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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 nation is renowned for their rugs and perfume making. 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.

Cup and saucer

Tea is the national drink of Iran. It is always served black and without milk. A sugar cube is put in the drinker's mouth to sweeten the tea. Tea leaves are used instead of teabags. They are brewed in a samovar. It has a cylinder that hot coals can be put in. The cylinder is surrounded by water and kept at boiling point by the coal's heat.



Look at the size of the teacup. Middle East countries drink coffee and tea in small cups, often with no handle. When entertaining guests many cups of tea are drunk. It is an important way for friends to socialise. The tea is usually served with dried fruits, pastries or sweets.



Above: Iranians drink tea with a sugar cube



The cup and saucer are made from clay and fired to keep their shape. When this has been done it can be decorated.

Flowers decorate both the cup and saucer. Why do you think they use flowers on the design?

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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.



Above: Carving a print block.

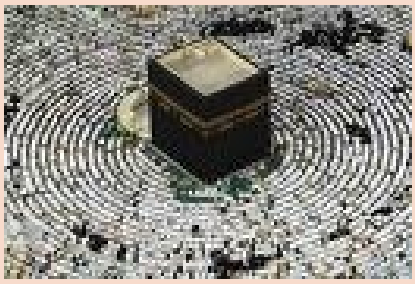
It is a long process to make the block. The design needs to be drawn onto wood so that the carver then knows which parts of wood to cut out. Look at the small detail. Imagine trying to carve the curves and thin lines from hard wood. The finished block is brushed with a coloured dye and then pressed onto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

Perfume bottle



This bottle would have held perfume. The lid is used to dab the scent onto the skin. Rose perfume was originally made from a method that began in Iran. Oils are obtained by steam-distilling the crushed petals of the rose.

Rose water is also produced in this process. Iranian rose-water is used to clean the Kaaba in Mecca. This is the most important religious site in Islam. When Muslims pray they must face toward the Kaaba wherever they are in the world.





The bottle's design is very recognisable in the Middle East. In Qatar there are statues in the shape of these perfume bottles.

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Metal bowl



The metal bowl is made from copper with a thin layer of tin over it.

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 bowl 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.

Plate



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



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

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.

Iranian rug



Weaving has been an important part of Iranian culture for centuries. Rugs are still one of Iran's largest exports. Only more oil is sold abroad.

A smaller rug, like this one, is called a qalicheh. Handmade rugs can take a few years to create. A reason that Persian rugs are so highly regarded is the curved design. Weaving curves is harder than straight lines. On the back of the rug it is possible to see all the small knots that are tied. The effort and skill that is required to design the rug also give Persian rugs their value.