

**A socarrat tile depicting Saints Cosmas and Damian**  
**Spain, Valencia, Paterna**  
**c. 1450-1500**



*43 x 35 cm; fired earthenware with tin, manganese and red ochre pigments on a reddish body.*

*Provenance*

Private collection, Spain

A large earthenware wall tile showing two male figures identified by their attributes and the inscription beneath their feet as the surgeon saints Cosmas and Damian, two Arab physicians and early Christian martyrs who lived and were executed during the persecutions of in the Roman province of Syria. The saints are depicted in contemporary fifteenth-century attire holding medical instruments, to denote their medical professions. Their heads are framed by circular haloes reserved against a background of dense wriggling forms.

The term *socarrat* ('scorched') refers to large fired-earth tiles manufactured using the biscuit technique: the slab, once dried in air, is rubbed with white clay on its smooth side, then blue, red ochre and iron is painted onto this base. It is then fired, and the tile comes out coloured blue, vermilion and black on a white base. They were intended to decorate eaves and cornices, to which they afforded a colourful intensity, usually in mineral earthy black tones and iron or ochre reds dissolved in a lime milk that, once set, gave them consistency. Socarrat tiles are not glazed, a typical characteristic of *azulejos*. An analogous tile now in the National Archeological Museum, Madrid (inv. 60399) (Fig. 1), is stamped at its centre with the coat of arms of the town of Paterna, where most socarrat tiles are known to have been produced.

*Related literature*

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Fig. 1  
Socarrat tile with a ship in full sail  
Spain, Valencia, Paterna  
14th century  
*41 x 33.5cm, fired earthenware*  
Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional, inv. no. 60399