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Treasures from the National Museum: Qalhat World Heritage Site (UNESCO)

The ancient city of Qalhat was the main port of northern Oman from the 7th to 9th centuries AH (13th to 15th centuries CE). In this edition of *Wings of Oman*, the National Museum's Director General, Jamal al-Moosawi, and the Head of Curatorial Unit, Moza al-Wardi, tell us more about this fascinating place – which plays an important role in Oman's history. (With photography by Saleh al-Ruzaqi/The National Museum).



The ancient city of Qalhat, known as the Twin of Hormuz, was the main port of northern Oman from the 7th to 9th centuries AH/13th to 15th centuries CE and the Great Mosque was its most famous edifice. The mosque was built around 699 AH/1300 CE by Bibi Maryam, the wife of Bahauddin Ayaz, King of Hormuz and Ruler of Qalhat. The Moroccan geographer Ibn Battuta visited Qalhat during his travels in the 8th century AH/14th century CE and wrote a vivid description of the Great Mosque shortly after its completion: "Qalhat has fine bazaars and an exceedingly beautiful mosque, the walls of which are decorated with elaborate tile work. It occupies a lofty position overlooking the town and harbour..." The Great Mosque was destroyed by the Portuguese when they raided Qalhat in c. 913 – 914 AH/1508 CE. Surviving elements of its decoration, discovered during preliminary archaeological excavations of the mosque site in 1430 – 33 AH/2008 – 11 CE, are illustrated here. In 1439 AH/2018 CE, Qalhat was awarded world heritage status by UNESCO.

Fragments of panels for wall decoration

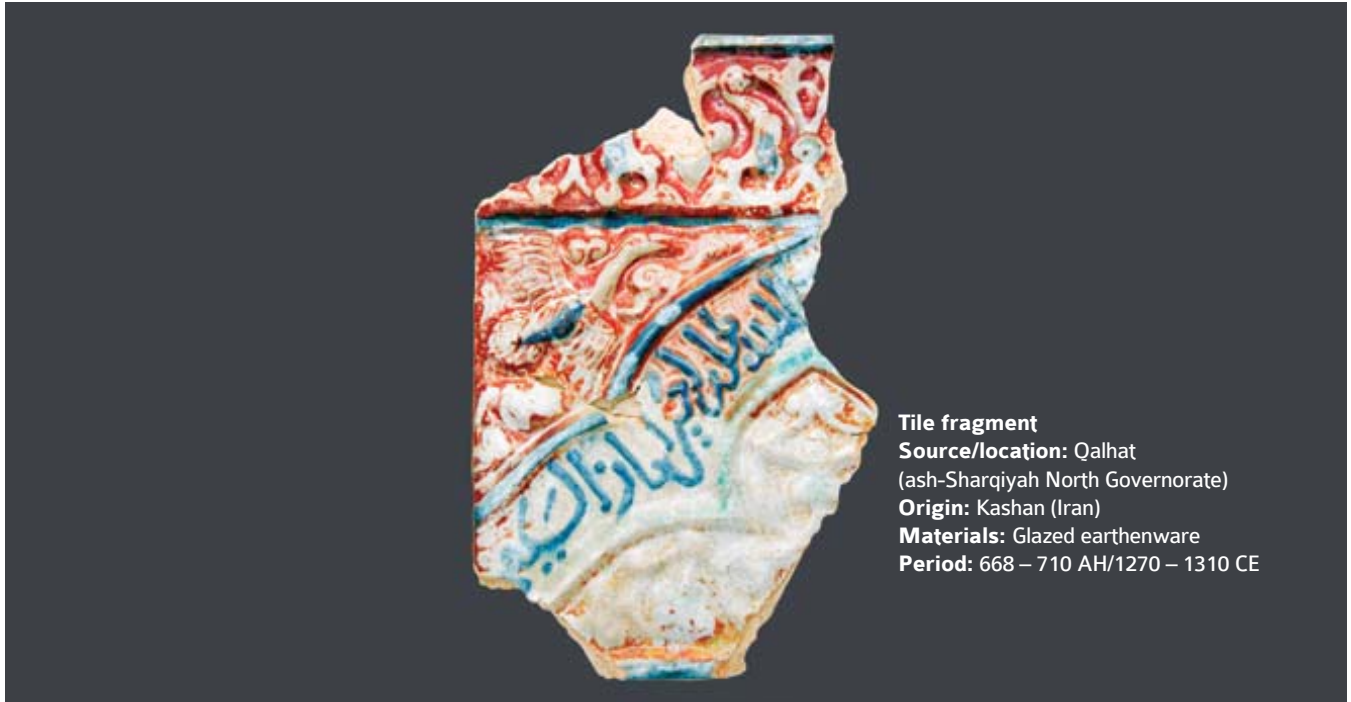
Source/location: The Great Mosque, Qalhat (Oman)

Origin: Probably Qalhat

Materials: Glazed earthenware and local mortar

Period: 8th – 9th centuries AH/14th – 15th centuries CE

Description: These decorative panels, based on a pattern of interlacing stars, were made from broken pieces of green-glazed tiles set in mortar and overlaid with thick mortar coils. The coils were shaped with special molds which were discovered during the excavations. It is not clear whether the panels belonged to the original structure of the mosque or to a later renovation, possibly after an earthquake which seemingly affected the city at the end of the 9th century AH/15th century CE.



Tile fragment
Source/location: Qalhat
 (ash-Sharqiyah North Governorate)
Origin: Kashan (Iran)
Materials: Glazed earthenware
Period: 668 – 710 AH/1270 – 1310 CE



Kashan Tiles

During the Mongol Il-Khanid Period (c. 654 – 735 AH/1256 – 1335 CE) the potters of Kashan in central Persia were renowned for the making of luxurious glazed tiles for wall decoration. The tiles were typically arranged in friezes or in star-and-cross mosaic panels. Three decorative styles were produced, featuring lustre painting and dark blue or turquoise glazes. In describing the decoration of the Great Mosque, Ibn Battuta used the word *kashānī* – and several fragments of tiles imported from Kashan were indeed discovered during preliminary excavations. The fragments were found in the prayer hall near the *mihṛāb*, and outside near the minaret, where the main gate was possibly located.

The National Museum: Visitor Information

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The National Museum is open daily from 10:00am – 5:00pm (except on Fridays 2:00pm – 6:00pm). The ticket desk closes half an hour before the Museum’s closing times.