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MIHRAB TILE, CARVED MARBLE

AFGHANISTAN, GHAZNA; C. 1100

H: 52; W: 34 CM

This marble tile features a niche with an oil lamp whose burning flame rises high above the lamp's edge. The name of God, "Allah," is repeated on each side of the lamp. This motif has a symbolic significance because of the Koran's *sura* 24, "the Light Verse." While God is compared there to the light of the heavens and earth, according to the early Muslim theologians, a burning oil lamp in a niche is a metaphor of Muhammad's prophetic light.

The marble tile was probably used as a *mihrab* – the prayer niche in a mosque toward which the devout Muslim turns in prayer.

The sturdy palmettes in the central wheel ornament are a special Ghaznavid variant of the form of decoration that evolved in Abbasid Iraq. The two short columns, in contrast, exhibit the influence of Indian culture.

Published in:

*Art from the World of Islam. 8th-18th century*, Louisiana, Humlebæk 1987, cat.no. 46;

Kjeld von Folsach: *Islamic art. The David Collection*, Copenhagen 1990, cat.no. 272;

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James W. Allan: “”My father is a sun, and I am the star”: Fatimid symbols in Ayyubid and Mamluk metalwork. The C.L. David Lecture 2000” in *Journal of the David Collection*, 1, 2003, p. 26, fig. 4;

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Catherine B. Asher: *Delhi's Qutb complex : the minar, mosque and Mehrauli*, Mumbai 2017, fig. 1.12, p. 33;