enormous tribute, including the fabled Peacock Throne, which he carted back to Iran on the backs of donkeys. The loot was so extensive that Nadir Shah was able to exempt the people of Persia from taxes for several years.

Like his new religion, Nadir Shah's political ambitions were soon thwarted. Though a powerful military opponent, he failed to lay the administrative foundations for government. He became increasingly suspicious and capricious, savagely punishing those who staged a revolt, or were even alleged to have done so. Resentment rose, and with it attacks on the ruler, until a group of Afshar and Qajar chiefs finally succeeded in assassinating Nadir Shah on 11 Jumada II 1160/20 June 1747.



Fig. 9. Amulet from the Bibliothèque nationale, dated A.H. [1]173/A.D. 1759–60. 5.2 x 3.4 x 5 cm. After Kalus, no. III.1.11.



Fig. 10. Amulet from the Bibliothèque nationale, dated A.H. [1]171/A.D. 1757–58. 2.6 x 2.3 x 5 cm. After Kalus, no. III.1.16.



Fig. 11. Oil painting of Nadir Shah, attributed to Muhammad Riza Hindi, ca. 1740. 162.7 x 102 cm. London, Victoria and Albert Museum, I.M. 20-1919.

Nadir Shah was succeeded briefly by two of his nephews. His assassins first offered allegiance to his eldest nephew, who was enthroned as 'Adil Shah, but after a reign of less than one year, he came up against the ambitions of his younger brother. The armies supporting the two brothers collided in Jumada II 1161/June 1748, and 'Adil Shah was deposed in favor of his younger brother, who reigned briefly as Ibrahim Shah. He too was soon overthrown, and Nadir Shah's blind grandson, Shah Rukh, ascended the throne in 1163/1750. A descendant of the old Safavid house through his mother Fatima, daughter of the Safavid shah Sultan Husayn, Shah Rukh was more acceptable to the populace than any mere descendant of Nadir Shah. Despite interruptions, he managed to stay on the throne for almost fifty years.

The carnelian amulet in the Walters, commissioned as a gift for the night of the prayer for extensive and desirable gifts, 2 Rajab 1161/28 June 1748, and the amulet in The

British Museum dated to the same year (fig. 5) were made during the brief and troubled interregnum of Nadir Shah's two nephews. The Walters' amulet is precisely dated to the month following the younger boy's upset of his older brother. The texts on both amulets reflect the rapidly changing political situation in Iran. Both contain Koranic verses asking help from God against unbelievers. Both also cite the names of the fourteen immaculate ones, and, on the Walters' amulet, the traditional Shi'ite allegiance to the imams is tempered by Iranian overtures to the Ottomans, in the form of the names of the four orthodox caliphs. The texts on both these amulets can be read as appeals to God and his regents on earth for help in these troubled times. Wearing such an amulet would protect the wearer from harm.

It is also possible to see the Walters' amulet as reflecting the new taste of the Afsharid court. Much of the art made in Iran during this period depicts Nadir Shah in triumph.⁴¹ The first life-size royal portraits to survive in Iran date from this period, including an oil portrait (fig. 11), assigned to the hand of Muhammad Riza Hindi, ca. 1740. It shows Nadir Shah seated on a floral carpet. He is festooned with ropes of pearls set with emeralds, diamonds, and polished red spinels and grasps a string of pearl prayer beads in his left hand. At the beginning of his reign, Nadir Shah had dressed modestly, but following his conquest of India, he often donned the fabulous jewels and accoutrements of the Mughal court. The ropes of pearls he wears in the portrait, for example, may be the very ones worn in portraits by the Mughal emperors Shah Jahan (r. 1605–27) and his son Jahangir (r. 1628–57), now in the Crown Jewels collection in Tehran.⁴² The Crown Jewels collection also contains other gems that may have passed from the Mughals to Nadir Shah, including an emerald engraved with his name and dated 1152/1739 that is the same size and shape as the one in this portrait and other similar spinels with the names of Nadir Shah and late Mughal rulers.

Nadir Shah inherited his taste for fancy jewelry from the Mughal emperors, who were particularly fond of engraved gemstones.⁴³ Court artists there in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries developed new drilling techniques using the wheel and polishing points to produce free-flowing designs of flora and fauna engraved on precious stones. One of the most stupendous examples is a huge emerald weighing 234 carats (fig. 12) that has been wheel cut into an octagon and drilled with a floral scene.⁴⁴

The precious stones collected by the Mughals attest to their international connections. The emeralds most in demand were imported from Columbia. Muslims often attributed supernatural powers to gemstones, particularly as their vivid colors made them stand out from their natural surroundings. Emeralds were generally considered an antidote to viper bites and protection against epilepsy and stomach disorders. The exceptionally deep green of emeralds from

the New World was particularly prized, and Mughal authors sometimes likened the color to the Garden of Paradise and the Emerald Mountain, the highest spiritual level of Sufism.

The Mughals were not alone in their taste for engraved gemstones. In the early eighteenth century, there was a major revival of gem-engraving in Europe, partly due to the widespread interest in the arts of antiquity.⁴⁵ As in the Muslim lands, the gems typically used there were the traditional hardstones such as carnelian and sard, but important patrons also commissioned works on diamonds, emeralds, and aquamarines, though not on the scale ordered by the fabulously wealthy Mughals. During the first half of the century, Rome was the undisputed center of production, but, in the second half of the century, London became a major center as well.

Works produced in Rome and London were exported to monarchs abroad. One of the most successful and passionate collectors was Catherine II, Empress of Russia (r. 1762–96). She sent agents all over Europe to round up other collections, including that of the Orléans family in France, and amassed a vast collection amounting to more than 10,000 pieces, now in the Hermitage. Her daughter-in-law, later Empress Maria Fyodorovna (1759–1828), was also an accomplished engraver of cameos, many depicting members of the imperial family.

Nadir Shah's collection of Mughal jewelry made of precious gems and gemstones may well have stimulated courtly taste for amulets carved from hardstones. The carnelian amulet in the Walters is not inscribed with the name of any particular person, but its precise date strongly suggests that it was a specific commission, and its quality and precision (there are more than three hundred words incised on a surface measuring only 15 square cm., or 3 square in., slightly larger than the area of a silver dollar), indicate that it was made for a wealthy and sophisticated patron, perhaps a member of the Afsharid court.

Just as the material of the Walters' amulet is a cheaper version of the gemstones used by the Mughals, so too the shape and decoration of the Walters' amulet echo the Mughal style. The articulated oval shape recalls the cusped ogee arches typical of Mughal art and architecture. Mughal artisans also used the same shape for precious objects, including a pendant dated 1029/1619 (fig. 13).⁴⁶ Its apotropaic text, saying that God alone wields strength and power, suggests that it, like the carnelian pendant in the Walters, served as an amulet, but its precious materials—it is carved of grey nephrite with a ruby set in the center—are indicative of royal patronage. The 1619 piece may well have been made for the emperor Jahangir himself.

Both the cusped ogee arch and the articulated oval shape also occur on other works of Mughal art, such as an enameled gold jar and cover made around 1700 and decorated with a white trellis set against a green translucent ground (fig. 14).⁴⁷ The overall shape of the jug is without



Fig. 12. Emerald, wheel cut and drilled. Late 16th or early 17th century. Maximum diameter 5.7 cm. Kuwait, Ex-Sabah Collection, no. LNS 28 HS.

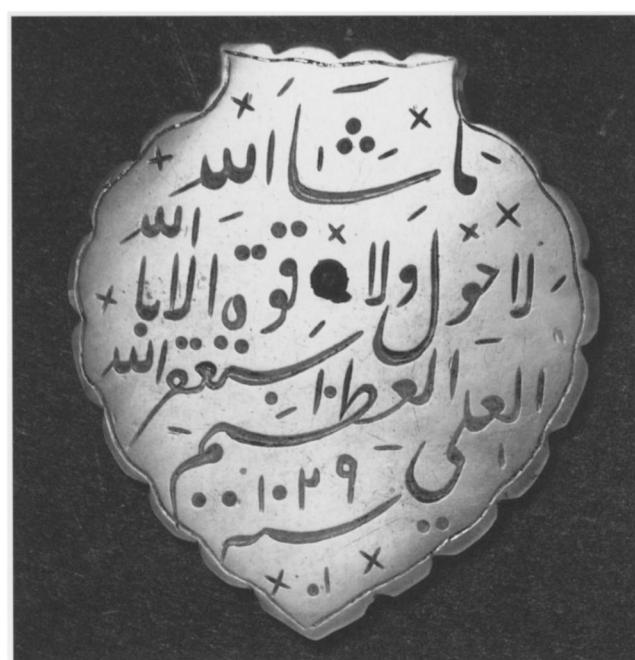


Fig. 13. Gray nephrite amulet dated A.H. 1029/A.D. 1619. Maximum height: 7.2 cm.; maximum width: 6.6 cm.; depth/thickness: 0.5 cm. (including jewel). Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, Is As 31.

parallel in Mughal art; it may well have been inspired by a Timurid jade or metal jug that passed to the Mughal court. The enameled decoration, however, is specific to Mughal India. European craftsmen had introduced the technique to the Mughal court, where it was exploited by Mughal artists using local motifs and themes of decoration, such as the cusped arches and cusped medallion on the shoulders and body on this jar.



Fig. 14. Gold jar and cover with champlevé enameled decoration in green, pink, and white. Height 14.3 cm. Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art, 62.206.

The floral motifs on the Walters' amulet are also reminiscent of Mughal taste. Plants derived from European herbals had become part of the Mughal decorative vocabulary under Jahangir around 1620, and from the period of Shah Jahan, they became ubiquitous in all the arts produced for the Mughals.⁴⁸ Naturalistic at first, the flowers became increasingly stylized, as on the enameled jar and cover as well as many other objects made for the Mughals in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The flowers incised in reserve on the Walters' amulet are further stylized and routinized in the style typical of Persian art of previous centuries.⁴⁹ Both the six-petaled flowers in the band around the central box and the lotus-like flowers in the band near the edge recall the floral designs common on Mughal gold objects and other metalwares.⁵⁰ These floral motifs also became typical of Bidri wares, objects cast of an alloy of zinc and inlaid with silver or brass and made in Bidar and other places in the Deccan in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁵¹

The Walters' amulet, securely dated to 28 June 1748, thus provides a window into courtly art and culture of the eighteenth century. The period is often reckoned one of

decadence and decline in West Asia, poised between the rule of great shahs, sultans, and emperors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the European imperialism and colonialization of the early nineteenth. Indeed, the mid-eighteenth century was a period of constant warfare, particularly under Nadir Shah, who expelled the Russians and Ottomans from Iran, conquered Central Asia and Oman, and marched into India. The inscriptions on the amulet reflect the uncertainty of the time, in which appeals were made to God, the Prophet, the fourteen immaculate ones venerated by Shi'ites, and the four orthodox caliphs venerated by Sunnis. At the same time, the mixture of forms and designs on the amulet—from the disposition of the names of the four orthodox caliphs following the Ottoman style to the oval shape and floral designs typical of Mughal taste—show enmity that was no barrier to artistic transferal. Though the Afsharids were often at war with their neighbors, the Ottomans and the Mughals, they often appropriated their artistic tastes and styles.

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TABLE 1: List of names incised around the center of the carnelian amulet in the Walters (Inscription II)

ROW 1, BOTTOM:

1	<i>yā allah</i>	O God
2	<i>yā rahman</i>	O Merciful
3	<i>yā rahim</i>	O Compassionate
4	<i>yā malik</i>	O King
5	<i>yā quddūs</i>	O Holy
6	<i>yā salām</i>	O Peace
7	<i>yā mūmin</i>	O Faithful
8	<i>yā muhaymin</i>	O Protector
9	<i>yā 'aziz</i>	O Mighty

ROW 1, LEFT SIDE:

10	<i>yā jabbār</i>	O Reparer
11	<i>yā mutakabbir</i>	O Great
12	<i>yā khāliq</i>	O Creator
13	<i>yā bārī</i>	O Maker
14	<i>yā muṣawwir</i>	O Fashioner

ROW 1, TOP:

15	<i>yā sittār</i>	O Veiler
16	<i>yā ghaffār</i>	O Forgiver
17	<i>yā qahhār</i>	O Dominant
18	<i>yā wahhāb</i>	O Bestower
19	<i>yā razzāq</i>	O Provider
20	<i>yā fattāḥ</i>	O Opener
21	<i>yā 'alīm</i>	O Knower
22	<i>yā qābiḍ</i>	O Restrainer
23	<i>yā bāsiṭ</i>	O Spreader

ROW 1, RIGHT SIDE:

24	<i>yā khāfiḍ</i>	O Abaser
25	<i>yā rāfi'</i>	O Exalter
26	<i>yā mu'izz</i>	O Honorer
27	<i>yā mudhill</i>	O Destroyer
28	<i>yā samī'</i>	O Hearer

IIB: ROW 2, BOTTOM:

29	<i>yā bāṣir</i>	O Seer
30	<i>yā hākim</i>	O Ruler
31	<i>yā 'adl</i>	O Just
32	<i>yā latif</i>	O Subtle
33	<i>yā qubād?</i>	O ??
34	<i>yā ḥalim</i>	O Clement
35	<i>yā hakīm</i>	O Wise
36	<i>yā 'azīm</i>	O Grand
37	<i>yā ghafīr</i>	O Forgiving
38	<i>yā shakūr</i>	O Grateful
39	<i>yā 'alī</i>	O Exalted
40	<i>yā hāfiẓ</i>	O Keeper

ROW 2, LEFT SIDE:

41	<i>yā hāfiẓ</i>	O Guardian
42	<i>yā muqīt</i>	O Strenghtener
43	<i>yā ḥasib</i>	O Reckoner
44	<i>yā jalil</i>	O Majestic
45	<i>yā karīm</i>	O Generous
46	<i>yā raqīb</i>	O Watcher
47	<i>yā mujīb</i>	O Approver

ROW 2, TOP:

48	<i>yā wāsi'</i>	O Comprehensive
49	<i>yā wadād</i>	O Loving
50	<i>yā majīd</i>	O Glorious
51	<i>yā bā'iṭh</i>	O Raiser
52	<i>yā shahīd</i>	O Witness
53	<i>yā ḥaqq</i>	O Truth
54	<i>yā wakīl</i>	O Advocate
55	<i>yā qawī</i>	O Strong
56	<i>yā matīn</i>	O Firm
57	<i>yā walī</i>	O Patron
58	<i>yā ḥamīd</i>	O Laudable
59	<i>yā muḥṣi</i>	O Counter

ROW 2, RIGHT SIDE:

60	<i>yā mubdī</i>	O Beginner
61	<i>yā mu'īd</i>	O Restorer
62	<i>yā muḥyī</i>	O Quickener
63	<i>yā mumīt</i>	O Killer
64	<i>yā hayy</i>	O Living
65	<i>yā qayyūm</i>	O Subsisting
66–67	<i>yā wadīd yā mājīd</i>	O Unique One, O Praiseworthy

BOTTOM FIELD:

68	<i>yā aḥad</i>	O One
69	<i>yā ṣamad</i>	O Eternal
70	<i>yā qādir</i>	O Powerful
71	<i>yā muqtadīr</i>	O Prevailing
72	<i>yā muqaddim</i>	O Bringing Forward
73	<i>yā mu'akkhir</i>	O Deferrer
74	<i>yā awwal</i>	O First
75	<i>yā ākhir</i>	O Last
76	<i>yā zāhir</i>	O Evident
77	<i>yā bātin</i>	O Hidden
78	<i>yā wālī</i>	O Governor
79	<i>yā muta'ālī</i>	O Exalted
80	<i>yā barr</i>	O Righteous
81	<i>yā tawwāb</i>	O Acceptor of Repentance
82	<i>yā muntaqim</i>	O Avenger
83	<i>yā 'afū</i>	O Pardoner
84	<i>yā rāūf</i>	O Kind
85	<i>yā mālik al-mulk</i>	O Ruler of the Kingdom
86	<i>yā dhu'l jalāl wa'l-ikrām</i>	O Lord of Majesty and Liberality

LEFT FIELD:

87	<i>yā rabb</i>	O Lord
88	<i>yā muqṣīt</i>	O Equitable
89	<i>yā jāmī'</i>	O Collector
90	<i>yā ghanī</i>	O Independent
91	<i>yā mughnī</i>	O Enricher
92	<i>yā māni'</i>	O Withholder
93	<i>yā darr</i>	O Distresser
94	<i>yā nāfi'</i>	O Profiter
95	<i>yā nūr</i>	O Light
96	<i>yā hādī</i>	O Guide
97	<i>yā badī'</i>	O Incomparable
98	<i>yā bāqī</i>	O Enduring
99	<i>yā wārith</i>	O Inheritor
100	<i>yā sabūr</i>	O Patient
101	<i>yā sādiq</i>	O Sincere
102	<i>yā muḥammad</i>	[He who is] worthy of praise
103	<i>abmad</i>	More praiseworthy

104 <i>hāmid</i>	Praising	160 <i>'azīz</i>	Dear
105 <i>mahmūd</i>	Praised	161 <i>hāris</i>	Full of concern
106 <i>qāsim</i>	Divider	162 <i>rāṣif</i>	Mild
107 <i>'āqib</i>	Following	163 <i>rāḥīm</i>	Merciful
108 <i>fātiḥ</i>	Opener	164 <i>yatīm</i>	Orphan
109 <i>khatīm</i>	Seal	165 <i>muḍī</i>	Resplendent
110 <i>ḥāshir</i>	He who gathers people [at Doomsday]	166 <i>jawwād</i>	Generous
111 <i>nāj</i>	Saviour	167 <i>fattāḥ</i>	Opener
112 <i>dā'i</i>	Caller	168 <i>tayyib</i>	Agreeable
113 <i>munīr</i>	Radiant	169 <i>zāhir</i>	Evident
114 <i>sirāj</i>	Lamp	170 <i>mazhar</i>	Object of divine power
115 <i>bashīr</i>	Bearer of good tidings	171 <i>khātīb</i>	Preacher
116 <i>nadhīr</i>	Warner	172 <i>fāsiḥ</i>	Eloquent
117 <i>hādī</i>	He who guides rightly	173 <i>sayyid</i>	Lord
118 <i>mahdī</i>	Rightly-guided	174 <i>muttaqī</i>	God-fearing
119 <i>rasūl</i>	Messenger	175 <i>imām</i>	Leader
120 <i>nabī</i>	Prophet	176 <i>bār</i>	Beneficent
121 <i>nadhīr</i>	Unequaled	177 <i>ṣāfiṇ</i>	Pure
122 <i>yāsīn</i>	The letters yā' and sin	178 <i>mutawassīt</i>	Moderate
TOP FIELD:			
123 <i>muzammil</i>	Wrapped	179 <i>sābiq</i>	Previous
124 <i>mudaththir</i>	Covered	180 <i>ma'tazid</i>	Petitioner
125 <i>shafī'</i>	Healer	181 <i>awwal</i>	First
126 <i>khalil</i>	Good friend	182 <i>ākhir</i>	Last
127 <i>kalīm</i>	He to whom [God] has talked	183 <i>zāhir</i>	Evident
128 <i>ḥabīb</i>	Beloved	184 <i>bātin</i>	Hidden
129 <i>mustafā</i>	Chosen	185 <i>mahdī</i>	Rightly guided
130 <i>murtada</i>	Content	186 <i>mu'bīn</i>	Manifest
131 <i>mujtabā</i>	Elect	187 <i>muḥallīl</i>	Resolver
132 <i>mukhtār</i>	Selected	188 <i>muḥarram</i>	Forbidden
133 <i>nāṣir</i>	Helper	189 <i>ṭāmin</i>	Secure
134 <i>mansūr</i>	Victorious	190 <i>nābin</i>	Abstinent
135 <i>ḥafīẓ</i>	Preserver	191 <i>shakūr</i>	Grateful
136 <i>shahīd</i>	Martyr	192 <i>qarīb</i>	Near
137 <i>ādil</i>	Just	193 <i>mu'nib</i>	Returner
138 <i>ālim</i>	Knowing	194 <i>ṭā'-sīn</i>	The letters ṭā' and sin
139 <i>qā'im</i>	Steadfast	195 <i>ḥā'-mīm</i>	The letters ḥā' and mim
140 <i>nawr</i>	Shining	196 <i>ḥasib</i>	Respected
141 <i>munawwir</i>	Illuminated	197 <i>awwala</i>	Worthier
142 <i>ḥujjat</i>	Reasoner	198 <i>muḥammad</i>	Muhammad
143 <i>nūr</i>	Light	199 <i>'alī</i>	'Ali
144 <i>abtāḥī</i>	Belonging to al-Batha [the area around Mecca]	200 <i>fātīma</i>	Fatima
145 <i>mu'min</i>	Believing	201 <i>ḥasan</i>	Hasan
146 <i>mu'i'</i>	Obedient	202 <i>ḥusayn</i>	Husayn
147 <i>mudhakkir</i>	He who makes remember	203 <i>zayn al-'abidīn</i>	[Ali] Zayn al-'Abidin
148 <i>amīn</i>	Trustworthy	204 <i>bāqīr</i>	[Muhammad] Baqir
149 <i>ṣādiq</i>	Sincere	205 <i>ja'far</i>	[al-Sadiq] Ja'far
150 <i>muqtasid</i>	Adopting a middle course	206 <i>kāzīm</i>	[Musa] Kazim
151 <i>ṣāhib</i>	Possessor	207 <i>ridā</i> [spelled with alif]	[Ali] Rida
RIGHT FIELD:			
152 <i>makkī</i>	Meccan	208 <i>taqī</i>	[Muhammad] Taqi
153 <i>madīnī</i>	Medinan	209 <i>naqī</i>	[Ali] Naqi
154 <i>'arabī</i>	Arab	210 <i>ḥasan 'askarī</i>	Hasan al-'Askari
155 <i>ḥijāzī</i>	From the Hijaz	211 <i>mahdī ākhir al-zamān</i>	[Muhammad] Mahdi, the end of time
156 <i>nizārī</i>	From the Nizari tribe		
157 <i>qurayshī</i>	From the Quraysh clan		
158 <i>mudārī</i>	From the Mudar tribe		
159 <i>ummī</i>	Illiterate		

N O T E S

1. My thanks to Marianna Shreve Simpson, then Curator of Islamic Art at the Walters, for introducing me to this amulet and encouraging me to write this article about it.
2. In ancient times, minerals were divided into three categories (very hard, hard, and soft), but in modern times they are often arranged according to the ten degrees of hardness on the scale developed by Austrian mineralogist Friedrich Mohs (1773–1839). Based on the ability of one mineral to scratch another, the Mohs scale ranges from the softest talc (1) to the hardest diamond (10). Most true hardstones, including carnelian, fall into category 7, quartzes. These include rock crystal, amethyst, agate, jasper, and the fibrous variety of quartz known as chalcedony, which is particularly valued for carving. Chalcedony, in turn, comprises a wide range of stones, including carnelian, one of the best known and most valued types of common chalcedony, hardstones that are light and uniform in color. See “Hardstones” in *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. J. Shoaf Turner (New York, 1996), vol. 14, 167.
3. The distinction between amulet and talisman is often arbitrary and unclear, as many authors use the terms differently. Following Francis Maddison and Emilie Savage-Smith, *Science, Tools & Magic*, vol. 12, Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art (London, 1997), 133, an amulet is here defined as any relatively small object intended to ensure protection and well-being and made of durable materials. It can thus be distinguished from a talisman, which is made of more ephemeral materials, such as paper. The adjective talismanic means apotropaic, intended to ward off evil or bad luck. There are many Arabic and Persian terms for amulets and talismans (*t̄ilsam*, *bijāb*, *hāmīla*, etc.), but they too are often used interchangably and variably.
4. L. Kalus, *Catalogue des Cachets, Bulles, et Talismans Islamiques* (Paris, 1981), 70.
5. Ibid., 84, no. III.1.23.
6. For the ninety-four objects with inscriptions written in positive in the Ashmolean Museum, see L. Kalus, *Catalogue of Islamic Seals and Talismans* (Oxford, 1986). My thanks to Venetia Porter for supplying this information from her forthcoming catalogue of the Islamic seals and amulets in The British Museum.
7. For the 14th-century evolution of *nasta'liq*, see E. Wright, *The Look of the Book: Manuscript Production in the Southern Iranian City of Shiraz from the Early Fourteenth Century to 1452*, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art (Oxford, forthcoming).
8. See *Treasures of Islam*, ed. T. Falk (London, 1985), no. 177.
9. *Nasta'liq* script was also used in India, but the script there tends to be more sloping. More work needs to be done to distinguish Iranian and Indian calligraphy during this period.
10. The former is in the Nour Collection (MS 300), the latter in Vienna (MS. a.f. 162a(76)); see Maddison and Savage-Smith, *Science, Tools & Magic*, no. 22.
11. Maddison and Savage-Smith, *Science, Tools & Magic*, 106–31.
12. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition [henceforth EI/2] (Leiden, 1931–), s.v. “Asma’ al-husna.”
13. ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Qashani, *Kitab istalahat al-sufiyā*, trans. N. Safwat, as *A Glossary of Sufi Technical Terms* (London, 1991), nos. 293–392.
14. As Gardet points out (EI/2: “Asma’ al-husna”), it is difficult to translate these names into English as they often contain complimentary or even contradictory associations. I have taken my translations mainly from T. P. Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam* (Lahore, n.d.), s.v. “God.”
15. On the names of Muhammad, see A. Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill, 1985), esp. Chapter 6.
16. Cited in Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 110 and n. 29.
17. Ibid., 111; for the Leeds manuscript, see R. Y. Edier and M. J. L. Young, “A List of the Appellations of the Prophet Muhammad,” *Muslim World*, 66 (1976), 259–62.
18. One rare example is a gold amulet published by W. E. Staples, “Muhammad, A Talismanic Force,” *Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, 57 (January–October 1940), 63–70 and cited by Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 100 and n. 30.
19. For an Ottoman example of the Muhammadan Rose in the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, see Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 111, and front cover. For the ten promised Paradise, see EI/2: “al-‘Ashara al-Mubashshara.”
20. *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (London, 1985–), s.v. “Cahardah Ma’sum.”
21. A convenient introduction to the fundamental tenets of Islam and its culture is J. Bloom and S. Blair, *Islam: A Thousand Years of Faith and Power* (New York, 2000), esp. Chapter 1.
22. The amulet in the British Musum (1866 12-29 10), formerly in the Duc de Blacas collection, was published in M. Reinaud, *Monuments Arabes, Persans et Turcs* (Paris, 1828), vol 2. For the amulets in the Cabinet des Medailles, see Kalus, *Cachets, Bulles et Talismans Islamiques*, nos. III.1.17, III.1.18, and III.1.19, and for those in the Ashmolean, see idem, *Catalogue of Islamic Seals and Talismans*, nos. 1.16–1.22 and 2.4. The Nour collection owns several talismanic plaques (e.g., SC116 and SC117; see Maddison and Savage-Smith, *Science, Tools & Magic*, nos. 55 and 56).
23. Shi’ites in Mughal India also venerated the Twelve Imams, and it is impossible to exclude an Indian provenance for the piece. More work needs to be done in distinguishing Iranian from Indian works of this period, but the style of *nasta'liq* script used on the Walters’ amulet argues for an Iranian provenance.
24. Several sets of these tiles panels survive (Boston, Museum of Fine Art, 90.162 and New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 15.76.3). For these tiles and the mosque lamp, see S. Blair and J. Bloom, eds., *Images of Paradise in Islamic Art* (Austin, 1991), nos. 22 and 30a.
25. For the *hilya* in the Chester Beatty library, see D. James, *Islamic Masterpieces of the Chester Beatty Library* (London, 1981), no. 40. For a general discussion of the *hilya*, see my forthcoming *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh, 2002).
26. The cardboard examples in the Nour Collection (CAL204-209) measure 35 cm. in diameter; the wooden ones in the same collection (MXD 265A-B) 60 cm.; see N. Safwat, *The Art of the Pen: Calligraphy of the 14th to 20th Centuries*, vol. 5, Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art (London, 1996), nos. 82–89.
27. EI/2, s.v. “*Djinn*” and R. Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (London, 1994), 203–7.

28. For more on the many uses of the Solomonic knot over the centuries, see *King Solomon's Seal*, ed. R. Milstein (Jerusalem, [1995]). I thank Eva Baer and Rachel Milstein for speedily obtaining a copy of this hard-to-find publication.
29. The classic study of the Koran is W. Montgomery Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh, 1970).
30. Translations of the Koran are taken from A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (New York, 1955).
31. On these marks, see A. Gacek, "Technical Practices and Recommendations recorded by Classical and Post-Classical Arabic Scholars concerning the Copying and Correction of Manuscripts," *Les Manuscrits du Moyen-Orient: Essais de codicologie et de paléographie*, ed. F. Deroche (Istanbul/Paris, 1989), 51–60, esp. 55.
32. For further information of these marks, see Adam Gacek's forthcoming book, *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition: A Glossary of Technical Terms and Bibliography* (Leiden, in press).
33. See Gacek, "Copying and Correction," 55.
34. EI/2 s.v. "Radjab."
35. Gaston Wiet, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum*, Part I, Egypt, vol. 2, fascicule 1, Mémoires de l'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale du Caire (Cairo, 1929), 37, gives some other examples.
36. EI/2, s.v. "Mi'radj, 4."
37. See Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 111.
38. Maddison and Savage-Smith, *Science, Tools & Magic*, 132.
39. E.g., two in The British Museum: one of white chalcedony dated 1077/1666–67 (Sloane amulet 4) and a second of pinkish-orange carnelian dated 1086/1675–76 (1878 12-20 9, Christy collection). There are also two early examples in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford: a bracelet with three stones of yellow chalcedony, carnelian, and jasper, the last dated 1078/1667, and another jasper oval dated 1121/1709–10; see Kalus, *Catalogue of Islamic Seals and Talismans*, nos. II.2.3(III) and II.1.26. Both of the Ashmolean examples belonged to the J. B. Elliott collection, which was acquired in India and given to the Bodleian Library in 1859.
40. For Nadir Shah and the Afsharids, see, among many works, Peter Avery's chapter, "Nadir Shah and the Afsharid Legacy" in *From Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic*, eds. P. Avery, G. Hambly, and C. Melville, vol. 7, Cambridge History of Iran (Cambridge, 1991), 3–62, esp. 35–36.
41. *Royal Persian Paintings: The Qajar Epoch 1785–1925*, eds. L. S. Diba and M. Ekhtiar (London and Brooklyn, 1998), 137–45.
42. For a typical portrait of Shah Jahan bedecked in pearls and jewels, see the painting of him as a prince from the Minto album (London, V&A I.M. 14-1925); illustrated in *The Indian Heritage: Court Life and Arts under Mughal Rule*, catalogue of an exhibition held at the V&A, 21 April–22 August 1982 (London, 1982), cover and no. 41. For the Crown Jewels, see V. B. Meen and A. D. Tushingham, *Crown Jewels of Iran* (Toronto and Buffalo, 1968), 65–67 and 77; cited in Diba and Ekhtiar, eds., *Royal Persian Paintings*, 140 and no. 10.
43. "Gemstones, 6. Indian" in *The Dictionary of Art*, vol. 12, 252–53.
44. The emerald was in the Sabah collection in Kuwait (see *Islamic Art in the Kuwait National Museum. The al-Sabah Collection*, ed. M. Jenkins [London, 1983], 124), but was looted during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and is now missing (see J. Bloom and L. E. Gould, "Patient Restoration: The Kuwait National Museum," *Saudi Aramco World* (September/October 2000), 10–21).
45. "Gemstones, 11" in *The Dictionary of Art*, vol. 12, 261–64.
46. *The Indian Heritage*, no. 353.
47. *The Indian Heritage*, no. 324; S. Blair and J. Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam, 1250–1800* (London and New Haven, 1994), 300 and fig. 379; Mark Zebrowski, *Gold, Silver and Bronze from Mughal India* (London, 1997), 59 and fig. 29.
48. Robert Skelton, "A Decorative Motif in Mughal Art," *Aspects of Indian Art*, ed. P. Pal (Leiden, 1972), 7–37; Blair and Bloom, *Art and Architecture of Islam 1250–1800*, 281 and 299, figs. 351 and 376.
49. See, for example, the floral band with a rosette connected by paired leaves that runs along the bottom of a luster tile made at Kashan in the 1270s for the Ilkhanid palace at Takht-i Sulayman; New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 12.49.4, illustrated in Stefano Carboni and Tomoko Masuya, *Persian Tiles* (New York, 1993), cover and no. 19.
50. Zebrowski, *Gold, Silver and Bronze*, figs. 30–34.
51. In addition to Blair and Bloom, *Art and Architecture of Islam 1250–1800*, fig. 380, and Zebrowski, *Gold, Silver and Bronze*, see S. Stronge, *Bidri Ware: Inlaid Metalwork from India* (London, 1985).
- PHOTOGRAPHS: figs. 1–3, 7, Baltimore, Walters Art Museum; figs. 4, 9–10, after Kalus, *Catalogue des Cachets, Bulles, et Talismans Islamiques*; fig. 5, London, Trustees of The British Museum; fig. 6, New York, © The Metropolitan Museum of Art; figs. 8, 13, Dublin, By kind permission of the Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library; fig. 11, London, The Victoria and Albert Museum; fig. 12, Kuwait, Ex-Sahab Collection; fig. 14, Cleveland, © The Cleveland Museum of Art.