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CERAMIC DISH WITH LUSTRE DECORATION

IRAN, KASHAN; BEGINNING OF 13TH CENTURY

Six men are placed in a symmetrical composition in two groups facing one another. Instead of communicating, they seem to have fallen into a trance together. The stylized foliage around them shows that the scene is enacted outdoors, and their garments tell us that they belong to the social elite. Around the edge of the dish is an inscription with Persian love poetry that extols the beloved – which for the Sufi is traditionally a metaphor for God – above the physical world.

Sufism came to play an increasingly important role in the Islamic world in the course of the 12th-13th century. Many orders were founded during this period, attracting adherents from all levels of society.