



Inv. no. 3/1963

MIHRAB TILE, MOLDED FRITWARE

IRAN, KASHAN; 13TH CENTURY

H: 50.5; W: 32 CM

A *mihrab*, or prayer niche, is a special decorative element that denotes the direction of prayer in mosques the world over. The *mihrab* can take many forms. In small mosques, it often consists of a niche-shaped relief in one or more tiles, usually richly decorated with religious inscriptions and vegetal ornamentation. Larger mosques generally have a niche proper built into the wall.

This Il-Khanid *mihrab* tile features not one but two niches in relief. As is often the case, the niches contain a lamp. Lamps like these are believed to refer to the Koran's famous "Light Verse," *Ayat al-Nur*:

"God is the Light / of the heavens and the earth. / The parable of His Light / Is as if there were a Niche and within it a Lamp: / The Lamp enclosed in Glass: / The glass as it were / A brilliant star: / Lit from a blessed Tree, / An Olive, neither of the East / Nor of the West, / Whose Oil is well-nigh / Luminous, / Though fire scarce touched it: /

Light upon Light! / God doth guide / Whom He will To His Light: /  
God doth set forth Parables / For men: and God / Doth know all  
things.”

(*Sura* 24, verse 35)

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