Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

IRAN G111

Iran, once called Persia, is a country with a rich cultural past. It was home to an Empire that stretched through Egypt and the east Mediterranean. The country's capital is Tehran. It is the largest city in the Middle East and is similar to most big cities.





The nation is renowned for their rugs and making perfumes. Much of their decoration uses flowers and is brightly coloured.

It is mainly an Islamic nation. Their art has an important role in decorating mosques with colourful tiles.

Print block



Can you guess what this piece of wood is used for? It decorates a cloth. The plant pattern can be repeated on the material to get a consistent image.

It is a long process to make the block. The design needs to be drawn onto wood so that the carver then knows which parts of wood to cut out. Look at the small detail. Imagine trying to carve the curves and thin lines from hard wood. The finished block is brushed with a coloured dye and then pressed onto the material. It leaves the carved image and can be used again and again.



Small mat



The brightly coloured mat shows another representation of a flower. An important part of Iranian textiles is the different textures. Run your fingers over the mat. Can you feel the difference between the rough and smooth?



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Beads



These beads are known as faience beads, or donkey beads.

The bead is made from quartz stone that has been ground into a powder and mixed with clay. Frit soda and copper are added to colour it light blue.



They are protection from the 'evil eye'. The evil eye is a belief that a person can harm somebody or something important by looking at them with envy.

People did not wear these beads, they would be put on string and tied round the neck of a donkey. In rural areas of Iran the donkey was an important way of transporting goods.

Metal plate



The metal plate is made from copper.

Iran has a long history of metal work. It has been used for thousands of years and can be ornamental, domestic or practical. The Iranians learned the essentials of metalworking by using copper. The techniques were developed in northeastern Iran but the products were carried to other areas by trade.

A plate like this would be sold in an Iranian souk. The Grand Bazaar in Tehran is a huge souk that sells different types of goods. Iranians have shopped here for hundreds of years looking for jewellery, rugs or spices.

Purse



This is an Iranian coin purse. It would only hold money and not credit cards, photographs or train tickets! The purse is opened by squeezing together the two metal pieces on the ends.

Iran uses the Iranian rial as its currency. The smallest coin is worth 50 rials and the largest is 500.

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Bowl

The bowl holds pastries and sweets that are served with tea. The flowers, shapes and colours that decorate it are seen throughout Islamic countries.





This bowl is in the Qajar style. From the end of the eighteenth until the twentieth century it was popular. Plates and bowls were brightly decorated with flowers to suggest they were in bloom. The patterns were very formal. Tiles were also created in this style that then decorated mosques. An example is shown on the left.

Goblet

A handmade glass goblet takes a lot of skill to create. The blue-green colour comes from cobalt being added to green glass when it is molten. Three parts have been made individually and then put together, the cup, the stand and the circle designs.





On this particular piece the three parts have been put together whilst the glass was still molten. The cracking shows the cup was dipped into a thin film of molten glass. This gave a hot surface for the decorations to be attached.
The glass is heated until molten. An iron rod twirls the liquid forming a big blob. The glassmaker keeps twirling the iron so that the molten glass doesn't fall off. It is like having syrup on your spoon. You need to keep twirling it so that the syrup doesn't fall off and make a mess.



A wet wooden block is used to shape the molten glass. The glassmaker blows air down the iron, making the glass begin to form a bubble. By now the glass is getting cooler and starting to harden. It is re-heated in a furnace called the gloryhole to be reworked. When the piece has been completed it is left overnight to cool in a kiln called the lehr.

Bottle



What would you keep in this bottle? All different types of liquids, spices or salts could have been stored in it.

It is made of clay and decorated a turquoise colour. This is a sacred colour in Iran and is said to represent paradise.



Turquoise is the country's national stone and has been used to decorate important buildings. The mosques of Isfahani are still brightly coloured with turquoise stone.

Most people would not be able to afford such a precious stone. Instead the bottle has been decorated turquoise to imitate the stone.