FRIEZE ABU DHABI FEATURE: THE BOTTLE AT BURLINGTON HOUSE

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In January 1931, the Royal Academy of Arts opened the doors of Burlington House to the *International Exhibition of Persian Art*. Under the patronage of King George V and Reza Shah Pahlavi, the exhibition brought together thousands of objects from collections across Europe, Asia and America. More than a quarter of a million visitors came to see it.



Among the works displayed in Gallery VII was a slender glass bottle, just 28 cm high, with looping threads of applied glass and traces of blue enamel and gilding. Its exhibition number was 291 P.



Dikran Khan Kelekian, a celebrated collector and dealer

The lender was Dikran Khan Kelekian, the celebrated Armenian-born collector and dealer whose influence on the formation of major museum collections was immense.

Nearly a century later, the bottle can be identified not only in the Royal Academy catalogue but in a contemporary illustrated article, a monumental history of Persian art and Kelekian's own handwritten inventories.

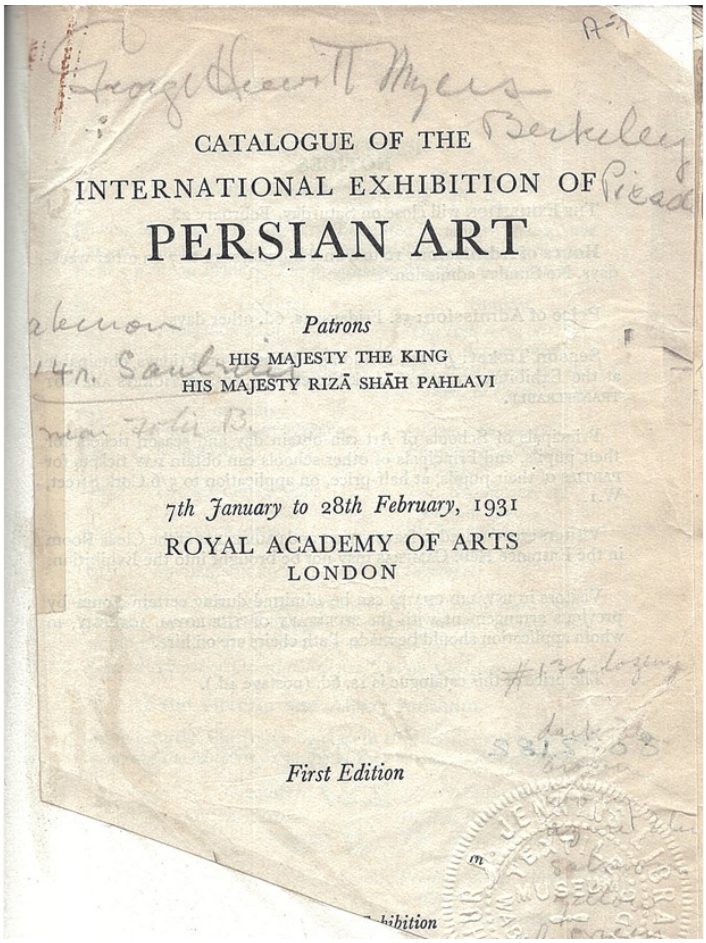


Bottle with Applied Decoration, Mamluk, circa 13th–14th century. Enamelled and gilt glass, height 28 cm. David Aaron.

At the Royal Academy in 1931

Organised under the direction of the American art historian Arthur Upham Pope, the 1931 exhibition was one of the Royal Academy’s most ambitious winter shows. Its galleries presented Persian architecture, ceramics, metalwork, manuscripts and textiles to a vast public audience. In Gallery VII, dedicated to glass, the Kelekian bottle appeared alongside historic vessels lent by museums and private collectors.

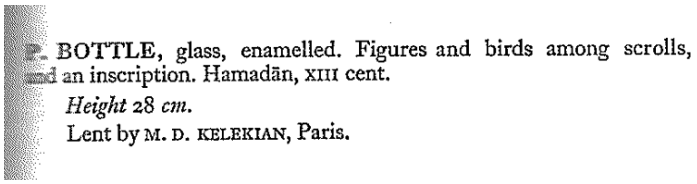
The official catalogue lists no. 291 P as an enamelled glass bottle with figures and birds among scrolling decoration, measuring 28 cm in height, lent by D. K. Kelekian of Paris. The combination of its dimensions, distinctive form and named lender securely identifies the object. It was among seventeen loans from the Kelekian Collection.


CATALOGUE OF THE
INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION OF
PERSIAN ART

Patrons
HIS MAJESTY THE KING
HIS MAJESTY RIZĀ SHĀH PAHLAVI

7th January to 28th February, 1931
ROYAL ACADEMY OF ARTS
LONDON

First Edition


291 P. BOTTLE, glass, enamelled. Figures and birds among scrolls, and an inscription. Hamadān, XIII cent.
Height 28 *cm.*
Lent by M. D. KELEKIAN, Paris.

The bottle recorded as no. 291 P in Gallery VII of the International Exhibition of Persian Art catalogue, Royal Academy of Arts, 1931, p. 167.

The catalogue classified the bottle as thirteenth-century Persian glass associated with Hamadan. This attribution reflects the nascency of the scholarship in 1931. The bottle is now understood within the traditions of enamelled and gilded glass produced in Mamluk Egypt or Syria, where the decoration of glass reached extraordinary technical sophistication during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The Kelekian Bottle in the Art Historical Record

The Royal Academy exhibition was only one stage in the bottle's early scholarly recognition. In 1931, Pope illustrated it as figure V in his article "More about Persian Glass" in *Apollo*. The caption named the Kelekian Collection and announced its forthcoming inclusion in the Royal Academy exhibition. The image is especially useful today: it captures the bottle's unmistakable silhouette and applied glass threads more than ninety years ago.



Apollo : A Journal of the Arts

p. 394 and colour plate) there are rondels with seated princesses and cavaliers and bits of these motifs are seen also on fragments in the author's collection. These are as close as the technique permits to the decorations of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Ray faience. and nowhere do we find these charming courtly personages.

A large enamelled plate, also in the Kelekian collection, presents a perfect illustration of this close connection between the figures on the glass and the Ray pottery. In the centre is

FIG. V. GLASS BOTTLE

Decorated with arabesques and personages in enamel and applied glass threads. Persian, thirteenth century. Found at Hamadan. Kelekian collection. To be included in the Royal Academy Exhibition

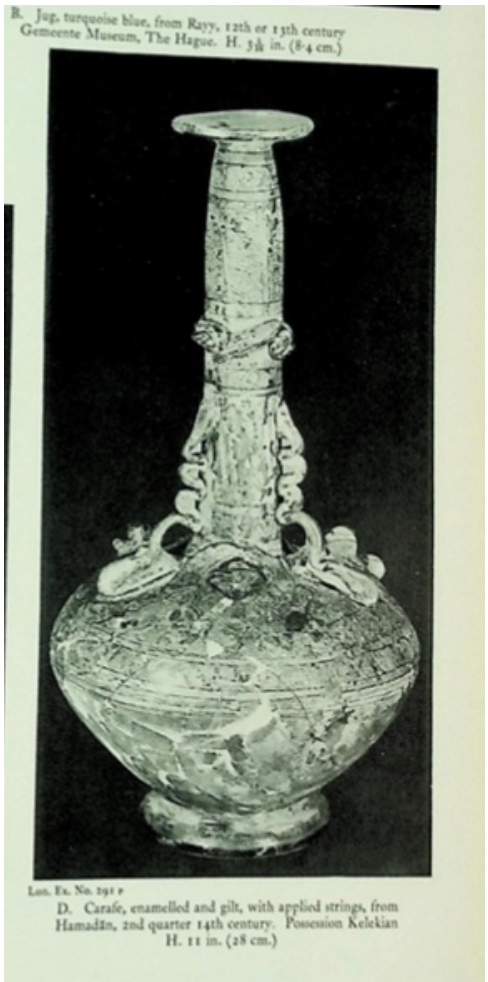
The subjects and the rendering are both clearly Persian, for while many Persian motifs did travel down to Mesopotamia, they lost there their lightness and gaiety and a certain sparkling delicacy. The Rakka and Resafa wares that are contemporary with those of Ray and Sultanabad carry a number of similar themes, but the treatment is always bolder and heavier a large cavalier, practically identical with those frequent on Ray bowls and plates.

Many attributions in the history of art are accepted on far less evidence than that which is available for the attribution of early enamelled glass to Persia. Indeed, little is now wanting save the discovery of furnaces and wasters and these are actually being sought.

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Arthur Upham Pope, "More about Persian Glass", Apollo, vol. 13, 1931, p. 12, fig. V. The caption identifies the Kelekian bottle and its forthcoming Royal Academy exhibition.

The bottle was illustrated again in 1939 in *A Survey of Persian Art from Prehistoric Times to the Present* , Pope's monumental six-volume reference work. Carl Johan Lamm's chapter on glass discussed the movement of enamelled and gilt vessels from Syria into Persia, and the bottle appeared in the plate volume as no. 1445D. The caption retained its Royal Academy number, "Lon. Ex. No. 291 P", linking the two publications unequivocally.


B. Jug, turquoise blue, from Rayy, 12th or 13th century
Gemeente Museum, The Hague. H. 3⅛ in. (8·4 cm.)

Lon. Ex. No. 291 P

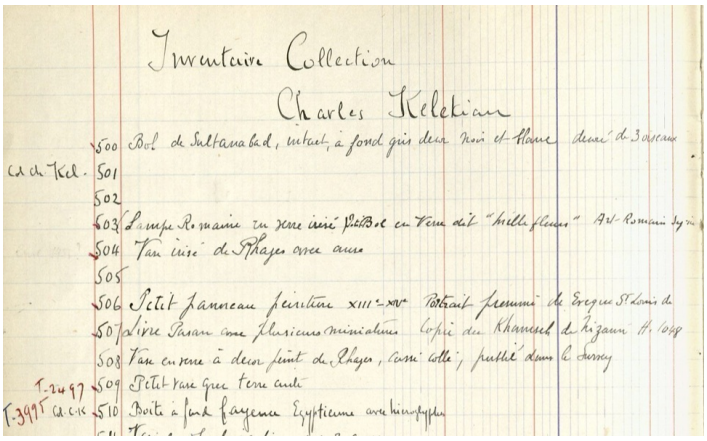
D. Carafe, enamelled and gilt, with applied strings, from Hamadān, 2nd quarter 14th century. Possession Kelekian
H. 11 in. (28 cm.)

The Kelekian bottle reproduced as plate 1445D in Arthur Upham Pope (ed.), A Survey of Persian Art, vol. VI, 1939. The original caption retains its 1931 exhibition number.

These successive publications chart the development of the study of Islamic glass. They also establish that this particular bottle was recognised and reproduced by some of the period's most influential scholars.

The Kelekian Collection and Its Paper Trail

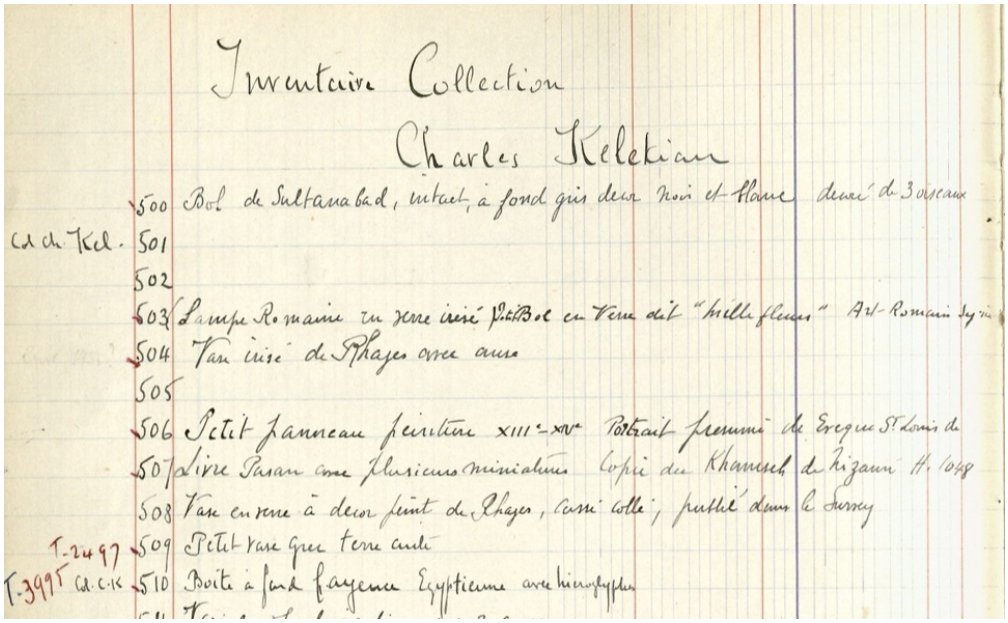
The story can be traced still further back. On 8 July 1930, Kelekian acquired the bottle from the collection of Aziz Ezra. The transaction survives in his handwritten inventory, which describes it in French as a painted glass vase from Rhages, under entry no. 4240. The date falls only months before the opening of the Royal Academy exhibition.



Detail of Dikran Kelekian's 1930 inventory, recording the acquisition from Aziz Ezra on 8 July, entry no. 4240. Original record preserved in the Kelekian archive; duplicate supplied through the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

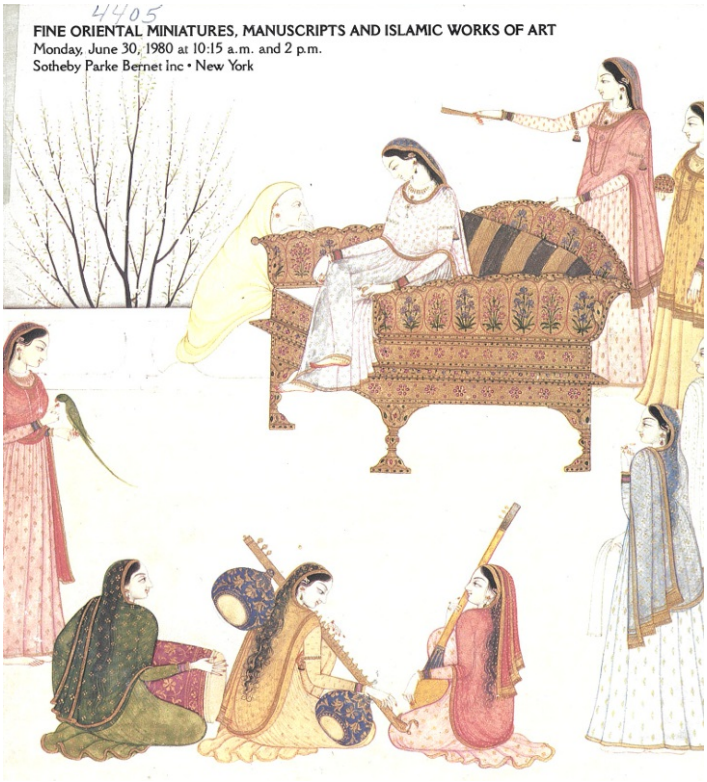
Kelekian had established his business in the 1890s and became a major intermediary between collectors, museums and the Islamic art market. He advised figures including Henry Walters, George Blumenthal and the Havemeyers, and his collections featured in defining international exhibitions of Islamic art. The Metropolitan Museum of Art has described his influence on the history of collecting as difficult to overstate. He was the subject of a 1944 exhibition at the Durand-Ruel Galleries, *Kelekian: As the Artist Sees Him*, paying tribute to his relationship with important contemporary artists who took his portrait, including Milton Avery, André Derain and André Masson.

After Dikran's death in 1951, the bottle passed to his son, Charles Dikran Kelekian. Charles's inventory records the vessel as no. 508 and explicitly identifies its publication in the *Survey*. This number also corresponds to an old collection label retained on the bottle. The two generations' inventory entries, together with the 1931 exhibition catalogue and the 1939 plate, form a particularly persuasive sequence of independent documentary references.


Inventaire Collection
Charles Kelekian
500 Bol de Sultanabad, intact, à fond gris deco noir et blanc decor d'oiseaux
Cd de Kel. 501
502
503 Lampe Romaine en verre irisé Petit Bol en verre dit "mille fleurs" Art Romain Syrie
504 Vase irisé de Rhages avec anse
505
506 Petit fauteau peinture XIII-XIV Portrait présumé de Eveque St Louis de
507 Livre Persan avec plusieurs miniatures Copie des Khamseh de Nizami H. 1049
508 Vase en verre à decor peint de Rhages, aussi collé, publié dans le Survey
T-2497 509 Petit vase grec terre cuite
T-399 Cd. C-IK 510 Boite à fond faïence Egyptienne avec hieroglyphes

Charles Dikran Kelekian's inventory, entry no. 508, identifying the bottle and referring to its reproduction in Pope's Survey of Persian Art.

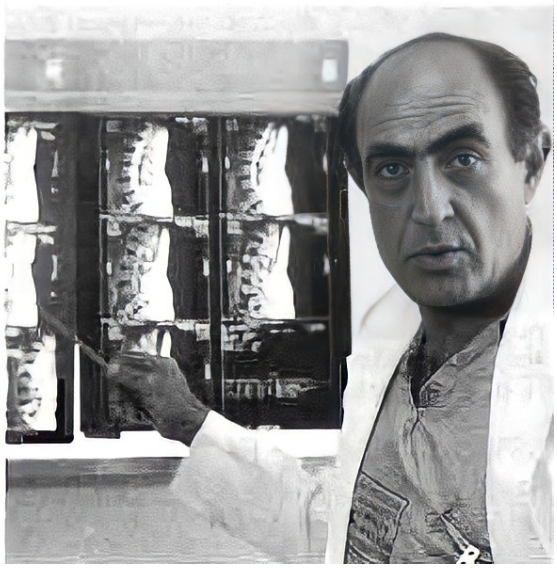
From the Kelekians to a New York Collection



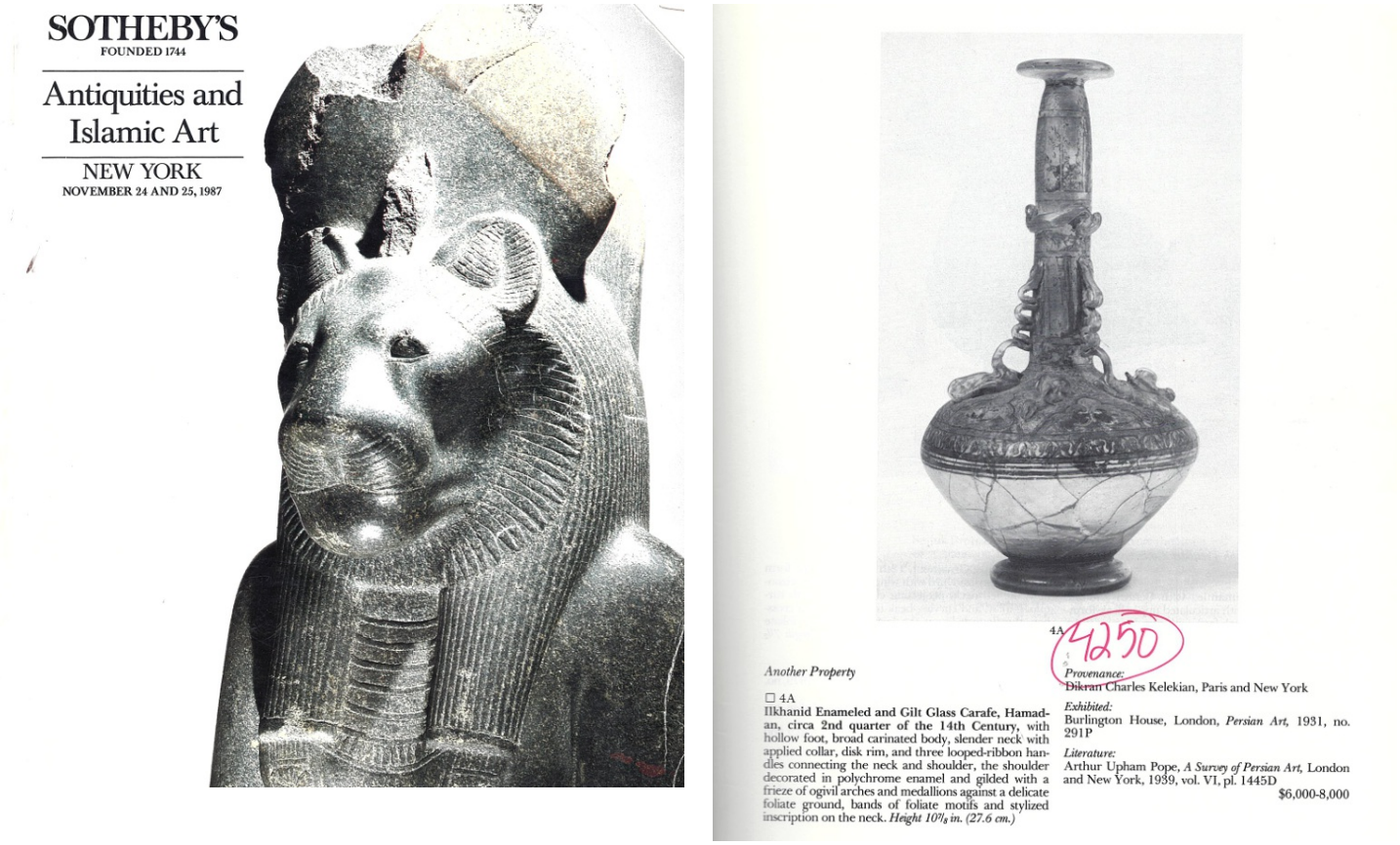


Fine Oriental Miniatures, Manuscripts and Islamic Works of Art, Sotheby Parke Bernet, 30 June 1980, Lot 331.

The glass bottle resurfaced at Sotheby Parke Bernet on 30 June 1980 as lot 331, where it was described as an important enamelled and gilt carafe and its Kelekian provenance and 1939 publication were recorded. It appeared again at Sotheby's New York on 24–25 November 1987 as lot 4A. This later catalogue cited both its display at Burlington House in 1931 and its reproduction in Pope's *Survey*.



The bottle subsequently entered the collection of Dr Vallo Benjamin (1934–2021), the distinguished New York neurosurgeon and collector. He likely purchased it in an auction at Sotheby's New York on 24-25 November, as this was the period in which he was collecting and living in New York.


SOTHEBY'S
FOUNDED 1744
Antiquities and Islamic Art
NEW YORK
NOVEMBER 24 AND 25, 1987

4A
4250
Another Property
Provenance:
Dikran Charles Kelekian, Paris and New York
□ 4A
Ilkhanid Enameled and Gilt Glass Carafe, Hamadan, circa 2nd quarter of the 14th Century, with hollow foot, broad carinated body, slender neck with applied collar, disk rim, and three looped-ribbon handles connecting the neck and shoulder, the shoulder decorated in polychrome enamel and gilded with a frieze of ogivil arches and medallions against a delicate foliate ground, bands of foliate motifs and stylized inscription on the neck. *Height 10⅞ in. (27.6 cm.)*
Exhibited:
Burlington House, London, *Persian Art,* 1931, no. 291P
Literature:
Arthur Upham Pope, *A Survey of Persian Art,* London and New York, 1939, vol. VI, pl. 1445D
$6,000-8,000

Antiquities and Islamic Art, Sotheby's, New York, 24-25 November 1987, Lot 4A.

Benjamin commissioned architect Paul Rudolph to design an apartment on East 57th Street in the late 1970s, conceived in part to display his art and antiquities.

The bottle was later consigned from Benjamin's estate to Nadeau's New Year's Day sale in Connecticut on 1 January 2023 as lot 518.

The physical bottle preserves the technical accomplishment of medieval Mamluk glassmakers. Its accompanying archive preserves something equally compelling for collectors: the history of how it was seen, studied and valued across almost a century of art history.

The stele will be presented by David Aaron at Frieze Masters Abu Dhabi, a curated section of the inaugural edition of the fair in November 2026.

Exhibition and Selected Literature

Exhibited: *International Exhibition of Persian Art*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1931, Gallery VII, no. 291 P.

Arthur Upham Pope, "More about Persian Glass", *Apollo*, vol. 13, 1931, p. 12, fig. V.

Carl Johan Lamm, "Glass and Hard Stone Vessels", in Arthur Upham Pope (ed.), *A Survey of Persian Art from Prehistoric Times to the Present*, 1939, vol. III, pp. 2599–2600 and vol. VI, pl. 1445D.

Sotheby Parke Bernet, *Fine Oriental Miniatures, Manuscripts and Islamic Works of Art*, 30 June 1980, lot 331; Sotheby's New York, *Antiquities and Islamic Art*, 24–25 November 1987, lot 4A; Nadeau's, *Annual New Year's Day Auction*, 1 January 2023, lot 518.