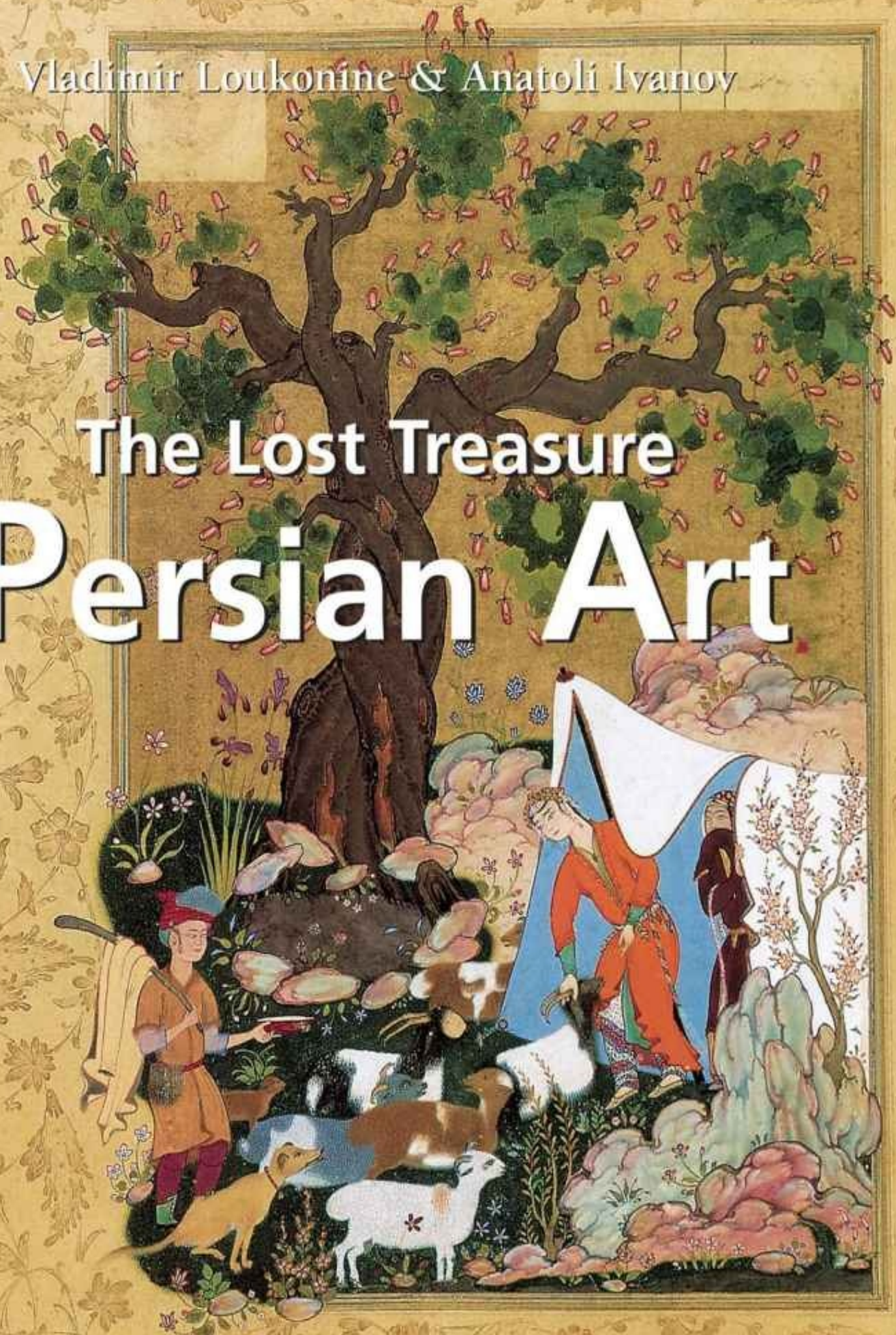


Vladimir Loukonine & Anatoli Ivanov

# The Lost Treasure Persian Art





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Vladimir Lukonin and Anatoli Ivanov

# **PERSIAN ART**

## **The Lost Treasures**



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Interior of Blue Mosque. Isfahan, Iran.

## **Persian Art: From Antiquity to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

This book consists of two sections. The wide-ranging introduction attempts to outline the basic stages in the development of Persian Art, from the first appearance of Persian peoples on the Iranian plateau during the 10<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries

BCE up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century CE. Detailed commentaries on the works of art reproduced here provide not only factual information (dates, iconography, provenance, techniques, etc.), but are also, in many instances, followed by brief scholarly studies of the examples of Persian art housed in various museums of the former Soviet Union that are, in the authors' opinion, of the greatest interest and significance. Some of these objects are reproduced and discussed here for the first time.

As far as possible, we have tried to select only such works as are typical of Persia itself, and not those produced beyond the present-day borders of Iran (Transcaucasia, Central Asia, etc.), however strongly influenced by Persian culture these may have been. At the same time, we have tried to present material to illustrate our basic thesis, namely that Persian art, though it had periods of ascendancy and of decline, remained coherent, individual and profoundly traditional throughout its development, from its formation in the 10<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE right up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century CE. This is despite the violent, often tragic political upheavals, fundamental ideological changes, foreign invasions and their concomitant, devastating effect upon the country's economy.

In attempting to sketch a general outline of the development of Persian art over this vast period, we have been obliged to set aside artistic descriptions or analyses. The specific "morphology" and "syntax" of Near-Eastern art differs fundamentally from Western art. There is a lack of source material, insufficient analysis of the work of some periods, and art history suffers from terminological inflexibility – how many more arguments could be put forward in support of the indisputable fact that at the present time, so far as Near-Eastern art is concerned, no serious artistic analysis is possible. At the moment, the task of fundamental importance is to interpret the objects in a historical light, to attempt to analyse them as one of the sources for a history of the culture of one period or another and investigate these objects in such a way as to enable them to fill the considerable gaps in our reconstruction of the ideological, political and economic history of Iran.

Our present state of knowledge inevitably means that we can plot the course of the development of art only approximately; nevertheless, the points along this course tally with all the sources, written and otherwise, on the history of the period. Research into Persian art is impeded by a number of obstacles that are extremely difficult to overcome. From the foundation of Persian art to the end of Sassanid rule there are very few antiquities extant, and the chief danger in suggesting an outline for art of this period is that one is forced to draw excessively straight lines between the rare incontrovertibly established facts. The result is an incomplete and problematic description. Yet even the drawing up of

such outlines is made extremely difficult by the need to take into account a whole network of facts – from iconographical analyses of cultural artefacts to linguistic studies. Confidence in the accuracy of the resulting outline is inspired only in those cases where there is no contradiction between any of its component elements. In other words, recourse to a very wide range of sources of the most varied nature is required.

On the other hand, a vast number of objects survive from the Middle Ages, yet here the construction of outlines is far too complex. At every point along the way, the researcher is confused by the attempt to take into account all the twists and turns of development inherent in the material itself, and in a comparison of written sources with information contained in any inscription there might be on the object. There is thus a real danger of drowning in a sea of facts, albeit incontrovertibly established facts, without having clarified the general trends.

There is yet another danger – that of the “academic” illusion, which links the cardinal ideological or political changes (for example, the change from the Zoroastrian religion to Islam or, say, the conquest of Iran by the Seljuk Turks) far too closely to developments in the art produced by that culture. There are a number of further difficulties – the unreliable dating of individual objects, lack of data as to origin, *etc.*

As far as possible, we have attempted to draw a clear distinction between two levels, the prestigious works of art reflecting concepts of an ideological, official, dynastic or other such nature, and handicrafts or, more accurately, traded objects in which one can see more clearly changes in the aesthetic taste of a wide range of buyers, the influence of local traditions and developments and innovations in particular techniques. Clearly, both categories of objects are closely linked and to study them together significantly enriches the overall picture of the art of the time, but it is also clear that prestigious objects more obviously reflect changes in the art of the period, whereas the study of handicrafts offers important assistance in dating and identifying the origin of articles. Apart from this, these objects provide evidence of changes occurring in the economy, but only partially reflect social change.

In antiquity, beginning at any rate in the Median era, prestigious objects were those directly connected to the ruling dynasty, commissioned by the Iranian sovereigns and members of the court, and reflecting their tastes and ideological views. They all relate to a specific period in the history of the Ancient East – that of the Ancient World Empires – and they reflect the level of art in the region as a whole and not just the art of a dynasty. At this particular stage, the only possible scientific means of dating is by dynasty.

In the Middle Ages, owing to fundamental changes in the nature of the state



and the structure and outlook of society, the objects which had been used to reflect status and ideology in ancient times changed, and new forms of art took over. One cannot say that dynastic dating and dynastic chronology lose their meaning altogether in the Middle Ages, but dynasties degenerate, become local and inward-looking, and their range of subject-matter and technical skills naturally diminishes. The concept of “prestige” also changes. It is no longer purely an expression of dynastic ideas, but an assertion of high social status based on wealth and influence rather than nobility and ancient lineage.

It is much more difficult to draw up a general outline for the development of art during this period because of the increasing decentralisation, and because the range of prestigious works expands and their interpretation becomes more complex, whilst handicrafts and prestigious art objects become more closely allied. For the time being, only what one might term “technical” dating by period is possible, founded largely on mass-produced objects, above all on handicrafts. Whilst observing specific stages in the development of Persian art during the Middle Ages, it is still impossible to say what determined significant changes in various types of art. It is not even possible to say whether we are merely observing changes in various technical skills and devices or a change in fashion.

By no means have all of the suggestions in this essay been proved with a satisfactory degree of certainty. There are a number of questionable hypotheses and the result may well be similar to that in a story told by Jalal al-Din Rumi. The son of a padishah was studying magic and had learned to identify objects without seeing them. The padishah, clasping a jewelled ring in his hand, asked him, “What is this?” The prince decided that the object in the hand was round, was connected with minerals and that it had a hole in the middle. “But what exactly is it?” asked the padishah. After long meditation the prince answered: “A millstone...”.

For over a hundred years, specialist studies have looked at the question of when and by what routes the Iranian peoples, above all the Medes and Persians, first emerged onto the plateau.

The first references to these peoples are found in Assyrian texts of the 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE (the earliest is an inscription by the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III, c. 843 BCE): despite this, specialists have discovered Iranian names for a number of places and rulers in earlier cuneiform texts.

According to one of the most widely held theories, the settlement of Iranian tribes on the present territory of Iran dates back to about the 11<sup>th</sup> century BCE, and their migration route (at any rate, the migration route of a significant proportion of them) passed through the Caucasus. Another theory traces the Iranian tribes back to Central Asia and has them subsequently (about the 9<sup>th</sup>

century BCE) advancing towards the western borders of the Iranian plateau. Whatever the case, a new ethnic group gradually penetrated into an immensely varied linguistic environment – into regions where dozens of principalities and small city-states existed side-by-side with lands subjugated to the great empires of antiquity – Assyria and Elam<sup>[1]</sup>. The Iranian tribes, who were cattle-breeders and farmers, had settled on lands belonging to Assyria, Elam, Manna and Urartu and subsequently became dependent on the rulers of these states.



Miniature: *Rustam Besieging the Fortress of Kafur*, from Firdausi's masterpiece (*Shanama* or *The Book of Kings*), c. 1330.  
Gouache on paper, 21.5 x 13 cm.  
The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.





Persian carpets (detail).

It would seem that these questions of the routes by which the Iranians entered the plateau and of how they settled among the heterogeneous native population of what is now Iran during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE have only an indirect bearing on the history of the culture and art of Iran. However, it was these very questions which inspired archaeological excavations and research, covering a large area into the pre-Iranian and proto-Iranian period, or, in archaeological terminology, Iran's Iron Age. As a result of intensive work undertaken in Iran by archaeologists from many countries from the early 1950s almost to the present day, the majority of specialists have come to the conclusion that new tribes appeared in the western provinces of Iran (in the Zagros Mountains) during "Iron Age I" (c. 1300-1000 BCE), bringing about sudden changes within the material culture of this region. Some archaeologists suggest that this invasion was "completely clearcut and dramatic". Pottery shows drastic changes. Red or grey earthenware vessels appear in place of painted ones and they adopt new shapes – so-called "teapots", long-stemmed goblets, "tripods", *etc.* Burial customs change. Spacious cemeteries appear beyond the city walls and bodies are buried in "stone boxes" or cists. Later, during the Iron Age II (c. 1000-800 BCE) and the Iron Age III (c. 800-550 BCE), gradual changes occur within the confines of this culture, which was in essence introduced wholesale from outside. Its spread

throughout the Zagros region was at first limited and appears, in theory, not to contradict the resettlement of Iranian tribes known from written records.

Later (during the Iron Age III), it took over practically the whole of western Iran, and this may be linked to the formation and expansion of the Median and Persian states. However, a detailed study of all the hitherto published material destroys this neat picture.

Firstly, there is no hard evidence of any incontrovertible link between new forms of pottery or decoration that would be necessarily and exclusively attributable to ethnic changes, rather than to other types of change (technical developments, fashion, cultural influences, etc.). Secondly, as far as burial rites are concerned (a factor apparently more closely bound to a specific ethnic group), the picture also turns out to be unclear throughout Iran. Burial rites are not consistent and vary considerably.

Finally, a closer examination of the facts relating to the “archaeological revolution of the Iron Age” leads to the conclusion that the beginning of this period in no way demonstrates either a general unity of culture or any sudden changes.

It would be far more consistent with the process established by written sources to postulate a gradual accumulation of new characteristics within the material culture, taking place over several centuries.

Disputes about archaeological aspects of the early history of Iran or changes in its pottery and rituals appear to be only indirectly linked to the history of Iranian culture and art. Yet it was due to archaeological work from c. 1950-1970 that an unexpected and remarkably vivid page of ancient Iranian culture was revealed.

There were splendid works of art, above all metalwork, that had hitherto remained completely unknown. Archaeologists date these works with varying degrees of success, but the search for the sources of Iranian culture depends on finding an answer to the questions: who produced these works, the local population or the Iranians?; and what do they depict: local, ancient oriental designs or new Iranian ones?

In the summer of 1958, whilst clearing away the remains of a collapsed ceiling from one of the rooms in the fortress of Hasanlu (in the Lake Urmia region), the archaeologist Robert Dyson came upon a man's hand, the finger-bones covered with verdigris from the plates of a warrior's bronze gauntlet. When Dyson took over the excavation of the find and began to brush off the bones, a sliver of gold was suddenly revealed. At first the excavator thought he had a bracelet, but the gold went deeper and deeper until a solid gold bowl, eight inches in height and eight in diameter, was revealed. Careful observation of the two skeletons found with that of the man who had carried the bowl, resulted in the following

reconstruction: the bowl “was being carried out of the flaming building by one of three men who were on the second floor at the moment it gave way. The leader of the group fell sprawled forward on his face, his arms spread out before him to break the fall, his iron sword with its handle of gold foil caught beneath his chest. The second man, carrying the gold bowl, fell forward on his right shoulder, his left arm with its gauntlet of bronze buttons flung against the wall; his right arm and the bowl dropped in front of him, his skull crushed in its cap of copper. As he fell his companion following on his left also fell, tripping across the bowl-carrier’s feet and plunging into the debris.”[\[2\]](#)

The fortress of Hasanlu, the headquarters of one of the local rulers, was besieged and sacked, apparently at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE or the very beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The gold vessel which the warriors of the palace or temple guard were trying to save was a sacred object. Its dimensions are 20.6 x 28 cm, its weight 950g; around the top are scenes of three deities on chariots, with mules harnessed to two of the chariots and a bull to the other, whilst a priest stands in front of the bull with a vessel in his hand. These probably portray the god of thunder, rain or the sky (water streams from the bull’s jaws), the national god wearing a horned crown, and a sun god with a solar disc and wings. In all there are more than twenty different figures on the vessel – gods, heroes, beasts and monsters, scenes of sheep being sacrificed, a hero battling with a dragon-man, the ritual slaughter of a child, the flight of a girl on an eagle.

In all probability, they illustrate local Hurrian myths (which survive in Hittite versions: “The Divine Kingdom”, “The Songs of Ullikummi”) in which the son of the Hurrian deity Anu, the dragon-slayer Kummurbi, features as the main hero. Iconographic and compositional parallels to the scenes on the vessel are also known in the Hittite reliefs of Malatya and Arslan Tepe and on ancient Assyrian and Babylonian seals. This vessel from Hasanlu is the first of a number of metalwork objects whose technique and style are evidence that a new local school and a large artistic centre had developed in north-western Iran at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> or beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE.

Illegal excavations have always taken place in Iran – peasants have dug up ancient monuments and sometimes remarkable works of art have appeared on the market, though unfortunately lacking any scientific documentation. This continues to be the case. Gold and silver goblets, found somewhere in Gilan, near the town of Amlash (the centre of the region in which the Marlik burial site is situated), appeared in the mid-1950s, both in antique shops and in private collections. Marvellous zoomorphic ceramic vessels, depicting either zebu-like bulls or antelopes, have also come up for sale.



In 1962, the Archaeological Service of Iran sent a scientific expedition to Gilvan, about nine miles west of the settlement of Roodbar. The archaeologists discovered 53 graves on the hill of Marlik in the form of four different types of “stone box”. Golden goblets were found, several of them very large, up to 20 cm in height and weighing more than 300g (at one time, one of them was even depicted on modern Iranian banknotes), plus gold and bronze vessels, bronze weapons, parts of horse harnesses, pottery (including a great number of zoomorphic vessels in the shape of zebu-like bulls) and ornaments, *etc.* So far, however, only preliminary reports of these finds and a spate of popular works have been published.

There are, however, some remarkable metalwork objects amongst the Marlik finds, although these have not been precisely dated[3]. Judging by their technique and a number of stylistic features, they are attributable to the same school as the Hasanlu bowl, but evidently a considerable time elapsed between the production of these objects. None of the Marlik vessels bear narrative designs; in general they depict real or fantastic birds and beasts. Unlike the decoration of the Hasanlu bowl, the illustrations are clearly divided into registers.

One of the vessels – a large gold goblet (height: 20 cm, weight: 229g) – bears “the story of a goat”[4]. The supervisor of the Marlik excavations, Ezzat Negahban, describes its design as follows:

“In the lowest row, A, the young kid is suckling from its mother. In the second row, B, the young mountain goat, just beginning to sprout horns, is eating leaves from the Tree of Life. In the third row, C, is a wild boar (apparently the killer of the goat). In the fourth row, D, the body of the goat, now grown old – as indicated by the long elaborately curved horns – lies on its back with two enormous vultures ripping out its entrails. On the fifth row, E, a small creature, an embryo or a monkey, is sitting in front of a small stand. If this is an embryo, it indicates rebirth; if a monkey, it is telling the story. It is common in the ancient fables of Iran for an animal, particularly a monkey, to tell the story.”

In our opinion register A (the mother goat) is not a goat at all but a deer. This design, a deer with a suckling fawn, is copied almost exactly from ivory plaques in the provincial Assyrian style of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. One finds exactly the same design on plaques from the famous treasure of Ziwiye. Register B is an ordinary goat. The design is typically Assyrian and known from numerous objects, especially cylindrical seals, and it has a particular symbolical significance in a local (Assyrian) religious context. Finally, register D is an ibex,

but the composition – birds pecking a goat – is known from Kassite glyptics (14<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE), Elamite cylinders and Hittite stone reliefs. In the above cultures this motif symbolises victory in war. Only the boar (register C) and the strange “embryo” have no direct iconographic parallel, although the latter is depicted in front of a typically Assyrian Tree of Life. They alone betray the artistic individuality of the craftsman.

Thus we have before us four different references to the symbolism of different religions (Assyrian, Elamite, Kassite and Hittite), but they have been removed from their context and brought together on one vessel by a local craftsman in a simple, guileless tale of life and death, lacking any of that complex symbolism and meaning which the separate components possessed in their own context. Who was this craftsman? An Iranian or a Mede? At any rate he was not an Assyrian, a Hurrian or an Elamite – he did not understand their pictorial language. To produce his tale he used representations on carved ivories, seals and signet-rings and possibly images from other vessels rather than those on works of official court art such as reliefs. However, the essential difference between what is depicted on the Hasanlu vessel and this goblet is that on the former all the images are used to create a single story which can be clearly deciphered on the basis of a single religious or epic tradition (Hurrian myths). The Marlik goblet, however, tells a new story with the help of old but very varied images. Taking the analogy of language, one could say that the craftsman of the Marlik goblet is employing foreign ideograms in order to create his own coherent text. Perhaps for the first time we are encountering an example of the formation of Persian art as a whole. We will return to this in far more detail, for a great deal of evidence will be required, but on the basis of this example it is already possible to suggest that Persian art was created from heterogeneous quotations taken out of context, from elements of religious imagery from various ancient eastern civilisations reinterpreted and adapted by local artists to illustrate their myths or (subsequently?) to depict their deities. This theory suggests the possibility of an Iranian interpretation of works that still consisted entirely of foreign ideograms, but only of those works where these ideograms are taken from various artistic languages. In the case of the Hasanlu vessel, it is unnecessary to seek an Iranian interpretation of the Hurrian myths depicted. The Marlik goblet is an example of quotations from several languages and periods where the search for another, Iranian, content appears to be feasible.



Khaju Bridge. Isfahan, Iran.





Persian carpet.

In 1946, an enormous hoard was discovered by chance near a high hill some 25 miles east of the town of Saqqiz, not far from Hasanlu. The story of its discovery was rapidly transformed into confused legends. For example, the story was told of two shepherds who accidentally stumbled on the rim of a bronze vessel whilst searching for a young goat. Trying to dig it out, they are said to have noticed a large bronze sarcophagus packed full of gold, silver, bronze, iron and ivory objects. All of this was distributed among the peasants of the nearby settlement of Ziwiye and in the course of the distribution many valuable objects were broken into several parts, shattered or trampled. At the same time, some of

the objects appeared in Tehran in the hands of a few antique dealers. One of them, having first arranged to receive a share of the proceeds of scientific excavations, informed André Godard, then inspector-general of Iran's Archaeological Service, of the find's whereabouts.

In 1950, Godard published part of the gold, silver and ivoryware, gave a confused account of the circumstances of the hoard's discovery and suggested a date for the bulk of the items – the 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE. He defined these objects as “art in the animal style” of the Zagros region with elements from the art of Assyria and nearby regions – an art which was subsequently adopted by the Scythians and the Persians of the Achaemenid period. Godard noted that many objects in the same style had previously been found in this region, some of them at the site of the ancient town which he identified as Izirtu, the capital of Manna.

In 1950, the “Ziwiye fashion” began. The activities of antique dealers led to the dispersal of objects from the hoard into private collections, though some ended up in museums in the USA, France, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Japan. Until the 1980s a large part of the treasure was kept in the Tehran Archaeological Museum. One of its first researchers, Roman Ghirshman, drew up a list of finds, attributing 341 objects to the hoard, including 43 of gold, 71 of silver and 103 of ivory.

Such variety in the contents of the hoard aroused incredulity. Godard had already pointed out that items ascribed to the hoard had been discovered by chance in neighbouring regions or even in Southern Azerbaijan. In recent years, the disputes have grown even more bitter. Some specialists have flatly refused to consider that the majority of the objects on the “Ghirshman list” were really found at Ziwiye, declaring some of them to be modern imitations. It must be said that these suspicions have some basis, for archaeological investigation of the hill at Ziwiye has, in essence, yielded nothing (archaeologists only gained access more than ten years after the discovery of the hoard). The entire hill had been riddled with holes dug by treasure seekers. Remains of the walls of a small fort which once stood on the hill have been found. Judging by the pottery found there, it was built between the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> and the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE. But the hoard might well be unconnected with the fort. One of those who studied the hoard remarked: “Unfortunately, what is left in an empty stable after a horse has been stolen merely tells us that a horse was once there, but it does not identify the horse.”<sup>[5]</sup> This ironic remark is, in fact, extremely significant, for the answer to the question of what this collection of objects was hinges upon whether there was a real, not a metaphorical, horse at Ziwiye. Was it a hoard or the remains of the rich burial of an Iranian – or perhaps a Scythian – chief with his steed, weapons and personal belongings, like the Scythian barrow at

Kelermes? Ghirshman considers that the hill of Ziwiye is quite definitely the grave of the Scythian ruler Madias, son of Partatua, who was king of the Scythians and a powerful ally of Assyria (died in c. 624 BCE). But what then of the remains of walls discovered by archaeologists? As has already been stated, together with the other objects from Ziwiye housed in the Tehran Archaeological Museum and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York there are fragments of the sides and edge of a large bronze “bath”. Similar artefacts, undoubtedly Assyrian and dating from about the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, have been found at other sites. Sometimes they were used as bathtubs – for example at Zincirli, sometimes as coffins, as at Ur. But whatever the case, whether it was a burial or a hoard hidden in a large bronze vessel, it is clear that all these items were plundered from various places. Amongst the objects from Ziwiye are many ivory plaques with various designs. Some of them, fashioned with unusual artistry, are undoubtedly Assyrian, similar to those discovered in the Assyrian palaces of Arslan Tash, Nimrud or Kuyunjik. Another group, fashioned under the influence of Assyrian art, bears the stamp of the provincial style of the mid to late 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, with signs of the influence of Phoenician art, the art of northern Syria and possibly that of Urartu. The bronze bath already mentioned is also Assyrian. Some of the jewellery has neither been precisely dated nor precisely localised as such earrings, necklaces and bracelets are characteristic of many areas of the Near East. Amongst the bronzeware – parts of furniture, bells, bronze pins, and animal figurines are items that are undoubtedly from Urartu. Several ceramic vessels, supposedly found in the same hoard, are also Urartian or Assyrian (8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE). Most interesting of all are the gold and silver items in the hoard. Some of them, mostly silver objects, are also Urartian, but the majority of the gold objects belong to the so-called mixed style, in which stylistic features that are definitely Urartian and some that are definitely Assyrian, along with others that are apparently from Asia Minor and some almost certainly Syrian, all blend together with new, more vivid representations of a style, technique and, above all, choice of imagery which may be cautiously termed “local”.





Sheikh Lotf Allah Mosque. Isfahan, Iran.

These are all prestigious items. Richly decorated weapons, insignias of a king's or courtier's power, such as a pectoral, a diadem, a gold belt and so on. On nearly all these objects the composition is based on heraldic principles, symmetrical scenes depicting mythical creatures are displayed on either side of the Tree of Life. There are no less than ten versions of the Tree of Life from Ziwiye, consisting of standard S-shaped curves woven into a complex pattern. The representations of the Tree of Life on Urartian bronze belts of the 13<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE form the closest parallel. The fabulous creatures depicted at the sides of the Tree of Life on objects from Ziwiye are not very numerous – a dozen in all.

There are also purely Assyrian compositions on gold, as on ivory, objects. These include a king with a sword defeating a rampant lion. Apart from this, zoomorphic figures are represented on gold objects and even on fragments of pottery. There is a stag with legs drawn in and branching antlers executed in a typically Scythian style, very close to those on famous objects from Scythian barrows, such as the Kelermes or Melgunov swords or the Kelermes pole-axe; a panther with its paws entwined into a ring, almost the same as the famous Kelermes panther or the panther on the gold facing of the Kelermes mirror; the head of a griffin, identical to that on the Kelermes sword; a mountain ram with legs drawn under it, its pose and the treatment of its body identical to those of the Kelermes stag; and, finally, a hare.



Amongst the objects from Ziwiye are some which show only mythical beasts (the gold breast-plate, the gold quiver-facing, and others) or only real animals (the gold belt with stags and rams, parts of the gold diadem with panthers and griffins' heads, and others); only one object a gold pectoral, the symbol of power of a king or a courtier shows both types of animal.

At this point, an important detail must be emphasised. Without exception, all the images on both gold and silver items as well as some articles of carved ivory are fashioned using the same stylistic devices (for example, idiosyncratic "underwings" appear on the bodies of the fabulous creatures and the panther).

Thus the craftsmen of Ziwiye created prestigious objects such as symbols of power (ceremonial weapons, a pectoral, a diadem, a belt, etc.), employing the pictorial language of Urartu, Assyria, Elam, Syria, Phoenicia and, lastly, the "animal style" of the Scythians, so that their own pictorial language was again created from elements extracted from various alien contexts to produce a new text. They also employed many older metalwork techniques (as seen, for example, in the Marlik objects).

Three facts are of importance here. Many of the objects at Ziwiye were produced for rulers or for the aristocracy, they clearly display the Scythian animal style which was new to this area, and the majority of similar designs (such as the Tree of Life and the monsters) link these objects to the art of Urartu.

All these parallels inevitably pose fresh questions. Above all, for whom were the Ziwiye objects produced? And then, how are these works to be dated? If they were made earlier than the Scythian items at Kelermes, or were even contemporaneous with them, what then is their significance in the formation of the Scythian animal style and of those other aspects of Near-Eastern art to which we have already referred? How are these objects to be interpreted? Lastly, how did these images subsequently develop?



Vase, 9<sup>th</sup> century.  
The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

First of all, one has to answer, however cursorily, the question of how the animal style developed. The origin of the nomadic tribes known to the Ancients by the generic name of Scythians or Saka – their first homeland, their migration routes and their ethnic origin – is as controversial as the question of the Iranians' original homeland and of their migration. However, the important thing for the history of Iranian culture is that detachments of nomadic warriors are first mentioned in writings in the Near East during the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE (the oldest known references are the reports of Assyrian spies from Urartu in the 720s

BCE). They are known by various names: umman-manda (the Manda tribe), gimirrai (Cimmerians?), ashkuzai, ishkuza (Scythians), saka (Saka). In the 670s BCE, these tribes were already playing an active part in the foreign policy of the Near-East and subsequently they even set up a short-lived “Scythian kingdom” in Southern Azerbaijan, somewhere in the vicinity of Manna. No less controversial is the origin of the Scythian animal style itself. Images of beasts stylised in a Scythian manner connect a number of archaeological cultures covering a vast territory from the Mongolian steppes to the Crimea. In recent years, the term “Scythian-Siberian animal style” has become current in Russian archaeological literature. It has been suggested that this style emerged in the eastern steppes, perhaps as early as the late 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE, and then migrated westwards along with its bearers. Two features of “Scythian stylisation” are also characteristic of Ziwiye imagery. One is the generally closed construction of the animal figures (for example, beasts twisted into a circle), resulting in a distortion and simplification of form, and the other is the consequent construction of designs consisting of several entirely distinct planes of geometrical regularity.

Thus the question of dating is highly important, but at present it remains unresolved. It is not impossible, of course, that it was the Scythians themselves who brought with them to the Near-East the motif of the stag with legs drawn in and branching antlers, the motif of the panther and the stylised image of the griffin’s head[6]. One cannot, however, point to a single similar object of incontrovertible Scythian provenance which is reliably dated and known to be older than the pieces from Ziwiye[7]. At the same time – and leaving aside the stag’s or ram’s pose, which was already extremely widespread in the art of the Near-East by the end of the second millennium BCE – objects have been found on Iranian territory depicting these same beasts but stylised in a different manner.

A griffin’s head adorns the butt of a number of Lorestan axes as early as the 10<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, the stag with legs drawn in is found on Lorestan psalia of the late 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, and there is a panther on a bronze pin from Baba Jan Tepe, also from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

Let us assume that Ziwiye and the Kelermes burial mounds date from the same period[8]. Despite an abundance of Urartian and Assyrian motifs, the buyer for whom these articles were intended could have been neither an Assyrian nor an Urartian ruler because the pictorial categories of fabulous beasts are grossly confused, which would have been unacceptable in the unified systems of religious imagery of Assyria and Urartu. Thus we must seek another candidate, and he must be an Iranian. Only in this case would the “Scythian animals” have to feature on his belongings, insofar as they were a totem or

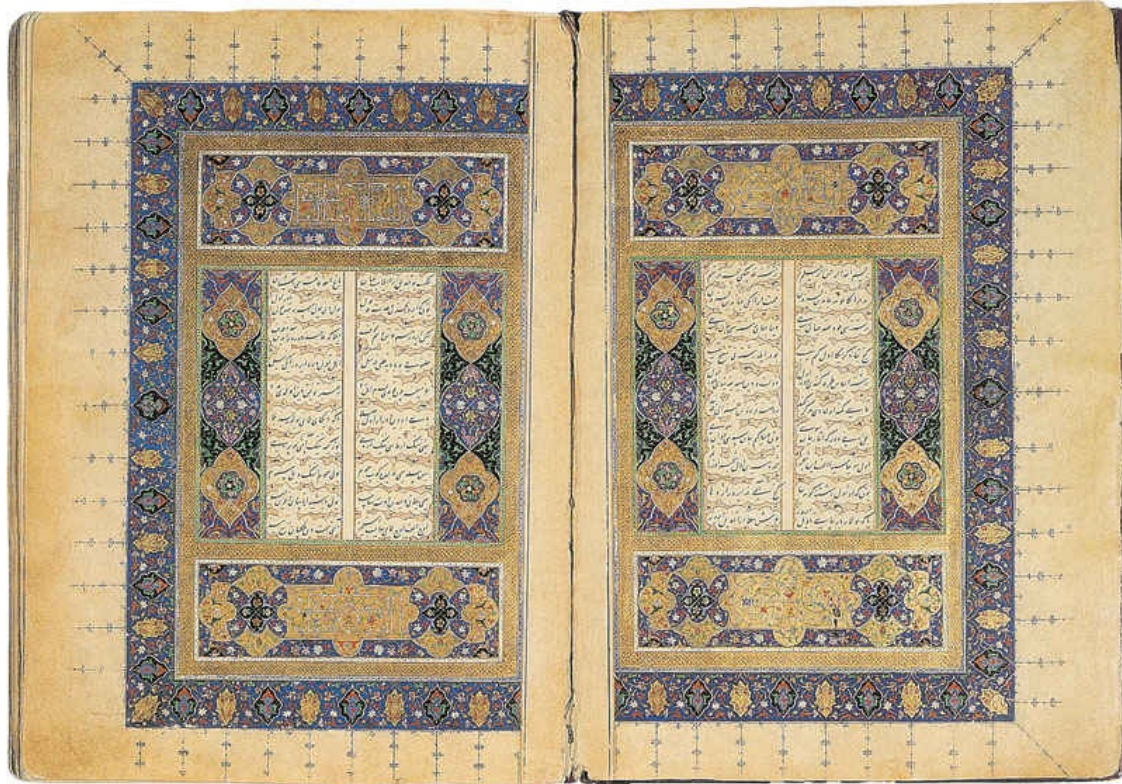
emblem of his tribe (in Vladimir Abayev's opinion, for example, the term saka – the name by which some Scythian tribes were known in the Near East – signifies “stag”).

It should be borne in mind that the craftsmen who incorporated them into insignias of power were employing the very same technical and stylistic devices they used for the ancient eastern motifs with which they were familiar. For example, the stag's antlers are depicted with the same S-shaped curves as the branches of the Tree of Life.

The intended recipient of these articles would have to be a king to account for the royal symbols of investiture. In other words, the most likely candidates are kings of a Scythian power settled in the Sacasene province of Transcaucasia and conducting raids from there on Urartu and Assyria, the rulers of a “Scythian kingdom” (one of these, Madias, has already been mentioned) who may have adopted the customs of eastern potentates, or the kings of Media, the first Iranian empire established on this territory in the 670s BCE. Two facts give grounds for considering these objects to have been produced for Median rulers.

Firstly, the political situation in the area in question during the late 8<sup>th</sup> and early 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE; secondly, the subsequent history of objects made in this style.





Manuscript frontispiece, c. 1340.

How rapidly early Scythian articles lose that fabulous imagery which is characteristic of Near-Eastern art! This imagery has already vanished completely from early Scythian objects in burial mounds of the northern Black Sea area dating from the 6<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE. Here Scythian art comes into contact with the art of Greece. On the other hand, this imagery survives in Persian art of the Achaemenid period. One finds it on Achaemenid seals, on silver and gold vessels (especially on rhytons), in the decoration of Achaemenid swords, and even in monumental art – on the capitals of columns and on reliefs[9].

The most natural explanation for this is that the imagery of the Near East was not interpreted by the Scythians in any way.

On the very earliest Scythian objects it simply constituted a form of exotic decoration. Yet images of actual Scythian “totems”, although originally produced by Near-Eastern metalworkers using Near-Eastern models and styles, were to be developed further in Scythian art.

In Persian art, on the contrary, Scythian images rapidly degenerate[10], whilst it is the fabulous imagery of the Near-East which continues to develop. This indicates that their selection, both at the beginning (at Ziwiye) and subsequently (under the Achaemenids), was not accidental and that they were interpreted in

some way.

Thus some of the objects from Ziwiye were produced for Iranian, and in all likelihood Median, rulers. The metalworkers, successors to the Hasanlu and Marlik “school”, produced works of art on the same principle as did the Marlik craftsmen, depicting in a single object images of “evil demons” and “good genii” extracted from the context of various religious pictorial systems. The field of selection for such “quotations” is a great deal more extensive than at Marlik, but the choice itself is more limited. Some dozen or so images are repeated on all the objects. In making the selection, no great importance has been attached to the symbolism these images possessed in their own pictorial systems. The quotations sometimes alternate with a “narration in one’s own words”.

Lastly, even though the Near-Eastern “text” is ideographic, images that are already indisputably Iranian are introduced into it as “phonetic indices”. If such a system were to be found in written records, we would conclude that the text, despite the fact that all, or nearly all, of it was composed of foreign words, would have to be read in Iranian owing to the presence of phonetic indices. Here is the situation in the written Iranian language: in the Achaemenid period standard correspondences were beginning to be developed between Aramaic words and expressions and their Iranian equivalents (all the business of the chancellery in Achaemenid Iran was conducted in Aramaic, a Semitic language).

Senior civil servants had the (Aramaic) text read to them in Iranian. Gradually, scribes developed the habit of reading the entire text, even to themselves, in their native (Iranian) language. Aramaic spellings turned into a type of conditional sign system for the Iranian words – ideograms or, more precisely, heterograms.

The actual use of heterograms was subject to specific rules: thus, for example, one or two of the numerous Aramaic verb forms were arbitrarily selected all the time to serve any purpose... An Iranian verb ending was often joined to the Aramaic form which had been selected once and for all, as a phonetic complement in order to reveal the real Iranian verb form concealed beneath the heterogram. When they arrived on the Iranian plateau, the Iranians did not have their own written language.

They used the cuneiform script of the Near East in order to set down the official manifestos of the Achaemenid rulers, and Aramaic writing and language in order to conduct their state and business affairs. Neither did these Iranians have their own representational art. Therefore an analogous process can be traced in art – quotations and a limited choice of images can be explained by the fact that the resulting works were also to be understood in Iranian.

It is only in late Zoroastrian works that we find faint hints of anthropomorphic representation. In fact only a single Iranian goddess – the goddess Anahita – is

depicted anthropomorphically. All the other deities of the ancient Iranian religion are represented abstractly, only through their “hypostases” or incarnations (chiefly as certain birds or beasts). The Yasna Haptanhaiti – one of the oldest parts of the Avesta, the ancient Iranian sacred text – mentions the worship of mythical creatures such as, for example, the sacred three-legged ass Khara and a few others, but the deities of the ancient Iranians were not pictorially represented.

This probably explains why, when the need arose to depict the Iranian gods, artists had to seek a suitable iconography amongst examples of ancient eastern art. These were foreign to them both as regards religious content and, of course, ethnic origin, but they were at the same time widely known and revered and the Iranians interpreted them in their own manner. It was entirely natural for the Median kings to use the very rich figurative art of Assyria, Urartu and Elam as their basis, and especially the art of that region in which their state developed historically and culturally; nevertheless, the selection had to be purposeful and relatively strict. At Marlik and Ziwiye a native Iranian representational language was created on the basis of foreign representational languages; this was, in effect, a native Persian art which, by the Ziwiye stage, one can justifiably term Median.

An inscription by the Achaemenid ruler Darius I, concerning the construction of his palace at Susa more than a century after the creation of the Ziwiye complex, states (lines 49-50): “The Medes and the Egyptians were skilled in the use of gold, they crafted works of gold”. As we find out in the following lines when he comes to list other craftsmen – stonemasons, specialists in glazed tiles, sculptors and builders (Ionians, Lydians, Babylonians and Egyptians) – Darius’s information is accurate. In all probability he was equally correct in speaking of the Medians as noted metalworkers.

We have already pointed out the characteristics that link the pieces described and the art of Lorestan – one of the most distinctive regions of Iran. Interest in the culture of Lorestan began in the late 1920s. The story has it that in 1928, in the small town of Harsin, a Lur nomad offered a local merchant a strange bronze object – an idol with a human body ringed with fabulous beasts – in exchange for a few cakes. The Lur had found the idol in an ancient grave. The story may be without foundation but it is well known that when similar objects appeared in the antique shops of Tehran and subsequently those of London, New York and Paris, the interest in them was so great that thousands of Lorestan bronzes were soon scattered amongst private collections and museums and virtually nothing remained for the expert archaeologist arriving in Lorestan, except for ancient graves pitted with holes and entirely robbed of their treasures. It required no

little time and effort for systematic excavations finally to reveal the ancient civilisation of Lorestan.

Nowadays the so-called “typical Lorestan bronzes”, characterised by their original form and iconography, have been singled out from the wide range of objects from this ancient centre. These bronzes consist of ritual bronze axes, often decorated with cast figures of men or beasts (some of them bearing inscriptions with the names of Elamite kings of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE), bronze daggers (also frequently bearing inscriptions, for example of the Babylonian king Marduk-nadin-ahhe, 1100-1033 BCE), and bronze handles of whetstones, terminating in protomes of a goat with splendid horns or birds.

Of later date (8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE) are the bronze psalia – parts of horse harnesses fashioned entirely in the Assyrian style (similar to those depicted on the relief of the Assyrian king Sennacherib, for example), or showing Elamite or local Lorestan deities, and psalia with depictions of beasts – moufflons, horses, unicorns (similar to those on Marlik metalwork), stags and even elks. Representations of some local deities, fabulous creatures, “demons”, and anthropomorphic figures combined with complicated zoomorphic images which appear not only on psalia but on heavy bronze pins, on the finials of standards and on weapons, etc., have no iconographic parallels beyond the bounds of Lorestan itself. The most characteristic standard finial takes the form of a hybrid image – an anthropomorphic deity ringed with fabulous animals and birds of prey (these are what were termed “idols”) – or a female deity with the heads of birds growing from her shoulders. No less typical are the large, disc-shaped or openwork heads of pins ornamented with floral motifs or representing a female deity surrounded by beasts, birds, fish, and plants. Sometimes these are in the form of plaques with a polymorphic deity combining feminine and masculine characteristics or the features of a youth and an old man.

Evidently, it will be a long time before we succeed in understanding this imagery, for in Lorestan only one local temple where such items might have survived has been excavated to date. This is the temple of Surkh Dum where exploratory excavations were carried out in the 1930s, but the material from these excavations has still not been published. However, those articles fashioned in the Assyrian or Elamite style were evidently made to order. The craftsmen of Lorestan who, as excavations show, had thousands of years of tradition and extensive experience in the field of metallurgy, manufactured weapons and parts of horse harnesses for various customers, among whom were kings, princes and chiefs of tribes of different ethnic origin.





Miniature: *The Fall of Bahram Gor into the Ditch*,  
from Amir Khusraw Dihlavi's masterpiece,  
*Chamse* or *The Collection of Five*, c. 1370-1380.  
Gouache on paper, 8.7 x 12.8 cm. Biruni Institute  
of Oriental Studies. Documentary heritage  
submitted by Uzbekistan, Tashkent.

These were the craftsmen who manufactured psalia in the form of Iranian beasts – a stag with legs drawn in, an ibex, an elk; it was they who made bronze quivers with the same pictorial quotations seen in the Marlik age. But no unified representational language was created here out of such images; the articles were simply made in accordance with the customer's taste. A native, and very

complex, art coexisted here alongside the foreign articles. But the important fact about them is that they can be dated much more precisely than, say, objects from Marlik and Ziwiye, and here it turns out that the “Iranian animals” portrayed on them have a date – the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE – demonstrably earlier than any item hitherto discovered in the Scythian animal style.

There are no prestigious objects from Lorestan exhibiting Iranian characteristics. This is understandable, for in the 9<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE the Iranian tribes, which had by then already settled in the vicinity of Lorestan, had not yet evolved any sort of strong or stable unified state.

On turning to an analysis of the art forms developed in the Achaemenid empire, one of the world empires of antiquity, we should describe at least one architectural complex, such as Persepolis.

Persepolis, Parsa in Old Persian, is situated some 30 miles from Shiraz in the south of Iran. Its construction began c. 520 BCE and continued until c. 450 BCE. The city was erected on a high artificial platform reached by a wide stairway with 111 steps made of limestone blocks.

On the platform there is a unified architectural complex made up of two types of palace – the Tachara (an inhabited palace) and the Apadana (an audience hall). The best known of them is the Apadana of Darius and Xerxes – a square audience hall, its ceiling supported by 72 stone columns. The Apadana was raised 13 foot above the terrace and was reached by a wide stairway decorated with reliefs. On the left side are three tiers of identical soldiers of Elamite regiments with spears, bows and quivers, Persian guards with spears and shields, and Medes with swords, bows and spears. There are also warriors carrying the king’s throne, leading the royal horses and driving the royal chariots. On the right side the reliefs depict a procession of the nations which formed part of the Achaemenid empire. At the head of each group is a courtier, possibly a satrap – the governor of a province who was always chosen from one of the leading aristocratic families – in ceremonial Persian dress with a high tiara. The different nations are depicted in approximately the same order as that of the kingdoms composing the empire on official inscriptions of the Achaemenid kings.

Here are the Medes with their famous horses of Nisa, bearing gold vases, goblets and torques, Elamites with tame lionesses and gold daggers, Africans with okapi, Babylonians with bulls, Armenians with horses, vases and rhytons, Arabs with camels, and other peoples.

The stairway leading to another palace, the Tripylon, is decorated along the outside with a solemn procession of the royal guard, and along the inner side with a procession of servants carrying rams, vessels and wineskins. By the east door of the Apadana of Darius-Xerxes; close to the door Darius I, the king of

kings of the Achaemenid state, is represented, seated on his throne, and behind him stands the heir to the throne, Xerxes. The hands of both of them are raised and stretched out in a gesture of worship towards the symbol of the royal deity, Khwarnah. At the north entrance to the throne room, the king of kings is depicted fighting a monster with the head, body and forelegs of a lion, the neck, wings and hindlegs of a bird and the tail of a scorpion. Identical monsters appear on several pieces from Ziwiye.

The Persepolis reliefs form a slow procession, a rhythmic, solemn and magnificent parade of hundreds of soldiers, courtiers, civil servants, priests and hundreds of representatives of subject nations, occasionally interrupted at specific points by the figure of the king of kings himself on a throne supported by these same representatives of subject nations, or by the struggle of the king of kings with a monster, or, lastly, by the scene of a lion attacking a bull – an ancient eastern religious symbol. The separate figures and scenes do not themselves form a sequence, rather the sequence is of groups or complexes of scenes (“the Apadana complex”, “the Tripylon complex”, etc.). Close examination of them gives rise to the impression that the king’s army was innumerable, that the whole world was subject to the king, that he himself was like a god and fought with the monsters of evil, as the god of light and goodness himself fought against them.

The laws governing the imagery are meticulously elaborated and carefully observed in such details as weapons, dress, headdress, masterful depiction of valuable vessels, ornaments and details of horse harness. Such articles of Achaemenid applied art as have survived are reproduced with absolute accuracy in the sculpted reliefs at Persepolis. We may restrict ourselves to a single example – the relief on the western doorpost of the Apadana shows Darius wearing a garment, the hem of which is decorated with an engraved procession of lions. A wool hem with the same figures of lions – identical down to the minutest detail – was found in one of the Pazyryk burial mounds in the Altai.



Sheikh Lotf Allah Mosque. Isfahan, Iran.

The “portraits” at Persepolis are extremely stylised but the subjects are distinguished by details of attire – crowns, weapons or bracelets, by their position in the scene depicted or by clearly delineated “ethnographic” features.

In the first Achaemenid capital, Pasargadae, which was built twenty-five years before Persepolis, only remains of reliefs decorating walls and entrances to the palaces have been found. Comparing these to the Persepolis reliefs, one can trace the rise of the “Achaemenid style” of sculpture and its evolution. Above all, at Pasargadae the prototype for these reliefs can be more clearly discerned, going back to the stone orthostats of Assyrian palaces.

Their style and imagery also derive from the Mesopotamian traditions of Assyria and Elam. Several of them have exact counterparts in Assyrian art, especially amongst the orthostats of Sennacherib’s palace at Nineveh, where portrayals of fish-people and “demons” recur with great frequency. These images were probably seen by the Persians as guardians of the Assyrian rulers.

Perhaps some political purpose lay behind the repetition of these motifs at Pasargadae. Perhaps they express an attempt to proclaim the concept of a succession of power from the Assyrian kings. But the pictorial quotations are as chaotic as those at Ziwiyeh and the total sacrifice of the meaning of the Assyrian composition indicates that the original religious message was of no consideration. At any rate, we are faced here with the earliest example of imagery intended to convey a message adopted from kingdoms destroyed by the Achaemenids and used by them in order to glorify their own majesty and power.



It is significant that at Pasargadae too a limited repertoire of themes has been selected from the enormous variety of sculpted designs of Assyria and Elam – there are only depictions of “monsters”, “demons” and fabulous creatures, a king and courtiers, or processions of warriors and people offering gifts. Achaemenid reliefs have none of the scenes so characteristic of Assyrian art such as hunts, battles, the storming of cities, feasts, depictions of landscapes or various types of religious ceremony.

When analysing Achaemenid monuments we should recall an Egyptian hypostyle hall, the image of the Egyptian winged sun-disc, the Egyptian crown of one of the fabulous creatures on a relief at Pasargadae, the obvious Ionic influence in the form of the columns, and especially the Lydian features in the layout of the palaces and the Urartian techniques of erecting buildings on enormous artificial platforms, as well as the already mentioned Assyrian and Elamite reliefs.

We have already referred to the inscription of King Darius to mark the building of his palace at Susa (written in the three officially accepted languages of Achaemenid Iran: Akkadian, Elamite and Old Persian). It lists a wide variety of materials delivered to Susa from many of the kingdoms subject to the Achaemenids (from the Mediterranean coast as far as India) and a host of craftsmen of all nationalities (Ionians, Carians, Egyptians, Medes, Babylonians, etc.).

Carl Nylander, an expert on Achaemenid art, describes something like the following situation. Having subjugated Media and Asia Minor and destroyed Babylon, the Achaemenid king of kings, Cyrus II, became the ruler of an enormous powerful state. He ordered building to begin at Pasargadae, in view of the new political and religious tasks which confronted him. The buildings of his official residence were to be constructed of stone and decorated with reliefs. Median concepts and techniques were employed<sup>[11]</sup>, or those used in Assyria and Elam which Cyrus had subjugated. In other instances ready-made traditional forms were lacking, so there was a certain synthesis of other elements. But as all the palaces were to be constructed of stone and at that time such buildings only existed in Asia Minor it was essential to attract stonemasons from Sardis and Ephesus, in addition to those craftsmen schooled in the Mesopotamian and Median traditions who were employed above all as sculptors.



Iranian carpet, c. 1600.  
Silk and silver wire, 249 x 139 cm.  
Musée du Louvre, Paris.





Persian carpet.

A school of craftsmen developed at Pasargadae which later flourished at Persepolis; this united various formal languages in a single style which reflected state requirements. In other words, we are faced, in theory, with a pattern similar to that which characterised the formation of early Median art, which was itself a determining factor in this new school.

The Achaemenid age was the first period of a native Persian art from which many objects have survived, as well as written records. Such of its features as are formulated below may well help reconstruct the history of Median art from a few surviving objects and at present a comparison is possible only of general

patterns and theories rather than of actual objects.

Thus, first of all, Achaemenid art cannot be characterised any longer as one of direct visual references, despite the colossal number of borrowings – in this instance from prestigious branches of the art of subjugated lands. Such borrowings quickly lose their original meaning. The paradox of Achaemenid art lies in the fact that all, or nearly all, the details of any particular image or any particular architectural construction can be traced back to prototypes of previous ages and various lands, but the image itself, nevertheless, remains distinct from anything known and is specifically Achaemenid.

Secondly, the entire pictorial repertoire of art of this era, established with the participation of craftsmen of various nationalities, fairly rapidly spread down to the minutest details to all the monuments – from reliefs on palaces and kings' tombs to metalwork, textiles, ornaments, *etc.* A single imperial Achaemenid style was created and this unified culture can, moreover, be traced from the Indus to the shores of Asia Minor.

The plan of the Apadana at Persepolis, for example, was repeated by Darius at Susa, and in Armenia (at Erebuni) an Urartian temple was rebuilt according to the same plan; the same sort of palace was erected for the Achaemenid satrap at Khwarazm (Kalaly-gyr). In many instances, however, local traditional materials were used instead of stone.

Thirdly, the art of the Achaemenids as we now see it, primarily in the monuments of Pasargadae, Persepolis, Susa, the Behistun rock reliefs and the rock tombs of the Achaemenid kings at Naqsh-e Rostam, as well as in numerous articles of metalwork and glyptics, is in essence intended to proclaim the majesty of royal power and the majesty of the empire. This characteristic in particular also explains the paradoxical selection of themes in Achaemenid art. Only such proclamatory themes interested the Achaemenid monarchs and not tense, dynamic hunting or battle scenes.

There is conscious selection, or a strict pictorial system dictated by specific aims. One might say that the reliefs of Persepolis, for example, are thematically monotonous because Persepolis itself was a ritual city. Apparently the solemn celebrations of the sacred Iranian New Year (Nowruz) were performed here, when the coronation of the king of kings took place. We can thus conclude that it is this ritual that is depicted on the Persepolis reliefs, the sculptural reflection of the myths and images of the ancient Iranians.

These include the struggle of good and evil symbolised in the battle of the king with the monster, festive processions and subjugated nations presenting New Year gifts and tributes to the king of kings. It could be said that the reliefs of Pasargadae constitute the specific political programme of the Achaemenid



empire's founder, Cyrus.

Yet these very images took over the whole of Achaemenid art. It seems that the programme was a great deal more extensive, reflecting more than the specific aims that arose during the construction of Pasargadae and Persepolis. Canons stipulating certain "principal" scenes were laid down at this time: the scene of the king's triumphal reception, the scene reflecting his religious faith (the king at a sacrificial altar with a burning flame) and certain symbolical compositions. These canons were to endure in Iran for several centuries.

Like all Near-Eastern art, that of Achaemenid Iran is distinguished by its realism in the portrayal of everyday objects which are faithfully reproduced down to the tiniest detail, combined with stereotyped, idealised portraits lacking any individual features. Unlike the art of the Near-East, however, there is nothing that might be termed personal or private in Achaemenid art, for nearly all compositions have a specific symbolic meaning. Thus, for example, the symbol of the supreme god of the Assyrians, Ashur, was chosen as the symbol of the deity of fate, success and "royal predestination", Khwarnah. There was not even any need for any serious iconographic changes in doing so – in late Assyrian cylindrical seals Ashur is depicted in a sun-disc in the form of the figure of the king between two outspread wings.



Sheikh Lotf Allah Mosque. Isfahan, Iran.

The symbol of Khwarnah probably appeared at the time of Darius and evolved during his reign: the rock at Behistun bears an image in which a sphere with a star crowns the deity's tiara and in his hand he holds a torque – the insignia of power. At Persepolis, Khwarnah is depicted exactly like the king, Darius. The Assyrian “gatekeepers”, shedu, repeated on a gigantic scale in the “Gateway of All the Nations” at Persepolis, perpetuate many details of the prototype used and transformed by the Iranian sculptors, but here they symbolise an Iranian deity –

Gopatshah. This image was also very popular in the applied arts. Above the door of the rock tomb of Darius at Naqsh-e Rostam is a sculptural composition that in effect repeats the throne compositions at Persepolis in which representatives of subjugated nations support the ceremonial dais. Darius himself is shown on a stepped pedestal leaning on a bow with one hand raised towards an altar on which a fire is burning. Above this scene soars the symbol of Khwarnah. This scene soon becomes part of the artistic canon and tombs of later Achaemenid kings repeat it in detail. It also appears on Achaemenid seals.

In the spring of 330 BCE, Alexander the Great burnt down the Apadana of Persepolis; this event was to be a turning point in the history of Iran and of its culture. Alexander's campaigns in the East began an age usually referred to as the age of Hellenism[12]. Along with Alexander's phalanxes, the artistic tastes of the Greek world, its craftsmen and its works of art all penetrated Iran.

The efforts of Alexander's successors, the Seleucids (his generals who became

the monarchs of the lands he had subjugated) to create unity throughout lands with varied social conditions, beliefs and customs, complicated by the formation throughout the East of cities granted the right of polis, were simplified by the fact that in theory a social structure and political norms similar to those in Greece had existed in the East even before the arrival of Alexander's troops. As a result, an ideology of "cosmopolitanism" was to dominate for an extremely long period.

Initially, the Greeks themselves did not attempt to hellenise the conquered lands. Convinced of the superiority of their own political system and way of life, they nevertheless tolerated local cults and even supported them. In the end there was collaboration between the Persians and Greeks. The Persians began to aid the conquerors both in the creation of the machinery of state and in the sphere of religious cults and all of this simplified the process of syncretisation. Despite the shift in power, local rulers preserved the ancient traditions in many of the satrapies.

There is no need to list here the examples of Hellenistic art found on Iranian soil – the Greek inscriptions, the statues of Greek deities or Greek architectural monuments – since there are a number of specialist studies on this subject. The picture became a great deal more complex in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE when Iran was conquered by a dynasty of eastern Iranian origin, the Parthians, who brought their own culture to Iran, and a new, Parthian, empire arose which was to last for more than 500 years.

Even today the world of Parthian art remains a colourful mosaic of isolated works, varying styles and concepts which it is difficult to amalgamate into a coherent picture. Consequently, it is necessary to bear in mind that Iranian territory during this period is a 'blind spot'. We know a good deal about many works from Central Asia, Afghanistan, north-western India and Mesopotamia, but hardly anything about Iran itself, since there has been no archaeological research of this period. One could, of course, gloss over this period, uniting, say, the art of Mesopotamia with that of Central Asia and Eastern Turkestan. One would then find that this art (as opposed to Greek or Achaemenid art) is characterised by refinement of form, a wealth of symbolism and frontal representation. In addition there is greater movement and space, and a more illusionistic approach than is seen in Achaemenid art.

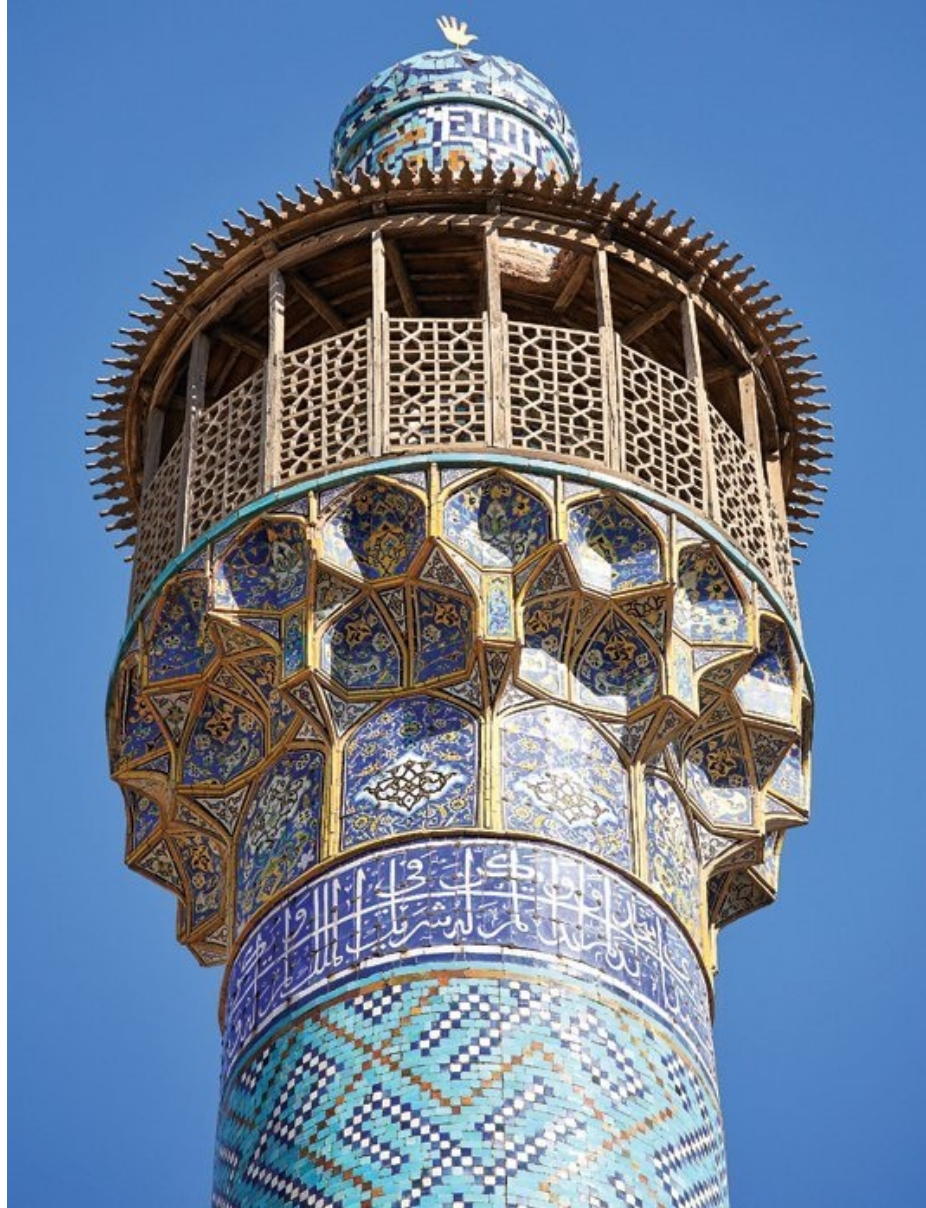
The process of artistic syncretism, especially as one era ends and another begins, is, of course, linked to definite social, economic and political changes. The rulers of both empires – the later Seleucids and the Parthians – tried to embody their own divine reflection in the form of single deities and nearly every religious system in the East of that time aspired to the role of world religion. In

the early Hellenistic period a common religious language appeared. The cult of a sun deity, under various names – the Semitic gods Bel (in Elam) and Aphlad (in Syria), the Iranian Ahura Mazda and Mithras – spread across the whole Parthian empire. The same happened with the cult of the god of victory (the Iranian Verethragna and the Greek Heracles) and with the cult of the mother-goddess or goddess of fertility, called Anahita by the Iranians, Nanai or Atargatis by the Semites and who was compared to the Greek Artemis or the Cybele of Asia Minor. It is easy to imagine how many new features the religious art of the Parthian period had to absorb. There is much greater thematic variety than in Achaemenid religious art.





Imam Mosque. Isfahan, Iran.



Minaret of Imam Mosque. Isfahan, Iran.

During this very period some Iranian deities were endowed with an anthropomorphic aspect. It has been established<sup>[13]</sup> that an enormous role was played at the courts of the Parthian rulers by gosans or minstrels who sang the epic ballads celebrating the exploits of the ancient Iranian heroes, the Kayanids (the kings who first embraced the Iranian faith of Zoroastrianism), or of heroic warriors battling with demons such as Thraetaona, the dragon-slayer, or Zarēr, the conqueror of nomads.

These traditions were more secular than religious and formed an extremely important part of Parthian dynastic doctrine, for the Parthian kings traced their

lineage back to these ancient epic heroes. Dynastic legitimacy was founded on the epic. The epic justified the divine right of the Parthians to the throne of Iran, the epic was Iranian dynastic history. Fragments of it survive in sacred texts often preserved by Zoroastrian priests. But the Iranian epic tradition, which was vitally important for Persian art of all ages up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was born in north-eastern Iran and came to the Iranian plateau by the north-eastern Iranians led by the Parthians.

This epic tradition gave rise to such essential themes of Iranian court art as the depiction of hunts, battles and feast scenes. The epic cycles may have been illustrated in polychrome wall-paintings in palace. Archaeologists have found such wall-paintings, together with clay sculpted portraits of noble ancestors – on the north-eastern frontiers of Iran, particularly in Parthia, whereas in Iran itself no wall-paintings or other depictions have yet been found clearly representing such scenes, with the exception of some wall-paintings of dubious date at the palace of Kuh-e-Khwaja in Seistan.

We may, however, safely assume that these themes, so decisive for Persian art, appeared during the Parthian period under the influence of the art of the north-eastern provinces (Central Asia and Afghanistan).

Towards the end of the existence of the Parthian state, Christianity arose and spread across its western boundaries. In the state of Kushan, on the eastern borders of Parthia, at approximately the same time, one of the most important Buddhist movements was taking shape – the doctrine of the Mahayana. In Parsa, in the south of Iran, Zoroastrianism was developing into a state religion. Syncretism and the common religious language that had arisen in the Hellenistic period were giving way to the search for a dogmatic religion.

Some knowledge of the Iranian religion, Zoroastrianism, is necessary as it formed the ideological basis of Iran's art for at least two millennia. Its name comes from that of its prophet – Zarathustra (subsequently transmitted to Europe in its Greek form as Zoroaster). Zarathustra was evidently a real figure, as is corroborated in particular by his "peasant" name meaning "owner of an old camel"; he was a member of the Spitama tribe and probably lived in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE. He was expelled from his community for having preached doctrines to which its priests objected and went away into the east of Iran, to Bactria or Drangiana, where he was received by a king belonging to the ancient dynasty of the Kayanids, Wishtaspa (Hystaspes), who was the first to be converted to his faith. Zoroastrianism is known primarily in its later, Sassanian version. At its heart lies a dualism: this asserts that there are two principles in the world – Good and Evil – and the essence of existence is the struggle between them. At the same time Zoroastrianism is a monotheistic religion, for Ahura

Mazda (later Ormazd) is the one god, a god of goodness and light, whilst his antithesis, “the lord of darkness” Angra Mainyu (literally “evil intent”, later Ahriman) and his forces, are fiends (daevas).

According to this doctrine, space and time are infinite. Space is dual – “the kingdom of good” and “the kingdom of evil”. Within infinite time (zrvan akarana) Ahura Mazda creates a finite, closed period which lasts 12,000 years. The concept of cyclical development is fundamental to Zoroastrian philosophy. Thus, according to sacred texts, the first 3,000 years of this period were devoted to an “ideal creation” of the world, the world of ideas; in the second 3,000 years the material world was created. Here the struggle between Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu takes place (everything good is created by Ahura Mazda, everything evil by Angra Mainyu). The following 3,000 years is the history of the struggle between the two forces before the appearance of Zarathustra. Finally, the last 3,000 years is “our time” in which Zarathustra appears and three “saviours” (Saoshyants) are awaited, who will announce the decisive moment in the struggle between the forces of light and darkness. The forces of darkness will suffer a final defeat and the world will be purified by fire.

A distinctive feature of Zoroastrianism is its assertion of man’s active role in confessing the good faith of a worshipper of Mazda and thus contributing towards the final victory of good.

Zarathustra’s doctrine and his preaching, as well as numerous pre-Zoroastrian religious hymns and liturgies and a plethora of ancient Iranian myths, were brought together in the Avesta, the sacred texts, which were, however, written no earlier than the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, in a very complicated alphabet created especially for that purpose by the Zoroastrian priesthood. For more than 1,000 years before this the priests had learned the texts by heart.

Apparently no more than a quarter of what once made up the Avesta has survived. Its foundation is the Gathas, the preaching of Zarathustra himself, and the Yasna, hymns to the gods. After its codification in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, parts of the Avesta were translated into Middle Persian and the Zend, an extensive commentary on it, was written. The liturgical texts (Yasna) have, of course, survived longer than anything else, and although they as well as their supplement (Vispered) and the priestly codex (Videvdat) are in the main monotonous incantations to the gods, they contain a number of myths and legends of great antiquity. The gods of the Avesta are not as a rule given human form in the sacred texts.

The single exception is the goddess Anahita, who, in one of the Yashts, is described as a beautiful woman dressed in a silver beaverskin cloak and wearing various ornaments. But many of the Zoroastrian deities are personified mainly as



various animals or birds which serve as complete representations of these deities. The evil daevas have a single personification.

These are such evil deities as Azhi Dahaka, a three-headed snake, or the daeva of plague and death, Nasu, represented as a fly coming from the North, or the demon of laziness, the long-armed Bushyasta.

During the Achaemenid period there also existed the Mazdaism of the Magi (an ethical and religious doctrine) and the religion of the Achaemenid kings, which in many ways differed both from the doctrine of the Magi and from ancient Iranian beliefs (thus, for example, in the official texts of the Achaemenid kings the name of Zarathustra does not occur and Ahura Mazda is not the only god but simply the supreme one).

Consequently one can say that in the late sixth and early 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, Zoroastrianism was only just beginning to assert itself in Iran and the Achaemenid kings, whilst valuing the superiority of Zarathustra's doctrine as their new official religion, nevertheless did not cast aside the cults of the ancient tribal gods. At the same time Zoroastrianism had not yet become a dogmatic religion with firmly established norms and there were slight modifications as the doctrine developed. Zoroastrianism was widespread in the Parthian empire: for example, shards from the wine store of Mithradatkirt (discovered during excavations at Nisa in Turkmenistan) bear more than 400 proper names of various people, of which a third, the so-called theophoric ones, are given in honour of Zoroastrian deities. However, symbols and religious formulae are lacking on Parthian coins, whilst at Mithradatkirt works of art used in the funerary cult of kings display an abundance of typical Hellenistic imagery.

Only in one province of Iran, in Parsa, are the old Achaemenid traditions preserved. Here a local dynasty was in power, and although very few works from this province have survived (its capital, Istakhr, situated not far from Persepolis, has still not been excavated), from about the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE its rulers issued coins bearing their Zoroastrian (even Achaemenid) names, the symbol of the royal Khwarnah and the symbols of Zoroastrianism – an altar with a blazing fire and a Zoroastrian temple (possibly a temple of the goddess Anahita).

The Sassanian state, formed in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, began with the creation of a strong centralised power which fairly soon united the whole of Iran under the control of the Sassanid monarchs.

The province of Parsa was the centre of the development of this state and its historical and cultural nucleus for the entire duration of its 400-year existence, and the Sassanids themselves were hereditary priests of the Temple of Anahita, one of the Zoroastrian holy places of Parsa.

Consequently, the keyword in the unification of the country was the “renaissance” of Iran’s ancient grandeur and the ancient grandeur of the Iranian religion. Before long, the Sassanid monarchs were starting to trace their lineage back to the Achaemenids. It is natural, therefore, to regard the history and culture of this period as a nationalist Iranian reaction to Hellenism. The first works of the Sassanian period seem in fact to be totally unlike works from the age of Hellenism or the few that have reached us from the Parthian age.

Above all, the thematic restrictiveness of Sassanian works of art is striking. Monumental reliefs depict nothing but scenes of the king’s investiture by a deity, military triumphs, single combat or the king of kings and his courtiers. In the main, carved gem-seals reproduce official portraits of civil servants and priests, whilst metalwork items show scenes of kings and courtiers hunting or again display official portraits. Such was the art of Iran during the course of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, and although new themes can be distinguished here in comparison with Achaemenid art – military triumph, tournaments, hunting scenes – it seems as if we are, in fact, faced with a rebirth of ancient Persian art, evident in the symbolism of the scenes, in a particular sort of extended narrative quality, in the emphasis on the divine essence of royal power, even in the choice of location for the largest reliefs which were carved into the same rocks out of which the tombs of the Achaemenids were hewn.



Sheikh Lotf Allah Mosque. Isfahan, Iran.

Once again, we are confronted with an artform that aims to reflect the specific ideological principles of a new state. Once again we are confronted with an “imperial style”, with a strict canon and a comparatively narrow choice of themes reflected in all branches of art, from reliefs to carved gem-seals.

This period must be regarded as the closing stage in the development of ancient Persian art. The art is characterised in particular by naturalism in the portrayal of iconographic details such as the insignia of power of the shahanshah (king of kings) – a crown and ornaments, a particular type of dress, the exact rendering of weapons, or horse harness. Such iconographic details vary only slightly as a result of variations in the material.

For example, all the basic elements of the individual crowns of the shahanshahs are portrayed absolutely identically whether on colossal rock reliefs and on miniature gem-seals, in soft stucco and in silk textiles. Until the end of the Sassanian period each shahanshah was portrayed on such works wearing an individual crown of a pattern that was unique to him and with the symbols of his own guardian deities.

A few palace ruins have survived from the Sassanian period (Firuzabad, 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE; Sarvistan and Ctesiphon, 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, and others), a few Zoroastrian temples, the so-called chahartaqs – domed constructions with a

windowless central space, which became widespread throughout Iran probably in late Sassanian times – and a few towns, in general still unexcavated. The outstanding works of art of this period are the numerous works of applied art, above all metalwork but also carved gem-seals, textiles, ceramics and glass, which are to be found in various of the world's museums. The State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg justifiably prides itself on possessing the largest collection of such pieces in the world. These works recreate the image of a state which was one of the great powers of the East from the 3<sup>rd</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries CE and a centre of learning and culture; a state which not only left as its heritage one of the first medical academies and one of the first universities of the Near East, but also the first authentic chivalrous romance and the first authentic record of the codification of the ancient Iranian encyclopaedia – the Avesta.





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In almost all fields of culture of the Sassanian era one can discern clear links with the culture of previous periods – not only with that of the Achaemenids but also the Hellenistic period. The artistic imagery and ideas of Sassanian works exerted a perceptible influence over a vast territory from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and in turn one can distinguish features from the art of the Caucasus, Central Asia, Eastern Turkestan, even China, in works of art from Iran.

The dominant theme of early Sassanian art (3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries CE) was the proclamation of the state's power. From the very beginning of the Sassanian era official portraits of the Sassanid shahanshah and his courtiers as well as his military triumphs were the images most often seen. In essence, Sassanian art begins with the creation of the iconography of the official portrait and the triumphal composition.

Religious art also follows the same line as official art. From the very beginning its basic subjects were anthropomorphic portrayals (also, in their way, official portraits) of the major Zoroastrian deities – Ahura Mazda, Mithras and Anahita, depictions of the interior of the monarch's coronation temple and portrayals of the shahanshah's investiture by these main deities. Such works of art reflected the fundamental, divine nature of power cherished by Iran's rulers in a language of clearly understood symbols. The scene of the divine investiture,

the handing over of the insignia of power to the shahanshah by Ahura Mazda, Mithras or Anahita, was mainly sculpted in reliefs, but also featured on the reverse of early Sassanian coins and on early Sassanian gems. The canonic form of the interior of the king's coronation temple shows an altar on which a fire blazes, sometimes flanked by the figures of the king and a deity, the design being almost the same as in Achaemenid reliefs; the altar is occasionally on the dais of a throne constructed just like those of the Achaemenid rulers. This altar appears on reliefs and coins as well as on gems.

These official works reflected the initial period of development of the Sassanid monarchy's state ideology; they emphasised the real political successes of the first shahanshahs and proclaimed their faith, Zoroastrianism. The religious theme becomes more complex at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, as if it had become obscured by the introduction into the official portrait iconography of incarnations of Zoroastrian deities of a lower order (in the beginning, it is true only of one deity the companion of Mithras, the god of victory Verethragna). The main incarnations of Verethragna are a wild boar, a horse, a bird, a lion and the fabulous Senmurv (half-beast and half-bird), and they appear in depictions of the shahanshahs' crowns and the headdresses of princes and the queen of queens. Strictly speaking, the emergence of such imagery marks the beginning of a new theme, that of Zoroastrian symbolism. The earliest pieces only present these incarnations themselves or their protomes, but very soon they give way to a different type of composition, above all to scenes of the royal hunt which are also widespread at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE.

Subsequently all three themes that followed developed along different lines. At the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE the state political theme gradually loses its significance. Rock reliefs, the chief monuments exhibiting this theme, are no longer produced: thirty reliefs are attributed to the period from c. 230 CE to the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, but only two to the period from the first decade of the 4<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The official portrait of the shahanshah appears primarily on coins, the official portraits of courtiers mainly on gems.

Zoroastrian symbolism, with various symbols of the guardian deities, occupies an ever greater place on the crowns of the shahanshahs. The scene of the altar flanked by the figures of the king and a deity on the reverse of Sassanian coins gradually becomes a canonical image, but one which has already lost its meaning. Zoroastrian symbolism, on the other hand, seems to overwhelm various branches of art. Incarnations of many Zoroastrian deities and symbolical compositions become the main subject of gems and are often depicted on stucco decoration and on textiles.

However, the initial meaning of this theme is also lost. The symbols of the Zoroastrian deities – various birds, beasts and plants – become benevolent. Imagery that is foreign to the Sassanians makes its appearance, borrowed from the West and in the main connected with Dionysian beliefs. Having been subjected to a Zoroastrian interpretation, not always of any great profundity, it is included in Zoroastrian benedictory or celebratory compositions. Such a subject as the royal hunt loses its initial, strictly symbolical, meaning and a new, narrative, theme arises in Sassanian art on its foundation; the symbolical composition simply turns into a literary subject.

All these processes had already begun in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE and were, of course, linked to definite changes both in dynastic doctrine and in the Zoroastrian canon, although there was no such hard and fast correspondence between the two as there was between official ideology and official art during the first stage.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, art as a whole was characterised by a flowering of the narrative theme and benedictory subjects, although in some works political and religious themes did reappear. There was even an emergence of what might be termed narrative-Zoroastrian themes – various Avestan myths were illustrated in works of art.

The link with ancient Persian art is particularly significant for Sassanian religious iconography. The portrayal of Zoroastrian deities in the form of their hypostases or personifications is a device with which we are already familiar and which was encountered in the art of both the Medes and the Achaemenids. Several such hypostatic images were passed on to Sassanian art. Amongst them one finds the already familiar Gopatshah who has the Assyrian shedu as his prototype, winged and homed lions, winged griffins, the scene of a lion attacking a bull and even such ancient images as a stag, a panther and a vulture. The changes are truly of great significance.

We have already referred to the creation of anthropomorphic images of the main Zoroastrian deities. It is true that they repeat the real iconography of royal portraiture. Ahura Mazda, in the dress and insignia of Iran's shahanshah, is depicted on the same pattern as the Khwarnah of the Achaemenids, except that the dress of the Achaemenid king is exchanged for that of a Sassanid king; Anahita is depicted in the dress and insignia of Iran's queen of queens; Mithras is also in royal dress, but with a radiant crown around his head.

The link with Achaemenid culture is apparent in many spheres. One could point out, for example, that in official manifestos of the Sassanid shahanshahs the standard formula of Achaemenid royal inscriptions is employed. Nowadays it has become evident that Sassanian state Zoroastrianism was initially nothing

but the Zoroastrianism of Parsa of the Parthian, or even the late Achaemenid, age. In the formation of Sassanian art the Parthian contribution was no less important than that of the Achaemenids and of post-Achaemenid Parsa. A certain number of reliefs and wall-paintings, as well as coins of the Parthian age, have the same composition and sometimes the same portrait iconography. The contribution of the late Hellenistic art of Mesopotamia to Sassanian art is also extremely significant.

Vessels of precious metal play an important role in Sassanian art. Such vessels were used at royal feasts, but the feasts themselves also had particular significance. Herodotus wrote that the Persians decided all their most important questions of state at feasts. Precious vessels were offered to the kings of neighbouring states as valuable gifts; they served as rewards to courtiers for outstanding exploits.

They were valued for their marvellous craftsmanship and for their imagery, but the metal of which they were made was itself of no small value in Sassanian times. According to the Sassanian Code of Law, for example, “worthy” provision for a free citizen of the empire consisted of 18 silver drachmae a month (about 75g of silver); the silver bowls in the State Hermitage Museum weigh at least ten times that amount. The earliest of the silver ceremonial bowls which have come down to us date from c. 270-290 CE.

Late Roman art and especially late Roman silver “portrait” vessels heavily influenced Sassanian metalwork during its early stage. Apparently under their influence this traditionally Persian art form was reborn. The vessels were of prestigious or propagandistic significance and their simple ceremonial role was merely secondary. At first, such vessels featured official portraits of the Iranian kings, employing the same iconography as on reliefs and coins. Fairly soon, within fifty years or so, the portraits depicted on the vessels were no longer of shahanshahs, but of great courtiers and priests. Towards the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century such vessels disappear completely. The first known plate bearing a depiction of kings and incarnations of Zoroastrian deities also dates from the c. 270-290.

The first known plate depicting a hunting scene was produced at about that time. This form of art was new to the Sassanians and exhibits some innovations. First of all, there is a wealth of Zoroastrian symbolism (other objects of this period presented only what might be termed basic symbols).

At this point, it is necessary to summarise briefly what little we know about the hypostases or incarnations of Zoroastrian deities, from the Yashts of the Avesta. The first of the yazads, Mithras, according to the Mihr Yasht a sun deity of victory, royal majesty and justice, does not have an earthly incarnation, but



even in the Achaemenid age a lion was the symbol of the sun and royal majesty. In the Mihr Yasht, the deity of victory Verethragna, in the form of a boar with sharp tusks and iron claws, flies in front of Mithras as he defeats his enemies. In other Yashts Verethragna appears before the hero-kings in different guises: in the form of a bull, a camel, the bird of prey Varaghna, a white steed, Senmurv, a ram, an ibex, a bear and a beautiful youth. The deity of fate, success and “royal predestination”, Khwarnah, appears in the Yashts in the form of the bird Varaghna, a fish, a gazelle (?), Senmurv and a large ram. In the Avesta Mithras is extremely closely linked to Verethragna and Khwarnah. The bull was also revered (the deity of the “soul of the bull” and Gopatshah, the man-bull) as was the star Sirius (Tishtrya) which appeared in the image of a steed, a golden-homed bull and a youth. This covers almost the entire animal repertory of early Sassanian art.

Fragments of eastern Iranian epic cycles are preserved in the Avestan texts, where they narrate the struggle of the hero-kings to acquire the qualities of these deities – strength, invincibility and success. The visible incarnation of the deity had to be literally captured or seized. Not only the hero-kings of the Iranian epics but also the founder of the Sassanian state, Ardashir, had to first obtain possession of the “good fortune of Khwarnah of the Kayanids” in the form of a large ram, according to the account in the romance devoted to him (*The Book of the Deeds of Ardashir, Son of Papak*).

This solves the mystery of the symbolism of the hunting scenes on Sassanian silver plates. The three divine qualities of a true, legitimate ruler of Iran, granted to him by the god Mithras, by Verethragna and by the deity of royal predestination, constitute the sole symbolism found on ceremonial royal metalware of the early Sassanian era, presented in strict, exact compositions repeated without alteration from one object to another.



Imam Mosque. Isfahan, Iran.



Columns topped with Persian horses.

These pieces were fashioned in a central royal workshop up to c. 480. Divine essence and the legitimacy of royal power are symbolically represented by the “capture” of Khwarnah in the form of the most popular hypostasis, a mountain ram, the strength of this power by the struggle with the lion, and its triumph by the struggle with the wild boar. Silver plates bearing such compositions were essentially for propaganda purposes.

By the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, however, scenes of royal hunts on silver plates were gradually giving way to depictions of the heroic or epic victory of the king of kings. Of course, one cannot say that the Zoroastrian symbolical composition in its pure sense was no longer recognised – it still occurs on 5<sup>th</sup>-century objects – but the range of buyers for metalwork had widened and this, it seemed, had somewhat altered the repertory of subjects. This development of iconography is characteristic of the evolution of all Sassanian art; it is a movement from orthodoxy to the everyday subject requiring no religious interpretation.

The theme of the heroic hunt flourished especially in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Later, this subject, too, was reduced to a simple genre scene, or even to the level of literary illustration of some particular hunting story. Royal horsemen were already being depicted wearing, as a rule, standard “impersonal” crowns.

Three silver plates – two in The State Hermitage Museum, one in a private

collection in the USA – provide examples of such a hunting story, representing one of the exploits of Prince Varahran.

These depictions are the first and possibly the only clear examples of genuine illustrations of oral or written tales of the skill and valour of an Iranian knight. But in the sparse Sassanian literature of the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries that has reached us we find tales of skill and prowess in chivalrous sports (hunting, polo, the mastery of various weapons and especially skill at archery) and also of proficiency in games (at chess, shatrang, and backgammon, nevartashir). One of those works, *Khusrau, Son of Kavadh, and His Page*, tells the story of the beautiful women who played the chang and who accompanied kings on their hunts; they are often depicted, for example in hunting scenes of the Shahanshah Khusrau II (reliefs at Taq-e Bostan). Judging by the story of Firdawsi, a woman playing chang also took part in the marvellous gazelle hunt of Bahram Gur, though on silver vessels showing this scene she has no instrument in her hands. A host of such beauties with harps, flutes and changs are depicted on silver vessels – ewers, flasks, deep hemispherical bowls and shallow dishes.

These vessels also show various birds and beasts, including fabulous ones, genre scenes, depictions of architectural monuments (which have not survived), illustrations of myths that are not fully comprehensible, plant motifs, flowers, trees, *etc.*

This group of Sassanian metalwork, unlike silver plates portraying Sassanid shahanshahs, can only be dated with difficulty (apparently most of these festive utensils relate to the 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries). It is even more difficult to interpret their subject-matter. The very fact that we are dealing with festive dishes may, in many respects, call into question any interpretation of them as religious and symbolical images. The Dionysian background of the main characters and most of their attributes are indisputable. The origin and prototypes of the iconographic details can, for the most part, be traced back to the West and in this sense the entire group is comparable to those few Sassanian dishes on which a western subject is reproduced in full by Iranian craftsmen – the dish with the Triumph of Dionysus from Badakhshan (now in The British Museum, London), later replicas in the History Museum in Moscow and the Freer Gallery in Washington, D.C., the Bellerophon dish in The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and several other vessels. In all probability such vessels were used at banquets during Zoroastrian festivities, the most sacred of which were Nawruz, the celebration of the New Year (meant to coincide with the vernal equinox), Mihragan, the autumn harvest festival dedicated to Mithras, and Sadeh, the winter festival dedicated to the divine fire.

Judging from accounts in written sources, the climax of all these festivals was



a ceremonial banquet, which took place after a special service in the fire temple, and various rites (the offering of water, wine, etc.) in which silver vessels were used. The *Nawruz-nama* (*The Book of Nawruz*), a work on ancient Iranian customs ascribed to Omar Khayyam, contains the following passage:

“The king said: this [water] has been stolen from two who are blessed and highborn. [This refers to two amashaspands, Haurvatat and Ameretat.] And they adorned the neck of the jug with a necklace of olivines and chrysolites strung on a golden thread. [The necks of some silver flasks are decorated with convex “pearls” in imitation of such beads.] And girls alone stole water for the New Year ritual from beneath water-mills and out of canal cisterns”.

The depictions on ceremonial vessels may be linked to rituals whose details remain unknown to us. It can, however, be gathered from written sources that various contests and exchanges of gifts took place during these festivities, and that musicians, dancers, and girls who served wine and water in special vessels took part in them. These festivities and the carnival processions did, of course, have a definite religious symbolism and ritual significance, but evidently they were taken over by ancient folk customs and their symbolism. The longer this continued the farther religion receded into the background. Thus, the Muslims of 9<sup>th</sup>-century Baghdad wholeheartedly celebrated several Zoroastrian festivities, and as late as the 10<sup>th</sup> century the Muslim rulers of Iran delighted in celebrating the Zoroastrian feast of Sadeh which, moreover, coincided with Christmas. On that night they would light bonfires and drive wild beasts into them, release birds into the flames and sing around the fires.

We can clearly see how the themes of Sassanian metalwork gradually change. The theme of state propaganda is very short-lived and soon changes into the religious propaganda of Zoroastrian symbolism in its “pure” phase, but both themes have a comparatively brief existence and eventually heroic and narrative themes predominate. All this can be demonstrated from stage to stage in the development of the royal hunt motif, which may well be the only motif in metalwork that relates directly to the art of official propaganda.

Of course there are vessels which employ only Zoroastrian symbolism or illustrations of Zoroastrian myths; there are also vessels portraying the “wonders of the world” or “marvels” like the complicated clockwork mechanism that once decorated the throne of one of the Sassanid shahanshahs, and depictions of subjects that were exotic or foreign to Sassanian society.

All this variety, initially clearly differentiated in terms of iconography and subject-matter, becomes confused towards the end of the Sassanian period, its previous exactness and rigour of selection seeming to break down. Judging by those Sassanian items known to us today, it is possible to state that all art of this

period, and not just metalwork, follows this line of development, a process by which themes of a propagandist nature die out, and heroic and epic, benedictory and everyday themes come to dominate.

This is one of the fundamental reasons why a wide range of similar compositions subsequently pass into Islamic, Umayyad and early Abbasid art. For it is Sassanian jugs of wine, and bowls served by Zoroastrian girls, that are mentioned in these verses of the famous Arab poet Abu Nuwas (died in the 9<sup>th</sup> century):

She is a Zoroastrian, her blouse complains it has no room because of the twin pomegranates of her breasts.

Her chief business is to bow down to the first ray of the rising sun when it appears.

She gives wine in marriage to water [mixes wine with water] in golden bowls whose interiors

Are filled, girdled with images that do not heed the caller and do not speak.

Before the figures of Papak's sons [the Sassanid shahanshahs] between whom a moat is trenched.

When the wine is above them they are as battalions of an army drowning in the depths.

The bowl described here is apparently a boat-shaped vessel with deep fluting at the bottom and images on the internal surface, so that there really does appear to be a moat trenched "between Papak's sons". In recent times such vessels have been found in north-western Iran during unsupervised excavations of Sassanian sites of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The Zoroastrian girl mentioned by many Persian and Arab poets of the Middle Ages is of particular interest. She would usually be serving them wine, which was forbidden by Islam, in taverns or among the ruins of a temple. Are these not fragmentary survivals of rituals connected with wine from Zoroastrian feasts, and is this not the reason why there are so many girls with wine and vines and other attributes of the "Dionysian background" both on these Sassanian silver vessels and on early Islamic ceramics?

Thus, looking at Sassanian art as a whole, one reaches the conclusion that it began with a fairly limited range of themes strictly stratified according to genre, as an art that was, so to speak, "conceptual", or at any rate subject to an absolutely specific interpretation, and "imperial", an instrument for political and religious propaganda. In late Sassanian art, however, genres blend; complex religious symbolism changes into benedictory symbolism; the symbolic banquet, battles and hunting scenes become ordinary tales of hunting exploits, many

feasts and chivalry.

The further art develops, the more all these initial, symbolic scenes and compositions become either illustrations or mere ornamentation. One could go so far as to say that towards the end of the Sassanian period the illustrative and ornamental themes played the main role in art, although, of course, the propagandist themes of the “imperial style” also survived until the very end of the period, especially in official works of art (rock reliefs, palace decorations, coins and gems). In discussing the illustrative aspect of late Sassanian art one cannot avoid mentioning Sassanian literature.

About a hundred titles of various religious, literary and scientific works of this time are known from different sources. A few dozen books of various kinds have reached us, mostly via translations into Arabic and later also into Persian, a hundred or more years after the fall of the Sassanian state, or even in revised versions of a comparatively late date. It is difficult to distinguish between their various accretions from different periods, to make any sense of the blending of various styles and genres. In the course of translation from Middle Persian a sort of compendium was usually produced.

In official manifestos of the shahanshahs and rock inscriptions (3<sup>rd</sup> century) mention is made of official state records, statutes and codices produced under each king. This is also reported by much later foreign sources relating the history of the Sassanids. Probably it was these official state-records that were reported by the Arab historian al-Mas’udi, who in 915 CE saw a manuscript in Istakhr which contained the history of the Sassanids – all twenty-seven shahanshahs who had ruled, as the manuscript stated, for 433 years, one month and seventeen days.

All these kings were portrayed in the manuscript. Another medieval historian, Hamza Isfahani, saw just such a manuscript (or perhaps the very same one). He left a description of the portraits of “kings and courtiers, famous guardians of the fire, all priests and others noted among the Persians”. These illustrations were typical official portraits. The crown was precisely depicted, the kings stood or sat on their throne. The manuscript was translated from the original into Arabic for the Caliph Hisham. It was completed in 731 CE and this is probably the earliest record of the translation of Middle Persian works.



Portal and minarets,  
Masjid-e-Jāmeḥ Yazd. Yazd, Iran.





The Gate of All Nations, c. 470 BCE. Persepolis, Iran.

A few compendiums of the 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries preserve fragments of similar translations and they confirm that in terms of their content such books were records of state affairs, arranged not by year but by separate reigns. Around the 4<sup>th</sup> century comes the first reliable report of literary works being among such records, and of their being collected into specific anthologies, their abundant subject-matter relating as a rule to distant antiquity. We know in particular of one such story, *Rast-sukhan* (*The Truthful Word*).

The story has not survived, but apparently it contained the legendary history of the founder of the Sassanian state – Ardashir, the son of Papak – and was similar to the *Book of the Deeds of Ardashir*, known in a late Sassanian version (4<sup>th</sup> century). It is possible that both these works were combined into one text in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Despite the fact that it recounts various stories in terms of feats of chivalry – the struggle with a fabulous “serpent”, the freeing of beautiful women, tournaments, miraculous portents, military stratagems and so on – this story was indisputably semi-official insofar as it defends the legitimacy of the Sassanid rulers’ power, asserting that they are descended from the ancient Iranian kings. It is curious that at the same time an “anti-romance” also existed and was widely known in certain circles opposed to the dynasty. In it, Ardashir turns out to be the son of a soldier called Sasan and of the wife of a cobbler

called Papak (Papak, it is true, was a sorcerer).

Fragments of eastern-Iranian myths about the hero-kings, the Kayanids and Peshdadians, survive in isolated Yashts of the Avesta, written in the alphabet specially created for it in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, and subsequently glossed and partly translated into Middle Persian (the language of the Avesta is very archaic). Names of heroes and various of their feats are mentioned (for example, their battles or their victory over the forces of evil), but not a single more-or-less complete myth has reached us.

These legends became especially popular in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, perhaps as a result of the Sassanids' capture of the city of Balkh in eastern Iran – according to legend the very city once ruled by the Kayanids. This was the period when the Sassanids began tracing their lineage back to these epic hero-kings. At the same time, epic poems dating from the Parthian era were being recorded.

Only one of them has survived, *The Chronicle of Zarer*, relating the Iranians' struggle for the Zoroastrian faith against their famous enemies, the "Turanians" (in the Sassanian version they are called Chionites, but that is a prose retelling). Even later, in the 6<sup>th</sup> and early 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, there were cycles written about individual Sassanid shahanshahs, such as the conqueror of the Turks and the usurper of the throne, Varahran Chobin. Apparently there were also books in existence at that time concerning the "wonders of the world", similar to the stories of Sinbad the Sailor, and there was a geographical literature and stories of the exploits of holy men. It is well known that in the 6<sup>th</sup> century a collection of edifying novella-type tales, *Kalila and Dimna* (or *Pañchatantra*), was translated from Sanskrit into Middle Persian. This book was by no means mere light reading – it was valued as "a book full of wise thoughts".

Thus, towards the end of the Sassanian period several literary genres already existed as well as official history and religious works. Tradition relates that the last of Iran's shahanshahs, Yazdegerd III, commissioned a scholar called Daneshvar to compile a dynastic history.

This book, the *Khwataw-namak* (*Book of Rulers*), grouped together myths, historical romance and royal records in a single cycle. This marked the beginning of a written tradition, although one must bear in mind that such works would hardly have found a wide readership. Written Middle Persian was extremely complicated and hard to understand. It involved a vast quantity of heterograms and in addition the lack of vowel points and the enormous polysemy of individual signs made the writing so difficult that contemporaries had good reason to name it "the devil's script". When reading these books, dabirs (scribes) and priests often had to "translate" them into spoken Persian.

To make this clearer (for the problems of literature and language will play an

important role later on in this account), we will cite the literal translation of one section from the Sassanian romance, *Book of the Deeds of Ardashir*:

“(1) In the book of the deeds of Ardashir, son of Papak, it is thus written that after the death of Alexander Rumi in the kingdom of Iran there were 240 rulers of principalities. (2) Isfahan, Parsa and the adjacent provinces were under the hand of the governor Ardawan. (3) Papak was marzban and governor of Parsa and was among those designated by Ardawan. (4) Ardawan sat at Istakhr (5) and Papak did not have any son to bear [his] name. (6) And Sasan was shepherd to Papak and always to be found among the sheep, but [he] was of the line of Darius.”

Everything underlined in this text was written in heterograms. And this is one of the easiest texts! Consequently, as previously under the Parthians, the basic literary works – epics, folk tales and true histories – were recited by poets and gosans, versifiers of epics, at courts and the castles of “knights”. Their names have survived and in later works there are a number of stories about their talent and their outstanding role in court life, for example the story of Barbad, the gosan of the shahanshah Khusrau II. We know only four lines from one of his poems, but these are the oldest verses at present known in the Dari language – the spoken language of late Sassanian Iran, which was to become the Iranian literary language two centuries later. They were preserved by the Arabic-speaking historian, Ibn Khurdadhbih: “Caesar [here the Byzantine emperor] is like the moon, but Khakan [king of the Turks] is like the sun. But my lord [Khusrau II] is a mighty cloud [Khusrau II was called Parwiz, “cloud”]. When he wishes he will cover the moon; when he wishes, the sun”.

These unsophisticated verses are one of the first examples of the ruba’i, the quatrain, a literary form that was to become extremely widespread in the Iran of the age of Islam.

It is beyond the scope of this study even to draw up a brief list of the problems connected with the new Islamic religion, which has been the dominant ideology in Iran from the 7<sup>th</sup> century to the present day.

However, one of its aspects is of great importance. From the very beginning, Islam rejected figurative representation, or more exactly the depiction of living creatures, as a means of propagating its ideas. In this respect Islam differed from Buddhism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism, which made widespread use of figurative representation and had for a long time anthropomorphised their deities. This hostile attitude towards the depiction of living creatures – though in essence only towards anthropomorphic representation as an object of worship – had a number of consequences that were decisive for the development of art in

Iran.

Firstly, it caused a gradual decline of monumental art forms such as rock reliefs, stucco panels and wall-painting (although we know that the latter existed in eastern Iran up to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and in central and western Iran up to the 17<sup>th</sup> century).

Secondly, it diminished the status of the artist, at any rate during the first centuries of Islam when it expelled him from the ranks of those creating works pleasing to God, and transformed his occupation into something not entirely commendable from the point of view of religious morality.

Thirdly, it narrowed the range of new themes that could emerge, above all the religious ones which were central to all Christian and Buddhist art – the depiction of God and his deeds, the stories of prophets and saints – everything on which an artistic impression of the world was founded in non-Muslim cultures during the Middle Ages. The reasons why anthropomorphic representation was unnecessary in the propagation of Islam are complex and have not been satisfactorily elucidated. We will examine a few of them here.

Theology, in the true sense of the word, took shape very late in Islam. Early Islam was interested only in external ritual observance and it elaborated questions of religious law, but despite this, in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, as Vasily Bartold writes, in Islam “the same disputes about God and his relationship to man were arising as in Christianity; apart from the direct influence of Christian dogma on that of Islam, this can be explained by the identical conditions in which both religions found themselves”[\[14\]](#).

Especially important is the school of theology of the Mutazilites (from the Arabic for “separatists”). This school, which created Islam’s first carefully elaborated theological system, made widespread use of Greek devices and achievements in logic and philosophy, particularly those of Aristotle. Its fundamental thesis was “the cognition of the divine unity”.

The Mutazilites resolutely opposed the concept of God in human form and of his attributes or qualities which were invented by man, even those such as “omnipotent” or “all-seeing”, for these are “conceivable” categories. According to the doctrine of the Mutazilites, God is a unity that is pure, undefinable in human terms and unknowable.

It was during the flourishing of the Mutazilites that the following hadiths (traditions of the words and deeds of the prophet Muhammad) first gained popularity: “artists will be tormented on the Day of Judgement [...] and they will be told: bring your own creations to life”.

But one must bear in mind that from the point of view of its structure Islamic theology was in no way comparable to, say, that of Christianity. Firstly, though



it became a state religion, even the dogmatic theology of the Mutazilites remained such for only a few decades. Secondly, Islamic law pervaded all aspects of social life (even contracts for buying and selling had to be agreed upon in the presence of a religious judge, a qadi), yet it was not founded on any absolute and clearly formulated law, but had four bases: the Koran, the hadiths, ijma – consensus of opinion between the faqihs (the authoritative theologians), and qiyas – the method of analogy with the Koran or the hadiths.

In consequence, one can fully understand why the faqihs held various opinions on the subject of the “hadiths of the artists”, but views such as the following, expressed by Abu al-Farisi in the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century, were more or less general:

But if someone should say: “surely it is said in the hadith, “the artists will be tormented on the Day of Judgement”, and in other hadiths, “and they will be told: bring your own creations to life”, then the words “the artists will be tormented” relate to those who depict Allah in the flesh. And as far as any addition to that is concerned, these are communications of isolated individuals who are unworthy of trust. And as we have noted, the ijma does not dispute this opinion[\[15\]](#).

Oleg Bolshakov, who has studied the known sources on this question, formulates his conclusions as follows: “Defining the permissibility of this or that depiction, the jurists proceeded first of all from the consideration of the extent to which they are dangerous as potential objects of worship. Disagreement between the various scholars arose over the attempt to define this very matter.”[\[16\]](#)

But the existence of persistent disagreements even between the faqihs did not, and never could, give rise to any official and general prohibition. Of course, in the history of Muslim theologians’ attitudes towards figurative art there have been periods when a more rigorous attitude prevailed, and even periods of persecution and extreme reaction (not until the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, it is true, and then only in individual Islamic countries), but one thing is clear: the question was always one of religious anthropomorphism – and of that alone.



The Gate of All Nations, c. 470 BCE. Persepolis, Iran.

Therefore there is absolutely no reason to see figurative art in Islamic culture as the perpetual overcoming of a prohibition existing within the religion. On the other hand, the arrival of Islam in Iran brought about the abolition of other restrictions which had an important bearing on the development of art.

By the 8<sup>th</sup> century the Islamic state, the Caliphate, included not only the whole territory of Iran but also part of Byzantium, North Africa, the Iberian Peninsula, Central Asia and Afghanistan, and it subsequently extended even further; yet this state was by no means a world empire like the empires of the Achaemenids or the Sassanids. Its ruler, the caliph (from the Arabic “successor” or deputy of the prophet Muhammad), inherited from the prophet the Imamate, the spiritual leadership of the Muslim community, and the Emirate political power. According to Islamic law, he either had to be elected by the whole community (this was, of course, only in theory), or appoint a successor during his lifetime, with the approval of the faqihs (this latter requirement was also not followed in practice). And although it was considered that the power of the caliphs had been established by God, the Islamic state was theocratic but far from despotic.

In theory, the Islamic state was considered to be a state of equals and the basic confrontation within it was not in terms of estates or between the nobility and the oppressed, but in terms of Muslims and infidels. In Sassanian Iran, and this was

especially noticeable towards the end of the Sassanian period, divisions in society were strictly upheld – they were specifically sanctioned by Zoroastrianism. Priests, warriors, scribes and the common people each formed separate “estates” and movement from one estate to another was impossible or at least extraordinarily difficult. In artistic terms, this social system fostered the creation not only of a hierarchy of forms and themes but also of a hierarchy of individual types of art (“prestigious” and “non-prestigious”). The Islamic conquest swept away the social system of castes and estates and in so doing significantly changed the hierarchy in subject-matter and the branches of the fine arts. The Sassanian royal and “chivalric” culture was destroyed.

Lastly, it is necessary to say something about the conception of a world culture which also suffered notable changes after the arrival of Islam in Iran. Mention has already been made here of this conception as understood by the Achaemenid and Hellenistic eras. Its character during the Sassanian period is described thus by Vasily Bartold:

The world situation of the Sassanian state in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries clearly had an even greater effect on the success of imperialism (Bartold uses this term only in the narrow political sense of the “creation of empires”) in individual countries than did the formation of Alexander’s empire in its time. This was the period of the unification of China under the rule of the Sui dynasty (589-618 CE), followed by the T’ang dynasty (618-907 CE), with their extensive claims in Central Asia; of the might of the kings of Kannauj on the Ganges, considered to be the imperial city of India during the first centuries of Islam; of the unification under the power of a Turkish dynasty of nomads from China to India, Persia and Byzantium. These events formed the basis of the Buddhist concept of four world monarchies at the four corners of the world: the empire of the king of elephants in the south, the king of treasures in the west, the king of horses in the north and the king of people [because of the vast population of the Chinese empire] in the east. With a few alterations, this same concept was transmitted to Muslim authors: the king of elephants was also called the king of wisdom because of a fascination for Indian philosophy and science; the king of people was the king of state government and industry because of a fascination for Chinese material culture; the king of horses was the king of beasts of prey; in the west two kings were differentiated – the king of kings, that is the king of the Persians and then of the Arabs, and the king of men, because of a fascination for the racial beauty of the [Byzantine] empire’s population.[\[17\]](#)

The Islamic modifications are of interest here. In Sassanian Iran the conception of the “four kingdoms” manifested itself as a concept of Greater Iran as a centre of civilisation surpassing, or at least equal to, other nations in terms of its culture. Islamic “democracy”, on the other hand, stresses the differences and the specific contributions of individual civilisations towards the single world of culture created by them, for the theory was that the Islamic state should in the end become worldwide and integrate all these achievements, since, after all, the “infidels” had been conquered by the Muslims.

Thus the Islamic conquest swept away a number of restrictions within Iranian culture, and not only religious ones but also those relating to estates. The Zoroastrian or state propagandist interpretations were eliminated from all artistic forms, themes and compositions which had been developed in Sassanian Iran; kings finally became simply kings; heroes, warriors and hunters simply themselves; beasts, birds, flowers and plants simply beasts, birds, flowers and plants. And this repertory, which included a great number of images and compositions imported from other cultures, passed into the art of medieval Iran, developing along the same general lines which characterised medieval art, such as an intensification of decoration and a striving towards abstract compositions.

And yet the art and culture of Iran did not fuse into a general Islamic culture. On the contrary, after the Iranian renaissance (10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries) the Modern Persian language became the language of Islam together with Arabic and under the influence of the Iranians, Islam itself became a multilingual, multinational culture and religion. In the words of one contemporary historian: “Iranian civilisation played the same role in the development of Islamic culture as Greek civilisation did in the formation of Christianity and its culture.”[\[18\]](#)

From the 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries the eastern province of Iran, Khurasan, was of special significance in the founding of the new culture (in the Middle Ages it encompassed the north-east of present-day Iran, the south of present-day Turkmenistan and the north-west of present-day Afghanistan).

In the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries the situation there resembled that of Syria, for example, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, in terms of the intensity of its conflict of ideas. In the Marv region, archaeologists have discovered a Christian monastery and cemetery; there was a large Jewish community which buried its dead in day ossuaries bearing Hebrew inscriptions; a Buddhist monastery was situated there, as was one of the most ancient and revered Zoroastrian temples. In 651 CE the last Sassanid shahanshah, Yazdegerd III, met his death here whilst fleeing from the Arabs. Medieval historians relate that his death was shameful: he was robbed and murdered in his sleep, his body was thrown into a river, and afterwards he was buried by the Christian bishop of Marv, Elijah.





The Gate of All Nations, c. 470 BCE. Persepolis, Iran.



Bas-relief with Persian soldiers.

One immediate consequence of the Arab conquest of Iran was an influx of Arabs settling in many cities or setting up military camps which soon became cities. This Arab immigration was on a mass scale; in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, for example, the Arab population already constituted a majority in the city of Qum.

The second consequence was the spread of Islam and of Arabic. During the first two centuries of Islam in the territory of Khurasan, the religion of the Arabs underwent an intensive process of transformation into the religion of the entire Caliphate, whilst the language of the Koran and various Arab tribes developed into an Arab literary language; in all of this the Persians, who had converted to

Islam, played no small part. It was here that Shi'ism, one of Islam's most important movements, developed, and in particular its extreme faction, Ismailism, and other doctrines that were to serve as rallying points for many national uprisings.

Thus during the early Islamic period (under the Umayyad Caliphate), Khurasan was a stronghold of Islamic science and Arab literature. It was here too, in Khurasan, that the anti-Umayyad rising began, instigated by Abu Muslim, leader of a political and religious party supporting the Abbasid family.

The common people were widely involved in the rising: peasants, craftsmen, and also the Khurasan dihqans, descendants of the Sassanian nobility. There were also Muslims and Zoroastrians amongst the rebels. Having established themselves on the caliph's throne, the Abbasids were naturally quick to settle with all the dissatisfied. One of the consequences of the Abbasid victory was a complete "Iranisation" of the Caliphate. The Abbasids offered a number of high positions in the state to the Iranian nobility that had helped them to seize the Caliphate. The state system of their Caliphate followed the Sassanian pattern.

There was yet another important consequence of the change of power. Before the Abbasid age the Islamic community of Iran had consisted primarily of Arabs and only afterwards of Persians converted to Islam, who were considered as clients (*mawali*) of the Arab families and tribes and did not possess equal rights with true Arabs. The Abbasids ended this division and in the same period many dihqans, who had preserved or even raised their social status, adopted Islam. This Iranian elite did a great deal for Islam.

The supporters of the Iranophile cultural movement, the so-called Shuubiyya, wrote their works in Arabic. This movement flourished especially in Khurasan under the Abbasids, and despite the fact that it inculcated into an Islamic culture the pre-Islamic ideas, traditions and customs of Sassanian Iran, in objective terms it led to the enrichment and widening of Islam itself and to a rejection of the provincial narrowness of Muslim culture. In the court of the Abbasid caliph al-Mamun (813-833 CE) translation in particular blossomed: works of many types were translated into Arabic – ethical and didactic (*andarz*), historical (numerous "*Histories of the Kings of Fars*" linked to the *Khawataw-namak* cycle), literary (such as *Kalila and Dimna*) and many others. At the same time scientific tracts and parts of religious and philosophical books were translated. It is interesting to note that at approximately the same period a Zoroastrian orthodoxy, that was not in any way prohibited by Islam, held power in Fars; basic Zoroastrian works such as the *Denkart* were written here. In honour of the arrival of al-Mamun in Marv (809 CE), a certain Abbas-i Marwazi delivered the first verses in the Modern Persian language.

These were all the first steps of the “Persian Renaissance” leading to a flowering of Modern Persian literature by the 10<sup>th</sup> century and, in the final analysis, to that of the Iranian cultures of Firdawsi, Nizami, Sa’di and Hafiz.

The creation of Modern Persian literature was also a factor of the utmost importance for medieval Persian art, for it was this which was to serve as the basis of figurative art. The essential preconditions already existed.

The illustrative quality and the variety of forms within late Sassanian art, the rich artistic traditions of wall-painting in eastern Iran and Central Asia and the no less rich traditions of Christian art in the eastern provinces of Byzantium, *etc.* But before discussing what happened to Persian art in the early Middle Ages, it is necessary to know something of the “Persian Renaissance” which flourished in eastern Iran, mainly during the rule of its Samanid dynasty – a line of Iranian nobles who claimed descent from the Sassanian general and usurper Varahran Chobin.

Modern Persian literature began as courtly literature. At that period the demotic language in the whole of Iran, Khurasan and Central Asia had for a long time been Dari, or what was to be Modern Persian. The Arabs themselves promoted the spread of Dari over a vast territory and its transformation into a language of communication between different ethnic groups; they used it to communicate with the local population in Iran, Khurasan and Central Asia[19]. The adoption of Arabic script (more convenient than Middle Persian or Sogdian) for the Dari language was a natural process. In 982 CE a geographical treatise, *Hudud al-'alam (The Limits of the World)*, was published, and in 1000 CE, the medical treatise *Kitab al-Tasrif* was completed by al-Zarhawi. But the first prose work in Modern Persian was a compilation of “universal history” (from various Arabic translations of the Sassanian *Khwataw-namak*), produced in 959 on the order of the ruler of the city of Tus, Abu Mansur Muhammad ibn Abd al-Razzaq, by four Zoroastrians (to judge by their names), “scholars of the past of the Persian kings”.

In lyrical poetry, the famous poets of the “Persian Renaissance”, Rudaki, Daqiqi and others, comprehensively exploited all the achievements of Arabic literature, but also utilised non-Arabic verse forms which were evidently still Sassanian or were re-created on the basis of Sassanian verse.

Their work was founded on oral tradition, the poetry of those same gosans who, in the courts of local rulers during the early Islamic era, continued to be “...entertainers of king and commoner, privileged at court and popular with the people; present at the council and at the feast; eulogists, satirists, story-tellers, musicians; recorders of past achievements, and commentators in their own times”[20].

The greatest literary achievement of this period was the Iranian national epic, the *Shahnama* of Firdawsi, who wrote this long poem on the glorious past of his country. Although he undoubtedly considered his subject matter as history, he wrote it in the form of a narrative poem, creating characters and combining various events from different periods or episodes from various legends around them so that the acts of his heroes and their ethical and moral, or even political consequences should stand out in sharp relief. Firdawsi's poem, like Iranian poetry of that period in general, could be said to "discover" the individual as an independent, creative being, as a personality and as the creator of his own fate and history. Man as an individual, and not as a typical representative of an estate, caste or class – it could be said that this is the leitmotif of Persian literature and social life at the time of the "Persian Renaissance".

It is clearly unnecessary to discuss the social and economic basis of this process at any length – it is completely comprehensible and has frequently been described. This, incidentally, was the golden age in the development of cities, but they differed from those of Western Europe, above all, in that their citizens had no special class privileges. The city was simply a conglomerate of manufacturing, territorial, religious and other self-governing corporations under the aegis of a civil service. Like the poets at court, the cities' craftsmen were bound together by close ties. All of these highly important circumstances bear witness to the enormous changes taking place in society, its social structure and its psychology.

Mention must be made of the fundamental difference between the medieval art of Europe and that of Iran. In western medieval art prior to the Renaissance, the acts of God, the saints and ascetics formed the subject of man's "visual" impression of the world and of its morality and history; in the medieval art of the East, however, during the course of this entire period man himself and his acts became the main focus.

During the Middle Ages the range of subjects in western art was universal, that of Persian art was national. This was a consequence of the fact that Iranian fine art was extremely closely linked to written and oral literature whose basic protagonists were ancient Iranian epic heroes and rulers, lovers, warriors, famous poets, and only very occasionally prophets and holy men.

At the time of the formation of the Caliphate and the emergence of Islam as its religion, it was natural that works of art from the preceding historical phase, such as metalwork, carved seals, stucco decoration, coins and silk textiles, should not change their range of subjects and motifs. The first Arab rulers minted coins on the Sassanian pattern, simply using the stamp for a Sassanian drachma with the addition of the Muslim religious formula "in the name of



Allah” on the coin’s face and, moreover, depicting themselves in the regalia of a Sassanid king of kings.

Some Sassanian metalwork may perhaps already be attributable to particular periods, although as far as its themes are concerned (hunts, royal or courtly banquets, genre scenes, dancers, etc.) no essential changes took place. Purely Sassanian themes and motifs survived longer in such regions as Tabaristan and Gilan. In eastern Iran a canonic scene, “the king on an ottoman throne”, was reproduced on articles of metalwork and possibly on silver medals.

During the 10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries this spread from the Indian frontier to the Mediterranean. In this scene, the king sits cross-legged on an ottoman-throne, holding a bowl and surrounded by his servants, dancers and musicians; this scene combines features that are above all Sassanian, but also Buddhist and Sogdian.



Imam Mosque. Isfahan, Iran.

On the whole, it can be said that Persian art of the 8<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries was first of all unusually varied as regards its range of themes and subjects and its influences. One of the major historians of Islamic art, Oleg Grabar, wrote: “Every newly discovered monument reveals to us completely unknown aspects of this art.”[\[21\]](#) It is true, as we have already mentioned, that there were attempts to create specific styles at the courts of rulers, such as a court style in Khurasan under al-Mamun (early 9<sup>th</sup> century) and under Mahmud of Ghazni (early 11<sup>th</sup> century), but these were merely episodes not leading to any sort of lasting unification.

Such variety is characteristic of all types of art at this time. In the architecture of Iran, for example, the hypostyle plan was introduced as the basic mosque layout, brought by the Arabs from the West (the mosques in Siraf, Nayin and Damghan), but at the same time the so-called “kiosk-mosques” were being built, based on the Zoroastrian plan of the chahar taq, and tower mausoleums were spreading (there are Middle Persian inscriptions on some of the mausoleums, alongside Arabic). Mosques were decorated with stucco panels consisting of plant and geometrical motifs, whilst in the east of the Islamic world, as in Nishapur, these motifs are extraordinarily close to those used in the west, for

example in Iraq. At the same time we know of stucco panels of that period (mid-8<sup>th</sup> century, Chal-Tarkhan) which depict not only Sassanian animals but even Sassanian deities (Mithras on a stag) and heroes of Sassanian legends (Bahram Gur and Azadeh).

All in all it could probably be said that during these centuries a process of selection was taking place in Persian art, involving a choice of forms and themes from traditional art together with various innovations. Historians of Persian art are unanimous in mentioning the slowness of this process. The most innovative art was produced in the north-west of the country.

It is especially important that in the same period one sees how the propagandistic and class character of the hunt, feast and battle scenes have entirely disappeared – they have become standard scenes, lacking any significant meaning. Sassanian symbols degenerated into purely visual motifs. The same thing happened to Sassanian depictions of birds, beasts and plants. Although they only had a benedictory significance even in late Sassanian art, during the 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries they become mere ornamentation.

Strange new motifs appear during the 9<sup>th</sup> and early 10<sup>th</sup> centuries on Nishapur ceramics, and there alone. The designs portray birds, beasts (most often a goat), various monsters, horses being attacked by beasts of prey, dancers, figures in rich clothing holding goblets and flowers, and riders on horseback. All these designs do, of course, have their prototypes in Sassanian art, but they are very primitively executed with no regard for proportion and are sometimes mere caricatures, though this style gives the faces a lively character and expressive quality.

This ceramic style, which appeared suddenly and vanished just as suddenly, possibly in the course of a single century, is an example of those completely new aspects of art appearing in connection with the new discoveries which Oleg Grabar mentions.

Ceramics from the Garrus region (north-western Iran) are also curious, executed in a technique involving the carving out of a layer of slip, which results in a low-relief design. One such bowl portrays a character from an Iranian epic, the tyrant-king Zahhak who killed Jamshid[22]. Some scholars assign these ceramics to the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

From the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century changes in Persian art are clearly distinguishable and this new phase covers a lengthy period of about 300 years, until the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century. In future, detailed studies of various aspects of art will probably enable us to specify the date when each of them arose and declined, but in the meantime it should be noted that ceramics and metalwork depicted the most vivid figurative images of this period. The golden age of miniature painting

dates from around the end of this phase of Persian art (after the Mongol conquest) and this form was subsequently to occupy a dominant position in figurative art.

The political history of this period involves the rise of the Turkic dynasties of the Ghaznavids in the east and of the Seljuks, and the crushing Mongol conquest. In view of the fact that works of art have as yet been insufficiently researched it is impossible to relate them precisely to historical events, and, on a wider scale, to events in the field of culture (often it is necessary to date objects of this period from the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries; although in the course of these centuries extremely important changes occurred both in politics and ideology).

Nevertheless, the general conclusion is totally clear. In essence, the art of this period should not be termed a “renaissance” in the generally accepted sense of the word, since one can hardly consider its aim to have been the rebirth of old traditions, for they had never died out completely. It should also be said that, to a great extent, this applies to the literary “Persian Renaissance” as well. However, we will not enter into disputes which appear to be largely terminological. One thing is indisputable – the 11<sup>th</sup> to the mid-14<sup>th</sup> centuries represent the golden age of art in Iran. In architecture, for example, mosques on the four-iwan plan appear and spread throughout Iran.

Whichever way they are interpreted (they are even regarded as an adaptation of the plan of the Buddhist vihara), they are truly Iranian and for many centuries were the glory of Iranian architecture.

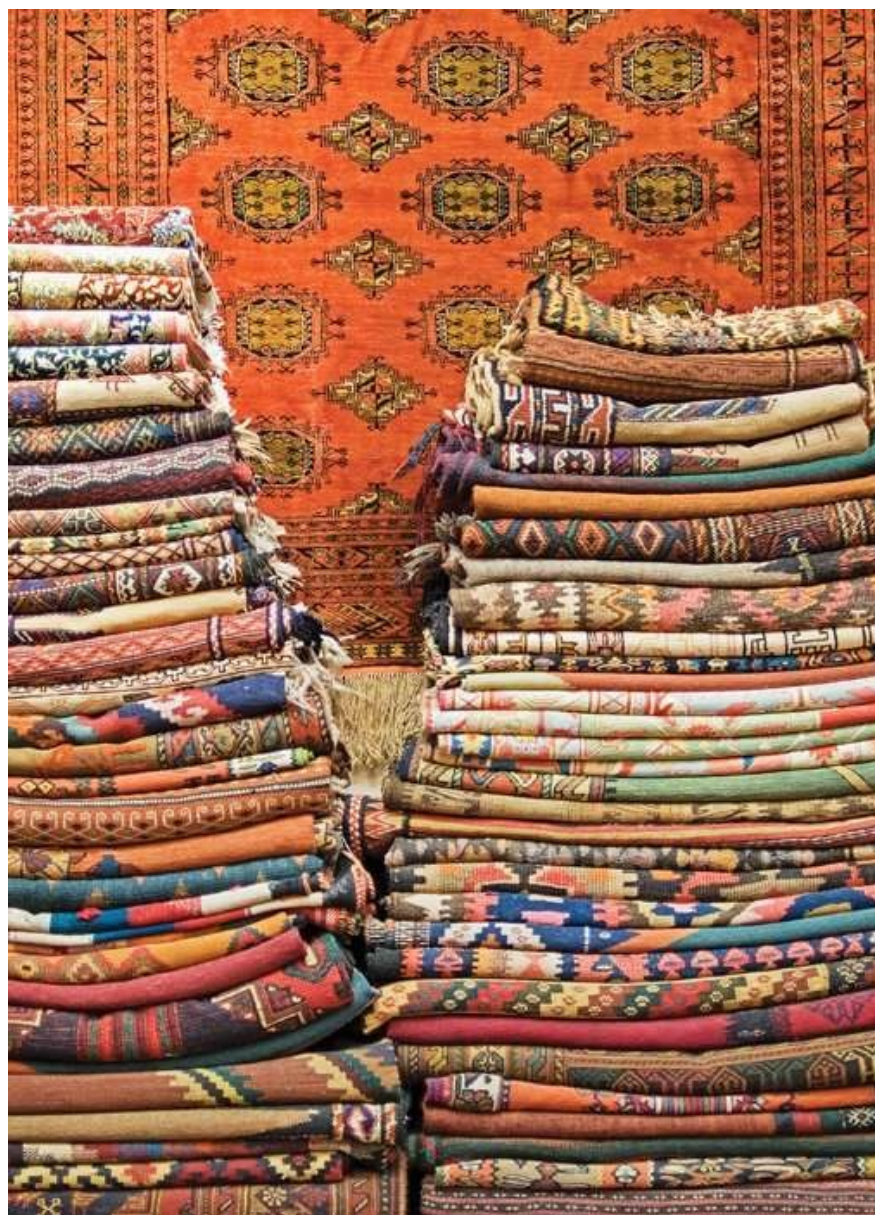
We need name only such classical monuments as the minaret of Jam, the mosques of Isfahan, the mausoleum of Sanjar, the mosque of Varamin and others. Significant changes also occurred in metalwork, above all in eastern Iran.

Sassanian traditions still survived at this time and partly on this basis, though to a much greater extent on the basis of eastern Iranian traditions, processes came about which led to the formation of a new phase in art. This phase was to reach its zenith in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

As before, we are faced with a geographical factor, involving separate historical and cultural regions. It is clear, for example, that the most outstanding mosques of this time are the Isfahan mosques built between c. 1130-1150; the most outstanding mausoleums are those in Khwasan and Azerbaijan from the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries; the most sophisticated ceramics are those of Rayy and Kashan, whilst the bronze inlay was produced predominantly in Khurasan.

Although outstanding craftsmen, as well as poets and writers, congregated at the courts of Iran’s rulers, and this had its effect on the general direction of artistic development, no dynastic art of any sort was created.





Persian carpets.





Apadana Palace, c. 530 BCE. Persepolis, Iran.

The art of Iran at this period was the art of cities, of cultural centres, an art of master craftsmen, calligraphers and painters scattered throughout the country, an art for various customers – for the sultan, of course, but also for the merchants and wealthy citizens. Possibly the most exciting branch of art of the 12<sup>th</sup> to mid-14<sup>th</sup> centuries was the production of ceramic vessels and tiles. At that time, the technique of manufacturing lustreware was becoming widespread. It was complicated, demanding double firing, but produced an object that was brightly coloured, glossy and polished, shot with gold in reflected light and imbued with rich tones in the shade. Ceramic dishes became expensive articles of display.

The lustre technique originated in Egypt as early as the 8<sup>th</sup> century (the first examples of it come from Fustat, near Cairo). Some scholars suggest that the secret of lustre was actually imported into Iran by Egyptian potters who had moved from Cairo to Rayy after the fall of the Fatimid dynasty (1171). The first precisely dated piece of Iranian lustreware is a jug from 1179 (The British Museum, London). This does not, of course, mean that all other lustreware is later than this jug, but this is the first example on which the inscription includes a date.

A vessel in The Metropolitan Museum of Art is the first in the *hafl rang* (or *minai* – painting in coloured enamels) technique which, apart from its date

(1187), also mentions the name of the artist (Abu Zayd al-Kashani). The style of painting on this vessel definitely has a number of connections with the Mosul school of miniatures. But the people depicted on it are generally round-faced (“moon-faced”, as the poets wrote) with narrow eyes and a small mouth; their hair, sometimes even that of the men, is braided into plaits and falls to their shoulders; their heads are, as a rule, surrounded by halos. This is clearly a Turkic facial type; and the clothes are also Turkic. This “ideal type” is used without exception on all lustreware, tiles and hafl rang ceramics. Its emergence coincides with the arrival in Iran of the Seljuk Turks, and the closest surviving parallel for these portrayals is provided by the Manichaean wall-paintings of Turfan.

The dishes with scenes of court receptions are probably closest of all to the Turfan paintings. We have already spoken of the canonic nature of such scenes, elaborated several centuries earlier (there are even two cheetahs here at the foot of the throne), but one should note the multitude of courtiers’ and women’s faces surrounded by halos, which is highly reminiscent of the Turfan paintings. Throne scenes were frequently depicted, not only on lustre vessels but also on minai (hafl rang). Such vessels also show scenes of feasts and hunting which were similarly standard motifs.

Inscriptions are found on many vessels (both lustre and minai) as well as on star-shaped and cruciform lustre tiles in friezes decorating the walls of private buildings (with the same designs as those on vessels) or lining the walls of mosques. Sometimes these are Koranic texts, but very often they are lyric verses or extracts from long poems (*Shahnama* of Firdawsi, *Khusrau and Shirin*, *Laila and Majnun* of Nizami, and others).

Unfortunately, the content of the verse frequently does not coincide with the image. A number of literary subjects are found on ceramics and tiles. Sometimes they are well known. Again one finds Bahram Gur and Azadeh (on several dishes and tiles), the hero Faridun with his cudgel, riding a zebu, *The Iranians Leaving the Fortress of Furud* (an episode from the *Shahnama*; on a star-shaped tile), subjects well known from Nizami’s poem *Khusrau and Shirin* (on a stamped vessel of the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, in The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg), and others.

The entire range of objects allows one to construct a certain, albeit sketchy, picture of Iranian figurative art over this period.

It has its standard themes (the royal banquet, the hunt, throne scenes, battles) founded on a tradition of great antiquity, but generalised and lacking any individual traits. It has many motifs or subjects linked in some way to oral poetry, to ballads and epics and to written literature.

These subjects are entertaining stories of ancient heroes and kings, of love and

life's pleasures, *etc.* By the 8<sup>th</sup> century they had probably already begun naming ancient ruins after such ancient heroes and kings. One also finds extremely rich ornamentation: flowers, trees, fruit, birds and beasts, often of a standard type and serving as a background or even as an independent subject, although still remaining ornamental.

All these subjects appear on ceramics, in bronze and in stucco decorations (for example, the large stucco panels from Rayy). Pieces with such subjects were sometimes made for a particular person, but more often than not they bear inscriptions invoking success and addressed to an anonymous owner, to anyone who might buy them in the bazaar. These inscriptions are sometimes dedicated to the object itself.

The craftsman praises his work, glorying in his art. Illustration overwhelms the object: even the letters of the inscription are formed with their tips in the shape of human or animal heads or simply in the form of fighting warriors (for example, on the famous early 13<sup>th</sup>-century bronze goblet in the Cleveland Museum of Art).

The works themselves cease to be anonymous. The craftsmen who made them sometimes added their names to the object and the date when it was completed, as did the scribes of manuscripts and their illustrators. The terminology used by the craftsmen to name themselves or designate their work is interesting. Inscriptions on ceramics (whether vessels or tiles) where name and date are marked, often used the standard formula: "Such and such a craftsman painted this." This signifies that he applied both the inscription and the design to the object. On many objects (bronzes and ceramics) another Arabic word is used: *amila* (made). But this same verb was also used by the artist in his inscription to a miniature in the manuscript *Varqah and Gulshah*. Miniaturists called themselves *naqqash*, as did the artist of *Varqah and Gulshah*, for example; yet metalworkers gave themselves the same name.

In the miniatures of the manuscript *Varqah and Gulshah* the names of the characters are written alongside, just as characters' names are written on lustre ceramics and tiles (this is a rare case). In miniatures from the famous Demotte *Shahnama*, the name of the subject is included in the composition, and the same is also seen on the lustre tile showing the scene from the *Shahnama* mentioned above. Could an artist in ceramics, an artist drawing designs for a bronze object, a miniaturist and a fresco artist all be defined in the same way, or at least be very close in terms of their training ?

At this point it is necessary to look more closely at the history of Persian manuscript illumination. The first Persian manuscript with real miniatures that is known to us is the above mentioned Persian poem of Ayyuqi, *Varqah and*

*Gulshah*, commonly assigned to the early or mid-13<sup>th</sup> century. It was probably produced in Upper Mesopotamia (Jazira) or Anatolia.

The miniatures were painted by the artist Abd al-Mumin ibn-Muhammad al-naqqash al-Khowi, and some of the miniatures reveal the following characteristics: the frieze-like compositions of several miniatures are analogous to frescos, with the interrupted action continuing beyond the frame in a linear development; some of them are painted against a vivid, often deep red, background which is characteristic of frescos and also, for example, of the miniatures of the Kyzyl Manichaean treatise; absolutely every detail of iconography and style in this group of miniatures coincides exactly with those found on contemporary lustreware, and especially on minai ceramics; finally, luxuriant plant ornament serves as a background to some of the designs in this group of miniatures, exactly as on ceramics.

It is the influence of the Iranian miniature which is adduced to explain the illustrations on metalwork and even the style of painting of Iranian ceramics. But is there any evidence at all, even circumstantial, bearing witness to the existence of miniature painting in Iran during the period before the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century? We do have a manuscript treatise on astronomy, Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi's *Book of the Fixed Stars*, completed in 400 AH (1009-1010 CE).

It contains fine drawings and scientific illustrations which are of a set type and are treated exactly like all illustrations to scientific works of the time. These are not, of course, miniatures in the true sense of the word; they lack any artistic perception of the world.

Information about illustrations in early manuscripts is also extremely sparse in written sources. In fact, only three references can be mentioned. Nizami Aruzi Samarqandi (12<sup>th</sup> century) relates that when Abu Nasr Arraq, the famous mathematician and nephew of the Khwarazmshah Abu al-Abbas Mamun, visited Mahmud of Ghazni (the action takes place in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century), the latter ordered him to paint a portrait of the renowned scientist Abu-All ibn Sina, who not long previously had refused to work at the court of Mahmud and had lied to Iraq.

Mahmud wanted the portrait to be duplicated in order to send it to various provinces to identify the runaway. This reference is probably pure legend, and if it is not, then the story may be of more interest to the history of criminology than to that of the Iranian miniature! More reliably, al-Rawandi relates that in 1184 he copied a collection of various poets' works in which the artist (naqqash), Jamal-i Isfahani, had included the portraits of these poets[23]. Finally, one source reports that during the siege of Marv by the Mongols in 1220, at their demand a list of artists (naqqash) and craftsmen of the city was compiled. Naturally it would be

difficult to maintain that the terra naqqash in this text applies to miniaturists.

Even earlier accounts are just as sparse and imprecise. There are the accounts of the already mentioned “official portraits” of the Sassanid rulers in the book of Sassanian history kept at Istakhr (Fars) during the early 10<sup>th</sup> century[24], and there is the information that the collection of fables, *Kalila and Dimna*, translated in the 8<sup>th</sup> century from Middle Persian into Arabic, had been illustrated by Chinese artists. Only this last report seems to be direct evidence of miniatures decorating a manuscript, but here it is a question of an Arab manuscript and Chinese artists and this is evidently credible, since it is known that Chinese artists, amongst other craftsmen, were captured by Arabs at the battle of Talass and taken to the Caliphate. From Chinese sources we even know the names of two of them – in the end they managed to return to their native land[25]. All other reports speak not of early Iranian manuscript illumination but of portrait painting or scientific illustration.

We have already seen that the portrait miniature as a genre had already established itself in the Sassanian period[26], and developed, even flourished, in Iranian painting during the following centuries. This movement undoubtedly had its specific characteristics, which have apparently still not been studied.

Thus the facts available at present attest that fresco painting existed on Iranian territory in the 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries, and that it was above all widespread in the north-east and beyond the borders of Iran; that portrait painting has been known in Iran since the Sassanian period; that there are a number of illustrations of literary and epic subjects on works of applied art, and even cycles of such illustrations, and finally, that the very earliest manuscript miniatures in Persian works known to us (*Varqah and Gulshah* and the Shiraz *Shahnamas*) bear witness to the influence of fresco paintings and the decoration of ceramics.

One can suggest that the illustrative, narrative quality, which had already been present for a long time in Persian art – in wall-paintings, metalwork, stucco and textiles – became widespread during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries in ceramics as well (on vessels and on lustre tiles, often forming what were, in essence, almost wall-paintings); only afterwards did those same artists – at any rate artists with the same technical training – also create Iranian manuscript illustrations. This is all the more likely, since, as scholars point out, one characteristic of Persian artistic perception is an extremely close connection between word and object, literature and fine art.

As a rule, comparisons run both ways: life is breathed into objects, human attributes and feelings are ascribed to them, whilst human experiences and states of mind easily find a precise symbol amongst objects in the immediate environment.





Sheikh Lotf Allah Mosque. Isfahan, Iran.

Because of this the actual circumstances of reading poetry take on another sense: the participants of the scene are no longer surrounded by everyday objects, but by object-symbols with all their various, and as a rule human, characteristics. The bowl in the hands of those listening to verse is no longer a simple bowl but a metaphor brought to life: the open tulips of wine bowls are hearts filled with blood, the lips of the cup are the lips of a beloved, the bowl itself is the bowl of the heavens tilted above the world, and the turning of a round bowl repeats the whirling of the wheel of fate<sup>[27]</sup>. It is interesting to cite the viewpoint of scholars studying comparatively early miniatures of the so-called Shiraz school (the miniatures in the *Shahnama* of 1333).

These miniatures differ fundamentally in their draughtsmanship from what we are generally accustomed to seeing in later Persian miniatures (15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries). “What one might call a painterly basis dominates here, [...] in terms of their technique these miniatures are on the one hand connected to fresco painting and on the other – and this is of vital importance – to paintings on ceramics of the so-called Rayy type, in which, as is well known, peculiarities of brushstroke and contour are explained by technical demands, *i.e.* the need to paint the object rapidly.”<sup>[28]</sup>

Of course, it is difficult to imagine a direct link between wall-painting and

designs on metal and ceramics that does not take book illustration into account. It is, of course, far easier to consider that early illustrated manuscripts have simply not survived to the present day. But all the facts cited above tell us that we have no right to insist categorically that Iranian illuminated manuscripts existed before the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century at least. How, in actual fact, could absolutely all the illuminated manuscripts have disappeared? Surely they would have been carefully preserved in court libraries. On the other hand, why have a number of Arabic manuscripts with illustrations remained, produced in the middle of the Abbasid Caliphate?

The total silence of early Persian sources on the subject of manuscript illumination is also strange. How many stories they tell of wall-painting! There are the anecdotes about Attar whose father, a merchant of perfumes (true, a fairly wealthy one), out of loyalty ordered a portrait of Mahmud of Ghazni to be set in the state apartments of his house, or the story told by Baihaqi about the erotic paintings in Mas'ud's pavilion, or the famous verses of Farrukhi (although this poet greatly disliked both antiquity and pictures): "Painted at several noble places in that palace [the palace of Mahmud of Ghazni] are pictures of the King of the East [Mahmud]. At one place in battle with a spear in his hands, at another place – at a banquet with a goblet in his hand." And not a single reliable reference to Persian illuminated manuscripts or Persian miniaturists before the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century the feudal system was at its height in Iran. At the same time, from the middle of the century, it was the age of individual rulers each striving to create their own magnificent court, with their own poets, scholars and artists. But the "prestige" of such a ruler, which he could flaunt to his rivals and subjects, was no longer a matter of precious vessels of gold, silver or bronze inlaid with gold and silver, of expensive ceremonial dinner services made in the lustre technique or painted in enamels, or of tilework decorating the halls of palaces, mosques or tombs.

These rulers were both weaker and poorer than their predecessors and there had long been no vast frescos in their palaces, no stucco panels depicting the heroic exploits of their noble ancestors and no portraits of themselves.

Miniature painting and calligraphy appear to have become the chief "prestigious" branches of art. Costly manuscripts of ancient narrative poems or verses written by the ruler's court poets or by historians praising his, or his ancestors', grandeur, and decorated with miniatures executed by court painters or simply by skilled miniaturists involved in commercial production were highly prized. As for ceramics and metalwork, they were "democratised".

Craftsmen produced these articles for the middle ranks of society. Thus there

were no longer ceramics bearing texts of great poems and decorated with pictures that were either themes from these poems or, much more frequently, pictorial equivalents of the verses; the inscriptions on metal objects, which were more durable and expensive, are popular quotations or specific catchwords – albeit from the works of great poets – and not poetic texts. The social class of customers was changing and Persian miniature painting occupied the position of the most prestigious branch of art.

For many centuries, miniature painting was to be the leading genre in the Iranian fine arts. Oleg Grabar's assertion is perfectly correct: "The Rashidiyya school of painting did have a greater importance in the development of Persian art after the death of its founder in 1318 than the architectural style of Azerbaijan in the 13<sup>th</sup> century."[\[29\]](#)

The previously mentioned Shiraz school of miniature painting is represented by illuminated manuscripts from the first decade of the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Eight examples are known, four of them being Firdawsi's poem, the *Shahnama*. In the earliest copies the miniatures are executed in a flat style with strong affinities to wall-painting and painting on ceramic.

The large number of miniatures in these early manuscripts is interesting, but it is even more important to note that many of them are simple, standard compositions, such as scenes of a palace reception, a battle or various sorts of garden scenes or hunts. Thus, in the manuscript of the *Shahnama* dating from 1333, for example, out of 52 miniatures more than 30 are standard scenes of battles, hunts and "conversations", *etc.* Such neutral, standard compositions have been aptly compared to the so-called *wasf* in literature. The *wasf* is obligatory in almost all genres of Persian literature; it is that part of a work which contains descriptions of nature, royal hunts and feasts, battles or, say, weapons, jewellery and carpets. The descriptions had no independent significance at all. They were vivid literary pictures, like decorations against whose background the action unfolded. The beauty of these decorations in literature was often arrived at through "combinative methods": poets would from time to time interchange the same standard descriptions and motifs, complicating the images more and more and illuminating them in a clever play on words[\[30\]](#).

Early miniatures are extremely exact illustrations of the text. Like those in medieval western manuscripts, they are based on a standard subject into which some significant concrete detail from the story they illustrate has been introduced. Therefore, when depicting Zahhak, the artist reproduced the standard scene of a king on a throne but added the snakes that grow from the king's shoulders.



Ancient city of Yazd, Iran.





Ancient city of Yazd, Iran.

This manner of illustration develops from one manuscript to another and gradually establishes its own standards with subjects that were, initially, original. The miniaturist proclaims his identity in the character of the painting – in the colour scheme and the attention to intricate detail. Within this framework a great artist could rival a great poet.

But all these features were to emerge somewhat later. To return to the Shiraz school in its first phase, it should be observed that these miniatures are marked by imperfection, coarseness and standardisation. In artistic terms they are not very interesting works. They are, so to speak, stereotyped miniatures.

Yet at the same period in Tabriz the masterpiece of Iranian illumination was produced, the Demotte *Shahnama*, which we have already mentioned. At that time the Mongol dynasty of the Ilkhans, or Hulaguids, ruled in Tabriz. These were the descendants of Hulagu, the grandson of Genghis Khan. One of them, Ghazan Khan (1295-1304), attempting to rescue the country from the cruel devastation that had been a consequence of Mongol invasion and rule, announced a series of important official reforms which were put into practice by his vizier, Rashid al-Din.

Rashid al-Din was an advocate of strong power and a centralised political system which, as it happened, were stubbornly opposed by the Mongol nomadic



military aristocracy. In the consolidation of centralised power Rashid al-Din was helped by the propagation of his own concept of an “Iranian empire of the Hulaguids”. He called the Mongol khan the refuge of the Caliphate, an Iranian Khusrau and successor to the Kayanid kingdom.

Rashid al-Din’s chief work, *Jami al-tavarikh* (*Collection of Chronicles*), is permeated by these concepts. The work was conceived as a genuinely universal history which would include the history of all the then known peoples, from the Franks to the Chinese. To realise this grandiose plan an entire “academy” was founded, which included scholars, calligraphers and artists – among them were two Chinese scholars, a Buddhist monk from Kashmir, a Catholic monk from France, scholars of Mongol traditions, *etc.* The manuscript of the *Collection of Chronicles* was illustrated by artists who strove to portray “ethnographic pictures” of the various peoples. The very strong influence of Chinese painting is noticeable in the illustrations – there were very many Chinese articles and Chinese craftsmen in Iran at that time, brought there by the Mongols[31].

Not long afterwards (perhaps during the third decade of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, at the court of Ilkhan Abu Sa’id)[32] a sumptuous manuscript of the *Shahnama* was produced, astounding in the quality of its miniatures and the originality of its approach. It has been suggested that the choice of themes for its 120 or more miniatures was governed by a definite programme.

First of all this programme stressed the legitimacy of royal power, the same concept as Firdawsi’s “divine Khwarnah (farrah)”, which alone provides the strength and might of a legitimate lord and his divine predestination to power. However, the important fact is that the miniatures are painted with overwhelming mastery; they are already far from being simply illustrations, although there are plenty of standard motifs in this *Shahnama* – throne scenes, hunts, banquets and battles. The miniatures of the Demotte *Shahnama* are the first to represent a new movement in Iranian miniature painting, one that has nothing to do with illustration, for “the elaboration of the narrative through the image of man leads the viewer to a highly moral interpretation of the epic”[33]. But the Demotte *Shahnama* is a unique manuscript that did not give rise to any imitations. In essence, the style of Iranian miniature painting was laid down in the 1360s and 1370s in the cities of Baghdad and Shiraz, and this was the style which was to determine its development for several centuries.

The first manuscripts with miniatures clearly displaying this style are the Shiraz *Shahnama* of 1370 and the manuscript of poems by Khwaju Xirmani, copied in 1396 in Baghdad by the calligrapher Mir Ali Tabrizi. Around this time, the initial stage of development of Iranian miniature painting – the stage represented by the miniatures in *Varqah and Gulshah* or the Shiraz *Shahnamas*

of 1330 and 1333, or by the so-called “Small *Shahnamas*” of the same period – was gradually but inexorably becoming a thing of the past.

Chinese painting of the Sung period played an important role in establishing the new style, especially in the depiction of landscape. Motifs from Chinese ceramics and textiles, widespread in Iran at that time, were equally important. Contemporary Arab miniature painting and Rashidiyya miniatures also played a large part.

During this period, it was manuscripts of the *Shahnama* which were most often illustrated. At that time, the *Shahnama* was arousing interest, in effect for the first time since it had been written, evidently for political reasons, both at the Mongol court of the Ilkhans (to which we have already referred) and at the court of their vice-regents, the Injuids in Shiraz. One could even go so far as to say that the development of genres in Iranian miniature painting began with the illustration of this work, which was viewed at the time not from the angle of its poetical merits but above all from that of its legitimist ideas. Naturally, however, this process was much more complex than that described here.

It is important to stress that from the very outset the illumination of manuscripts was concentrated at the courts of their owners and consequently, apart from their purely artistic aims, came to fulfill specific political functions.

Dust-Muhammad (16<sup>th</sup> century) also dates the beginning of miniature painting to the time of Ilkhan Abu Sa'id: “It was then that Ustad Ahmed Musa... removed the veil from the visage of painting and introduced such a manner of drawing as is generally accepted to the present day.”[\[34\]](#) It was this same Dust-Muhammad who described in detail the founding of the famous kitabkhanah (library) in Herat by Baysunghur, the grandson of Timur, who governed in Herat during the 1420s and 1430s.

The best painters of the time, brought from Tabriz and Shiraz, were gathered there. The literature, painting and calligraphy of Iran developed in such kitabkhanah as those founded by Rashid al-Din and Baysunghur. As objects of pride to the rulers at whose courts they were founded, such kitabkhanah naturally reflected the tastes of their patrons and the actual problems of the day. The history of medieval Iranian libraries is one of the most interesting pages in the history of its culture.

In referring readers to the specialist literature, we would point out that the work of many scholars has established the existence of several schools of miniature painting at various times in Tabriz, Shiraz, Mashhad, Isfahan, *etc.*

These schools all passed through phases of flowering and decay. Thus, in the 15<sup>th</sup> to early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Herat school reached the peak of achievement; in the 16<sup>th</sup> century miniature painting was dominated by the Tabriz school, and in

the 17<sup>th</sup> by the Isfahan school.

It is beyond the scope of this study to sketch even the most general outline of each school's particular characteristics or to examine even the most outstanding of their works. But the reader will find many details in the notes on the miniatures published in this volume, which have been selected to illustrate as fully as possible the characteristic features of Iran's principal schools of miniature painting.

As we have indicated above, research on the Middle Ages reveals a number of complex and unresolved problems. It appears to us that the basis for their solution will be a substantiated relative chronology, tracing the periods of development in Persian art after the spread of Islam throughout the country.

For a long time, historians of Persian art have adhered to a dynastic chronology. Such a classification has a certain justification, for after a large territory had been unified under the control of a single dynasty which then ruled for a century or more, a certain unity of style was in fact created in that state. But a more detailed study of objects and a precise determination of their dates have shown that periods of change in art do not always coincide with the emergence or fate of dynasties.

In 1970, Ernst Grube suggested a new classification for the development of Persian art in the Middle Ages. He distinguished five periods from the appearance of the Arabs to the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The first three periods, in his opinion, were common to the whole area dominated by Islam.

These are: the period of its establishment (650-850 CE), the first inter-regional style (850-1050) and the second inter-regional style (1050-1350). After this, in Grube's opinion, art in Islamic countries follows separate lines of development in different regions. As regards Iran, he considers it possible to distinguish two periods: the art of Central Asia and Iran between 1350 and 1550 and the art of Safavid Iran between 1550 and 1700.

Grube sketches only the most general outline of each period's characteristics without supplying any details. This important work was written twenty years ago and its ideas have not been further developed, as far as we know, either in studies by Grube or those of other authors. It seems to us, however, that the periodic chronology suggested by Grube is correct. In his research into Iranian metalwork of the 14<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Anatoli Ivanov has come to the same conclusions with regards to the two final periods[\[35\]](#).

In Grube's classification, the second inter-regional style (1050-1350) is the most interesting. In his opinion it arises in various centres of Central Asia and eastern Iran at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, and reaches its full development towards the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century[\[36\]](#). One of its chief distinguishing features is its

attention to the depiction of people. During this period wall-painting becomes very widespread; its style probably originating in eastern Turkestan. Perhaps there was miniature painting in eastern Iran at the time, but no examples have survived.

It is interesting that at this same period depictions of people appear in works of applied art too – in metalwork, ceramics and textiles – although this does not occur simultaneously in the various branches of art.

In his study of 10<sup>th</sup>- and 11<sup>th</sup>-century silver vessels, Boris Marshak came to the conclusion that the early 11<sup>th</sup> century formed a certain boundary in the development of art, at least in eastern Iran[\[37\]](#). He even managed to distinguish two schools of metalwork, based in Balkho-Tokharistan and Khurasan.

In the late 10<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries new phenomena were also observed in the manufacture of bronze (brass) ware in the eastern regions of Iran.

This can be clearly seen in a group of six bowls of large dimensions and beautiful workmanship decorated with benedictory Arabic inscriptions and in a few cases signed by the craftsmen[\[38\]](#). It should be stressed that the very fact that at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries signatures appear on works evidently attests to the growth of self-consciousness amongst the craftsmen.

This is the first signed bronzeware at present known on Iranian territory (one should also take into consideration a 10<sup>th</sup>-century ewer by the craftsman Bu Sa'id). Later, during the pre-Mongol period, the number of signed items increased.

All the bowls in question are richly decorated with people, birds and beasts and the signs of the zodiac. A bowl from the Kevorkian Collection bears an engraved hunting scene with a crowned rider – a subject drawn from the Sassanian period.



Miniature painting.





Masjid-e-Jāmeḥ Isfahān, also known as the Friday Mosque, 8<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Isfahan, Iran.

The appearance of living creatures on bronze articles constitutes an evident innovation, insofar as there is a large group of bronze articles dating from the end of the 7<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries from the eastern regions of Iran (possibly from Khurasan in the first instance), which are decorated only with geometrical ornament of circles and dots. At the outset there are no inscriptions on pieces in this group. Arabic inscriptions only appear at a later stage. In actual fact, only one scoop of this type is known, but its ornament of circles and dots no longer plays an independent role, serving only to fill in the background to the

inscription, which associates this scoop with the group of bowls described above, since they also have a similar background to several inscriptions. This fact attests to the geographical proximity of the two groups in question. Thus, around the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century the number of items with geometrical ornamentation decreases and items appear with inscriptions. A third group of bronze items, consisting of bowls and trays and contemporary to the two groups discussed above, was manufactured in Maver al-Nahr (Central Asia). It should be mentioned here because it also undergoes changes over the course of the 11<sup>th</sup> century: the bowls become more massive, the background ornament to the inscriptions becomes finer and the character of the script changes slightly. However, there are no depictions of living creatures on items of this group during the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is essential to point out one general feature of all three groups of bronze articles produced in neighbouring areas during the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries and that is the absence of inlay. Inlay appears on Iranian (Khurasan) items only in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and flourishes magnificently during the 12<sup>th</sup> century. This fact also supports the proposed periodic classification. Early pieces inlaid with copper and silver – such as the figure of an eagle dating from 180 AH (796-797 CE), or the ewer from Svaneti, and other objects of the 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries – if associated with Iranian territory, are more likely to have come from its western rather than eastern regions, but they were probably manufactured somewhere in Iraq, the centre of the Caliphate[39].

The absence of precisely dated examples hinders any assessment of changes in ceramics and textiles, and in this instance archaeological methods do not provide the necessary precision. The question of a periodic classification for architecture has concerned scholars for a long time[40]. During the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries great changes can be observed in architectural epigraphy. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Kufic script becomes more complicated and the so-called “plaited” Kufic makes its appearance.

It is possible that the first examples in architecture are to be assigned to the early 11<sup>th</sup> century (for example, at Rabat-i Malik), although in ceramics “plaited” Kufic script is already well represented in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time naskhi writing begins to be used as a monumental script. It has also been established that during the 11<sup>th</sup> century specific types of mosque, madrasah (mosque school) and minaret became prevalent throughout Iran, though these types were not genuinely new but had already been developed during the preceding ages. In the sphere of architectural decor much that is new emerges in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and frequently these innovations occur during the period preceding the creation of the great Seljuk empire.

It has been suggested that radical changes took place in art with the

consolidation of Seljuk power. But as we have attempted to show, these changes were already perceptible much earlier, before the founding of the Seljuk state in eastern Iran[\[41\]](#). The Seljuks' contribution to art appears to have been very small; it is even difficult to speak of the Seljuk sultans' patronage of art as their dynasty never founded a permanent capital city which would have become a centre for the artistic movements of the period.

The changes in Persian art coincide chronologically with the Seljuk conquest, but it is necessary to seek the cause of these changes in the life of the Iranian cities where craftsmen and artists congregated. But by founding an empire from the Amu Darya (Oxus) River to the Mediterranean, the Seljuks furthered the spread of Persian art to the west. A large number of Iranian craftsmen moved to Iraq and Anatolia in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries and collaborated in the creation of a new style in these areas (another group of craftsmen went to the western regions a little later, at the time of the Mongol invasion).

Of course, within this long period in the history of art in Iran (from the early 11<sup>th</sup> to the mid-14<sup>th</sup> centuries), one could probably distinguish shorter chronological intervals and, for example, define more precisely the consequences of the Seljuk conquest or of other political events.

The Mongol invasion did not cause any significant changes in the art of Iran until almost the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century[\[42\]](#), when one begins to sense the influence of China on miniatures and applied art. During the first three decades of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Iranian craftsmen also took over and reworked elements of Chinese art, but around the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century a period of changes began in all branches of Persian art.

As we have already stated, the greatest difficulties arise when we attempt to fix a periodic classification for architecture (to the present day many studies adhere to a dynastic chronology). However, Leonid Bretanitsky, who has researched the development of architecture in Azerbaijan, has pointed out that several changes can be observed between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, and this phase culminates in the 16<sup>th</sup> century[\[43\]](#).

Apparently some new phenomena occur at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century too. The period of change in architecture at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century corresponds to the beginning of the new stage indicated by Grube – around 1350.

Nor have the problems of classifying the periods of late Iranian ceramics been fully solved yet. Arthur Lane considers that the late phase in the development of Iranian ceramics covers the period from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries[\[44\]](#). This chronology has met with determined opposition from Gerald Reitlinger, who considers that the age of Timur is the watershed between the early and late periods – that is, the last quarter of the 14<sup>th</sup> and the early 15<sup>th</sup>

centuries[45]. This is close to Grube's point of view[46].

To explain the changes which occurred in the Iranian applied arts during the 14<sup>th</sup> century apart from metalwork one can study carved gems. It was during this period that Kufic script fell into disuse and inscriptions were as a rule executed in thuluth script, covering the entire surface of the seal[47]. These signs of a new style appear around the 14<sup>th</sup> century and end in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. The last rare examples of seals with depictions of animals and people are found amongst 14<sup>th</sup>-century seals.

During the course of the 14<sup>th</sup> century an important change also occurs in calligraphy – a new script is developed, nastaliq, which becomes extremely widespread throughout Iran during the following century. The majority of surviving manuscripts were copied out in this script. Historical tradition associates the invention of this script with the name of Mir All Tabrizi who worked in the middle to late 14<sup>th</sup> century. True, one can scarcely consider him the creator of nastaliq but his work apparently laid down those rules which served as models for other artists.

For a long time the design of manuscripts did not attract the attention of scholars. But studies of manuscripts of the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries have shown that the 14<sup>th</sup> century marked the turning point in the history of this art form. Between c. 1340-1390, important changes occurred in the decoration and use of colour and this almost coincides with the end of the second inter-regional period.

But the most clear-cut changes of all can be seen in Iran's metal manufacture. Earlier Islamic metalwork had been made from an alloy of copper, bronze or brass, but mostly of brass[48], and decorated with copper and silver inlay, or, after the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century, silver and gold. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century pure copper begins to be used. Such pieces were tin-plated so that food could be stored in them. The first copper vessels are not distinguished in form or ornament from contemporary bronze (brass) articles inlaid with gold and silver. The inscriptions on the copper vessels are also benedictory and in Arabic. They were presumably made for the middle ranks of the Iranian urban population.

At present, it is still difficult to determine with any great precision when the use of the new metal began in Iran, but if we take into account the fact that copper was used in the Syro-Egyptian region from c. 1330 onwards, then we may suppose that the articles which concern us in Iran also existed in the second quarter of the 14<sup>th</sup> century[49].

Together with the appearance of the new metal, certain techniques began to be used in decorating objects. Although first used on bronze (brass) objects of the preceding period, these techniques were only developed fully during the course of the new period. For instance, the practice of setting off the inscription and

ornament against a cross-hatched background: the first examples of this are observed on articles from the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. This treatment of the background apparently only appears on copper items at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. But as the comparison of precisely dated items demonstrates, this technique of treating backgrounds is a very important aid in dating works, distinguishing an entire phase in the history of Iranian metalwork from about the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century to the last quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The hatching is usually large on copper, but on bronze (brass) objects with inlay it is very fine, which may be connected with the much smaller dimensions of the latter.

Contemporary with the appearance of the new metal and the new treatment of background came the development of new types of copper objects. According to approximate preliminary calculations about forty new forms appeared, although very few examples of any one form have been found and bronze (brass) items of the 14<sup>th</sup> century remain almost unresearched. It is possible there will be new finds which will provide us with a more exact impression of how the new forms evolved, but in principle it remains a matter of importance to stress that the beginning of the new phase is characterised by the creation of new forms.

During the course of this new phase, from the mid-14<sup>th</sup> to the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the art of inlay gradually declines and disappears. This decline seems to be most pronounced during the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the last pieces with inlay decoration can be assigned to the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The art of inlay naturally serves to link the preceding phase very closely to the new one.





Bowl, late 12<sup>th</sup> to early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.  
Iran. Bronze. Khalili Collection.



Tray, 19<sup>th</sup> century.  
Iran. Diameter: 45.5 cm. The State  
Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

But on bronze (brass) objects of the 14<sup>th</sup> to the first third of the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, inlay – primarily silver – covered a fairly large surface (broad letters in the inscriptions, elements of floral ornament and human figures), whereas on new bronze (brass) items of the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century we see only thin lines of inlay, whether on inscriptions or decoration. This may be a special characteristic of the Khurasan school of coppersmiths, although it is true we do not yet know of any other school of this period.

Another new feature of decoration on copper appeared at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, namely filling a cartouche or medallion with an inscription. At first, the



inscription on bronze (brass) articles with gold and silver inlay is stretched out along a line and its background filled with scrolled tendrils. From the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, however, the inscriptions on copper objects begin to fill the space completely, the letters of the words arranged one on top of the other with hardly any space left between them; what limited background remains is cross-hatched. This tendency to fill the cartouche is exactly paralleled in the execution of inscriptions on seals of the late 15<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The rivalry between the Persian and Arabic languages in inscriptions on objects was already noticeable during the 10<sup>th</sup> to early 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, but it developed differently on the various materials. On bronze (brass) this process proceeded fairly slowly. Up to the 14<sup>th</sup> century there are fewer Persian inscriptions than Arabic. It must be stressed that there are few known versions of the latter, but they were very often reproduced on objects. On the other hand, Persian inscriptions occupied a place of honour on the famous ceramics of the late 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries decorated with lustre and enamels, to which we have already referred.

These consist of quotations from the work both of famous poets of the past (Firdawsi, Omar Khayyam) as well as of contemporaries (Nizami, Kamal al-Din Ismail Isfahani, Jamal al-Din Muhammad Isfahani). Probably this bears witness to the literary taste of the craftsmen themselves, to the links between literary and artistic circles in the cities and to the spread of Sufi poetry. The interest in Firdawsi's *Shahnama* is connected rather with some sort of anti-Mongol sentiment, for the earliest extracts from the poem appear on tiles only after 1260, *i.e.* during the Mongol period.

But with the onset of the new phase in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century fundamental changes take place. A set of Kashan lustre tiles dating from the c. 1330 bears an exact reference to the place of manufacture. After this period we know of no large-scale output either of lustre vessels or of sizeable sets of lustre tiles (the lustre tiles on tombs of that date and of the 15<sup>th</sup> century are clearly not mass-produced). In general, the mass-production of lustreware dies out for almost 200 years. As far as one can judge from preliminary observations, the 17<sup>th</sup>-century lustreware which has survived also appears not to be mass-produced and, above all, there is no longer any reason to link it with Kashan (in late historical sources Kashan is not referred to as a centre of ceramic production).

New centres of ceramic production such as Mashhad apparently arose during the course of this new phase, beginning somewhere in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century. The most surprising new feature of Iranian ceramics of the later period is the almost total absence of inscriptions on dishes and, probably, tiles, though the latter may not have been produced in any quantities in comparison with the preceding

phase. Ceramic mosaics were widely used in the decoration of buildings.

The small number of inscriptions which appear on faience dishes of the 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries should be regarded as exceptions, and by no means as a continuation of the tradition of the late 12<sup>th</sup> to the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. But the role which ceramics played in pre-Mongol and Mongol times in disseminating Persian inscriptions passes to metalwork in the new phase. The period of transition occupies the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century to the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, insofar as the number of Persian inscriptions also increases slowly, though often they are only benedictory Persian verses. But from the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century verses of Hafiz are found on copper items, and from the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century we see numerous extracts from the works of famous poets – Hafiz, Sa'di, Jami, Qasim-i Anwar Tabrizi, or such little-known authors as Salihi Khurasani.

The number of Persian verses on copper and bronze (brass) objects increases during the course of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Arabic inscriptions meanwhile, especially benedictory ones, practically fall into disuse towards the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but at the same time two new Arabic inscriptions appear, linked to the rise to power of the Safavid dynasty in Iran (1501-1736) – these are verses in honour of Ali and blessings on the Shi'ite imams, and they become prevalent on all types of object, in architecture and the applied arts. Thus, in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century a new phase begins in the history of art in Iran. The transitional period probably lasts a fairly long time, more than fifty years. One feature which characterises the art of this age is a loss of interest in the depiction of people on objects of applied art. This is indeed a surprising fact and one which has not yet been explained, for in this phase the Persian miniature flourished (although it was perhaps not at the height of its development) and was being rapidly produced at various centres.

In the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century depictions of people and living creatures appear only on carpets and textiles. It is difficult to assess whether this is the continuation of an older tradition, as we do not know of any carpets or textiles from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Nor are there any carpets or textiles with living creatures depicted in 15<sup>th</sup>-century miniatures. Possibly we are here encountering the influence of the Safavid court miniature, which is how this phenomenon is usually explained. Unfortunately, no concrete facts have yet emerged to enable anyone to defend this thesis and the effect of manuscript illumination on textile production still remains unclear. A new phase in the art of Iran begins to establish itself in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. And here the tentative nature of the accepted dynastic periodic classification becomes clearly evident, for the new Safavid dynasty had already been ruling Iran for fifty years. Yet its accession to

power did not herald any sharp changes in art.

The only new phenomenon in art which we can distinguish at the beginning of Safavid rule is the formation of a Tabriz court school of miniature painting at the end of the 1520s, *i.e.* the creation of a “prestigious” form of art. Real changes, which were most clearly expressed in metalwork and seals, began in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century.

In metalwork, hatching replaces cross-hatching in the treatment of the background to ornament, and inscriptions. The thuluth script gives way to the nastaliq script which was to dominate the following phase (only Arabic inscriptions were sometimes to be written in thuluth). The inscriptions themselves began to be laid out in a line instead of completely filling an allotted space. Elements of floral ornament were engraved on the free background and in the 17<sup>th</sup> century we see scrolled stalks with flowers and leaves. At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century representations of living creatures begin to appear amongst the ornamentation[\[50\]](#), and in the 17<sup>th</sup> century we again see human figures.

But these subjects did not, it seems, become very prevalent. During this phase, new forms of ware and new Persian inscriptions appear (sixty inscriptions have been noted for the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries alone).

A certain watershed in the development of the decoration of seals is clearly visible. It has been possible to isolate the changes because the number of precisely dated examples increases during the course of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, especially towards the end of the century. In the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the thuluth script gives way to nastaliq, the inscription no longer fills the surface of the seal so compactly and a scrolled tendril appears in the background.

Scholars of the Persian miniature are inclined to believe that the last quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was not only a time when old traditions were followed but when a new style was formed which found its expression in the works of the Isfahan school[\[51\]](#).

Unfortunately, other branches of Persian art of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, above all applied arts such as ceramics, carpets and textiles, although they are represented by hundreds of examples in the world’s museums, have not yet been sufficiently researched to enable one to confirm or deny the idea that a new phase in the history of art was formed in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps the lack of thorough research on these materials, and especially on the evolution of their ornamentation, is a factor here.

But it is possible to assume that the changes in art during the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century were not as great as during the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and therefore they are not reflected in all art forms (for example, it is entirely unclear whether there were any sort of changes in architecture). In other words,



we can now consider the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century to be a time of transition to a new phase, although this latter is not as clearly distinguishable as its predecessors. It is therefore difficult to speak of a canon style during this phase.

We now see a renewal of interest in representations of the human form, which is probably most clearly visible in textiles, although one may suppose that such fabrics do not represent a large proportion of the entire range of textile production. In 17<sup>th</sup>-century ceramics the strong influence of Chinese art can again be observed, but now aroused by the interest of Europeans in Chinese porcelain. Other art forms do not seem to experience any new Chinese influences.

During this phase active contacts with European art begin – first of all in painting. Traces of European influence can already be observed in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. First and foremost, this influence involves the court miniature, but it then spreads to other branches of art where it is reflected to varying degrees.

Here it is important to stress the fact that interest in European art initially arose in court circles, although there were various channels through which the influence was transmitted.

Apparently, the appearance of this new factor in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Persian art did not yet signify the emergence of a separate phase, nor even the onset of a transitional period – which became noticeable only from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. An analysis of metalwork serves to support this argument.



Ewer, c. 1200.  
Herat, Afghanistan. Copper.  
The British Museum, London.



Bowl with lid, c. 1265.  
Herat, Afghanistan. Copper.  
Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Although there are few precisely dated pieces from the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, a chronological series can be reconstructed. Changes are noticeable which could be explained by a decline in the quality of pieces, linked to their increased mass-production. For example, on copper and bronze (brass) items, the surface of the background to the design is not entirely hatched. Although hatching was obligatory during the 17<sup>th</sup> century; we now see in places only the engraved design against a plain background. The omission of the hatching

increases during the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and around the middle of the century a complete break with tradition takes place, for in the second half of the century the background of Iranian copper and bronze (brass) objects is tooled with punches and the hatching disappears completely.

Inscriptions on metalwork continue to be executed in the nastaliq script, but the letters become wider (especially the curves of the letters). By the end of this stage the inscriptions entirely fill their allotted space, leaving very little free background. These indications help us to identify metalwork of the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

If we compare objects from the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries with those of the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, then the most striking changes are the disappearance of most forms of objects (in the 19<sup>th</sup> century only ten early forms survive) and the sharp reduction in the incidence of inscriptions: in 19<sup>th</sup>-century objects it has so far only been possible to record eleven surviving samples, as opposed to more than eighty known from the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

But are the great changes in the decoration of metalwork also paralleled in the other applied art? During the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the characteristic scrolled tendril in the background of the inscription on 17<sup>th</sup>-century seals either degenerates into a few small spirals or disappears entirely. The character of the writing also changes gradually: letters become thicker, especially where they curve. This process culminates in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

As we pointed out earlier, Arthur Lane considers the fall of the Safavid dynasty to mark the end of the development of late Iranian ceramics, around c. 1720-1730. In actual fact there is a clear boundary, expressed in the decline of technical skill – the objects are overloaded with decoration, the cobalt and lustre painting is of poor quality – which distinguishes even late Safavid faience from late 18<sup>th</sup>- and early 19<sup>th</sup>-century ceramics.

It is more difficult to discuss carpets and textiles, since their relative chronology has not been studied at all and a history of their development remains to be written. Only in the last century has serious research begun into this area. We must limit ourselves here to the most general considerations, which become apparent on contrasting examples of the 17<sup>th</sup> century with those of the 19<sup>th</sup>. Thus we can see that ornamentation grows smaller during the hundred years that separate these carpets and textiles, but whether this change took place during the first or second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century remains unclear.

It used to be customary to end the history of the Iranian miniature with the fall of the Safavid dynasty. Since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, it is true, this tendency has begun to change and 18<sup>th</sup>-century painting is attracting ever greater attention, although no general works on miniature painting and lacquerware of the period

have yet been published. As we mentioned above, an abrupt alteration in the style of miniatures occurs in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, linked to the influence of European painting and, possibly, to that of the Indian miniature. The style of the Isfahan school of miniatures, known to us in the work of Riza-i Abbasi, survives until the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (see the work of Mu'in Musawvir), but then vanishes completely. Thus one can assume that a new period begins in the history of Iranian painting at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century; a new style immediately becomes prevalent in lacquerware also. As far as the history of architecture is concerned, Leonid Bretanitsky draws a line between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Some changes also occurred here, possibly throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century[52].

Thus we can state with some confidence that at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Persian art entered a period of change, heralding the beginning of a new phase. Evidently the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century is a sort of transitional period and new elements are finally victorious in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century.

Unfortunately, the new phase begins with a “dark age” characterised by a decline in technical skills. This was reflected in all aspects of applied art in Iran, in ceramics, metalwork, carpets and textiles, but was not caused by any great social crisis in society; rather it was a result of the collapse of life in the cities where crafts were concentrated, largely as a result of the extremely unstable political situation in the country. Wars and invasions brought desolation and ruin to the cities, something that is mentioned by all travellers in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and at the very beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The unification of part of the country under the power of Karim-Khan Zand did not last very long and was therefore not reflected in any resurgence of crafts. It was probably only miniatures and oil paintings – aspects of court art – which were of a comparatively high standard, although one should point out nevertheless that few specimens of 18<sup>th</sup>-century miniatures and painting have survived: apparently here too the number of artists declined.

Turning to the new phase which began more or less during the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, we are treading on extremely unstable ground, composed of assumptions and hypotheses, for not a single aspect of the art of that time has yet been researched. Generally speaking, interest in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Persian art emerged only about twenty-five years ago and at first was only concerned with painting and lacquerware. Applied art (with the exception of carpets) did not attract the attention of scholars, which, it may be said, is quite comprehensible, for periods of decline do not arouse enthusiasm. More literature has been devoted to carpets than to any other branch of Persian art, but until the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century works on carpets have been inclined towards too subjective an approach and



evaluation and this makes them of little help in drawing up a chronology.

It would now seem that court art during the rule of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar (1797-1834) experienced something of a resurgence. This affected painting, miniatures, lacquerware – the work of court artists – as well as jewellery and weapons of various sorts. These works were produced for the upper ranks of society and show clear signs of ancient artistic traditions. This was probably dictated by some sort of “imperial” ambition on the part of Fath-Ali Shah, as is suggested by the creation of rock reliefs – a tradition lost since the time of the Sassanids but reborn during his reign.

However, mass-produced objects such as ceramics and metalwork, which were used by a wide cross-section of society, bear witness to a clear decline in technical skill in comparison with the preceding phase in Persian art. The crisis as a whole begins in the 1840s, when Persian art fell into a decline as a result of the factory goods from European countries which poured into Iran at that time. The rejection of old miniature painting techniques and the definitive acceptance of European ones apparently dates from the same period.

A few words should be said about one curious phenomenon in Persian art, or rather in the applied arts of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is the reversion to Achaemenid patterns in art, inspired by the reliefs of Persepolis and Naqsh-e Rostam.

In recent times it has become evident that these patterns were used widely in carpets, in the manufacture of brass-and silverware and in the extant reliefs in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Shiraz palaces. Apparently these motifs were not reflected in painting (pictures, miniatures, lacquerware), since the new trend in miniature painting which emerged at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century took as its model the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Isfahan school. It is not clear what caused this fascination for such a distant historical past, although this type of work continues to be manufactured to the present day. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Persian art of this final phase, beginning in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, has still not been studied.

Casting one's eye over the history of art in Iran in general after the consolidation of Islam one can say, if only by way of preliminary hypothesis, that its progressive development continued until the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when the art of medieval Iran reached its height.

This is clearly seen in miniatures, metalwork, textiles and, though possibly to a lesser extent, in ceramics. The following centuries were a period of gradual decline, although at first glance this is contradicted by the flourishing of the miniature in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when it developed and perfected those principles and devices that had been created during the preceding period. Such a deduction completely corresponds to ideas of the historical development of Iran in the age

of feudalism; at any rate, it roughly coincides with the overall chronology accepted by Russian historians.

Within the larger phases one can, of course, distinguish shorter periods during which there was intense developments within one or other art form. For the time being, it is interesting to note that the length of each phase gradually diminishes as one approaches the modern era. This may be explained by the acceleration of historical development, but may also be the result of our as yet extremely limited knowledge of the art of earlier ages.

If a work on the history of eastern culture across several ages demands the drawing of conclusions, then we have probably not achieved that end. But in actual fact “deductions” set forth in one or two pages could only vulgarise and generalise, in effect reducing to banalities – or to excessively speculative categories – all the complexity and colour of the “motion” in the history of a culture; they would eclipse a multitude of unelucidated questions and unproved assumptions. Consequently we shall only allow ourselves one generalisation – a statement by Nikolai Konrad in a work with a bold title, *On the Meaning of History*:

In different lands, humanists have seen different aspects of the human personality as constituting its value. Their views have naturally been contingent upon their historical circumstances. Participants in the Chinese Renaissance saw the value of the personality chiefly in the human ability to attain self-perfection; the humanists of Iran and Central Asia saw it, mainly, in the fact that the highest moral qualities are accessible to man: spiritual nobility, magnanimity, friendship; the representatives of the Italian Renaissance regarded human beings as, above all, the bearers of reason, considering reason to be the highest manifestation of humanity's essence.<sup>115</sup>

Although its underlying meaning is to assert the existence of Iran's own special “renaissance”, the description of Iranian humanism given here seems, nevertheless, to be correct, despite the fact that a search for “renaissances” in various historical and cultural areas is not, as we see it, a problem that is particularly relevant to the history of Iranian culture. How many as yet unresolved, and consequently more relevant, problems there are in this field! For the task of precise dating is still incomplete, as is that of precise location for many, if not the majority, of pieces. Nor is there yet any closely argued historical and cultural interpretation of subjects and styles that uses all the available sources – if not for the majority, at least for very many of the pieces.

Such a complex task requires the scholar to refrain, for the time being, from any generalisations or outline sketches. That is why this outline is incomplete:

indeed, many of its judgements may appear premature. How could one, then, even consider a “conclusion”?



Tile, early 14<sup>th</sup> century.  
Herat, Afghanistan. Ceramic.  
Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran.





Miniature: Polo Game (detail), late 1520s.



# The Lost Treasures



**1. Hilt of a sword, 12<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.**

*Bronze, cast, length: 17.5 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. 19536. Acquired in 1974 (chance find in north-western Iran).*

Bronze swords – as a rule cast and with a crescent-shaped pommel – were widely produced in north-western Iran during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE. It is possible that the hilt and pommel were once inlaid with ivory or wood between the tangs.

**Bibliography:**

Lukonin 1977a, pp. 46, 47.



**2. Vessel, 10<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.**

*Clay, thrown on a potter's wheel, covered with red slip and burnished, height: 31 cm; diameter of body: 20.3 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. 19502.*

*Donated in 1970 by J. Gluck, scholar of antique and medieval art.*

Similar vessels with very thin walls have been found at burial sites in the Caspian region (Kaluraz and Amlash). It is possible that they had no practical purpose and were manufactured especially for burial rites. On one such vessel (in the Tehran Archaeological Museum), for example, found at the Kaluraz burial site, the spout is fixed to the body almost at the base and, furthermore, turned backwards. Pottery of this type is usually assigned to the Iron Age II.

**Bibliography:**

Lukonin 1971, p. 9; Lukonin 1977b, p. 39.



**3. Vessel with a long lip, 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE.**

*Bronze, forged from a thick sheet (pouring lip and handle soldered on), length: 17.2 cm.*

*The Rudaki Museum, Pyanjikent. Acquired in 1970.*

This is an extremely rare metal vessel, if not the only surviving one of its kind, from the Iron Age II or the end of the Iron Age I. Its pouring lip and feet mimic the long beak and claws of a bird.

Similar vessels, made of clay, are found in north-western Iran. The vessel was discovered by chance in the mountains of Tajikistan, in the village of Fatmev, which marks the north-eastern boundary beyond which no vessels with this particular design have been encountered.

**Bibliography:**

Lukonin 1977b, p. 40.



**4. Vessel with a long lip, 10<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.**

*Clay, covered with black slip and burnished (body thrown on a potter's wheel, lip modelled separately), height: 20 cm; diameter of body: 16.5 cm. Museum of Oriental Art, Moscow. Inv. No. 1821-II. Acquired in 1946; gift from the Iranian newspaper Iran-e ma [Our Iran].*

This vessel is typical of the Caspian region during the Iron Age II. Its lip is in the form of the head of a bird with a long beak.

Such ceramic vessels, apparently specially produced for burial rites, were copies of metal vessels.

**Bibliography:**

Maslenitsyna 1975, ill. 14; Lukonin 1977a, p. 40.



**5. Vessel in the form of a falcon, 10<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.**  
*Hand-worked clay, covered with slip, with traces of colouring,  
height: 19 cm; length: 27 cm. Museum of Oriental Art,  
Moscow. Inv. No. 4972-II. Donated in 1970 by the  
Government of Iran to the Government of the USSR.*

The purpose of this vessel is unclear, but similar decoratively-shaped vessels, or rather clay sculptures (in the form of various creatures), are found in burials of the Iron Age II in the Amlash area (Caspian region). However, vessels shaped like birds have not been found at any of the sites in this region excavated by specialists.

**Bibliography:**

Lukonin 1971, p. 10; Maslenitsyna 1975, p. 178, ill. 5.





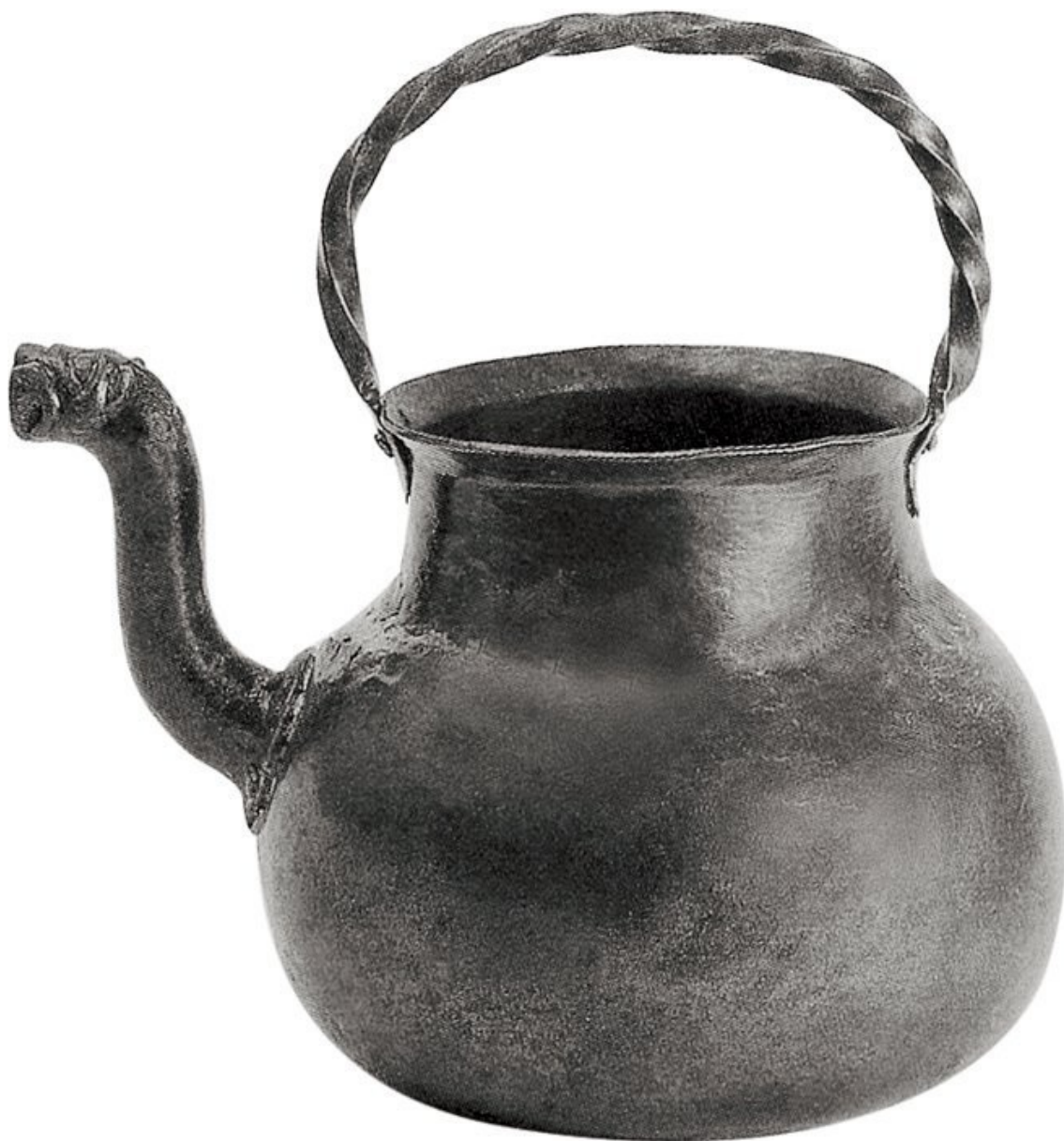
**6. Vessel, 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE.**

*Clay, painted and burnished, height: 21.5 cm;  
diameter of body: 19 cm. Museum of Oriental Art,  
Moscow. Inv. No. 4414-II. Acquired in 1945.*

The vessel comes from the excavations at Sialk (near Kashan). It is painted red and along the inside of the rim there is a small-toothed pattern. Down the rim and neck, passing onto the handle of the vessel, is a thick vertical stripe which changes below the handle into a thin wavy line that drops undulatingly towards the base. The spout is flattened at the sides and decorated with a network of triangles; the swelling at the base of the spout has a pattern of dots enclosed in a circle, from which three cross-hatched, extended petals radiate.

**Bibliography:**

Lukonin 1971, p. 12; Maslenitsyna 1975, ill. 4; Lukonin 1977b, p. 44.



**7. Spouted vessel, 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.**

*Bronze, forged from a sheet (handle and spout cast and riveted), height: 11 cm; diameter of body: 9.5 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. 19577.*

*Donated in 1971 by the scholar Krishna Riboud (France).*

This “teapot” vessel is typical of Lorestan culture. Of special interest is the spout, which terminates in a lion’s jaw. Only since the 1960s have such vessels begun to be found during the course of scientific excavations, as a result of which their exact date of manufacture has been determined.

Bibliography:  
Lukonin 1977a, p. 48.



**8. Finial of a votive standard, 800-750 BCE.**  
*Bronze, cast by the cire perdue method, tooled with a chisel, height: 17 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. 19574. Donated in 1971 by the scholar Krishna Riboud (France).*

This is a famous Lorestan idol. Hundreds of similar finials were found by local inhabitants plundering the graves of Lorestan. Such idols were very popular among collectors and many of them are now to be found not only in private collections but in the museums of Europe and the USA. It is probably with objects such as this (and

also with bronze psalia) that the concept of a Lorestan style is most often associated. An idol is, as a rule, an anthropomorphic being with a number of human traits (male and female). Dragons with the heads of beasts of prey or birds grow from its torso. The figure is three-dimensional and can be observed from various angles. The idol was mounted on some sort of shaft (hence the frequent designation in specialist literature – “finial of a votive standard”). Until the 1960s, the exact date of manufacture of such objects was unknown, but in the early 1970s a Belgian archaeological expedition finally found the first such idol in an intact burial site at Tattulban (Chinan, Pusht Kuh, Lorestan), where the material associated with it (pottery, weapons) enabled them to determine its date to around 800-750 BCE. Even so the use of such standards and the rituals associated with them remain to be explained. Only one thing is so far clear – that they had no practical function.

#### Bibliography:

Lukonin 1977a, p.49.





**9. Part of a horse harness,**  
**late 2<sup>nd</sup> to early 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE.**  
*Bronze, cast, diameter: 8.3 cm. The State  
Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. 18613.  
Donated in 1934 by the Government of Iran.*

The head of the moufflon with its enormous horns, and the two beasts of prey at the sides, are executed in a manner typical of Lorestan bronzes. They undoubtedly had some sort of symbolical significance and many other details of horse harness are decorated with similar figures. It is usual to describe such pieces as “typical

Lorestan bronzes”: they emerged suddenly in Lorestan around the 12<sup>th</sup> century BCE, replacing the local culture that had existed till then, and their manufacture ceases in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

Bibliography:

Lukonin 1971, p. 4; Lukonin 1977b, p. 12.



**10. Horse bit with psalia, 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.**

*Bronze, cast by the cire perdue method,  
engraved, height: 9.5 cm; length: 22 cm.  
Museum of Oriental Art, Moscow. Inv. No. 4465-II.*

Bits for horses with psalia in the form of real or mythical beasts or deities of the local pantheon are the most common Lorestan objects found in museums and private collections. However, they have still not been found in any excavations supervised by specialists. There are a great number of images on these psalia, which catered for the tastes of a very varied clientele. Moufflons with solar signs and plant ornament engraved on their bodies are probably the image most frequently found on objects of this type.

Despite the great number of such objects, they remain fairly mysterious. The psalia and bit are too big for use on horses and nearly all the known examples bear no traces of having been used.

It is also unclear why they have never yet been found during the course of scientific excavations, as numerous pieces of horse harness usually form part of the inventory of a grave's contents.

**Bibliography:**

Maslenitsyna 1975, p. 71, ill. 56; Lukonin 1977b, p. 46.



**11. Rhyton, 5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.**  
*Silver, embossed and chased, height: 20 cm;  
weight: 1600g. The Erebuni Museum, Yerevan.*

Rhytons, vessels for drinking and ritual libations, in the form of a horn or the head of an animal are known to have been in use on the territory of Iran from at least the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE. Manufactured from precious metals, stone or clay, the rhytons came in two basic forms: goblet-rhytons and those in the shape of a curved horn. Goblet-rhytons sometimes had handles and in this case served as ritual vessels.

Kings and rulers are depicted drinking from rhytons on Assyrian reliefs, like the 8<sup>th</sup>-century reliefs at Khorsabad. The wine was poured straight into the man's open mouth, and as such resembles porrónes in Spain, or the wineskins found in the Caucasus.

During the Achaemenid era in Iran, silver and gold rhytons became especially popular – such as the tributaries on the Persepolis reliefs, portrayed with rhytons in their hands.

Greek metalworkers also produced rhytons for the Persian nobility or for the satraps (governors of a province) of states in Asia Minor annexed by the Persians. This form of vessel became widespread throughout the entire Near, Middle and Far East and was widely used up until the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE. The rhyton was one of the attributes of power for some eastern rulers (among the Scythians, for example).

Rhytons with the protome of a horse are typical of Achaemenid metalwork. One is struck by the depiction of the horse's gear, the treatment of its mane and its muscles which are an exact replica of the horses depicted in the reliefs of Persepolis.

This rhyton, the rhyton with a rider and two other silver rhytons, in the form of a goblet and in the form of a bull's head decorated round its rim with figures of a seated Dionysus and women playing instruments, were all found crushed (or, more likely, deliberately flattened) in a large clay vessel which was buried on the site of Erebuni (an Urartian town of the 8<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE). The vessel was discovered during building work in the courtyard of a private house and consequently it has not been possible to determine the character and date of the archaeological layer.

The latest rhyton of this hoard (in the form of a bull's head) was very likely manufactured in Ionia and dates from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

As excavations of the Urartian citadel of Erebuni have shown, after the fall of the Urartian Kingdom the headquarters of an Achaemenid satrap was apparently situated here. As a rule, satraps were only chosen from amongst the Persian and Median nobility.

Archaeologists have discovered traces of the rebuilding of several Urartian buildings. An apadana-palace with thirty wooden columns was erected on the hilltop of Erebuni, built according to the plan of the Achaemenid palaces of Persepolis and other buildings with a religious function. It is highly likely that all the rhytons were



ceremonial and festal vessels of the Persian vicegerent of Armenia.

**Bibliography:**

Arakelian 1976, pp. 41-47, pl. LVIII; Lukonin 1977b, p. 80.



**12. Rhyton, 5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.**

*Silver, embossed, chased and engraved, height from horse's head to outer rim: 42 cm; height of rider: 20.5 cm; weight: 1800g. The Erebuni Museum, Yerevan.*

This is the only known rhyton surmounted by the figure of a horse and rider. The rider wears the so-called Median dress with a short sword (akinakes) in his belt and a Median headdress with the figure of an eagle. The horse-cloth is interesting with its woven motif of ibexes and a bull and its fringe – characteristic of the Achaemenid age.

Only one other free-standing Achaemenid sculpture of a riding warrior in such costume is known.

This is the gold figurine (height 7.4 cm) from the Oxus hoard of Achaemenid jewellery found in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century at the site of Takht-i Kuwat (on the banks of the River Vakhsh, now in Tajikistan). The figure subsequently found its way to India and from thence to The British Museum.

Although portrayals of Achaemenid riders are fairly rare in general, this is undoubtedly no ordinary rider on the rhyton but in all probability an important noble, possibly the governor of the province (satrapy) of Armenia, which formed part of the Achaemenid state. This is evidenced not only by the headgear (kulah) with its image of an eagle (according to Xenophon the royal Achaemenid standard was crowned with the figure of an eagle), and the ceremonial dress and special hairstyle and earrings (now lost), but also by the place where the rhyton was found (at the site of Erebuni).

The portrayal is in typically Achaemenid “imperial” style, with details of the horse harness, akinakes, dress, *etc.* rendered with extraordinary precision. Apparently the rhyton served not only for drinking but for some sort of possibly ritual libations – there are small openings in the forelegs of the horse through which narrow streams of wine could have been poured.

#### Bibliography:

Arakelian 1976, pp. 37-41, pls. LVI, LVII; Lukonin 1977b, pp. 72, 76.



**13. Rhyton, 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE.**

*Silver, cast and forged, with traces of gilding,  
length: 50 cm. The State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg. Inv. SBr IV. 3.*

This rhyton in the shape of a horn is probably more typical of Achaemenid art than is the goblet-rhyton. The protome of a winged goat at the end of the rhyton was a popular symbol in Achaemenid Iran; it is an incarnation of the god of victory, Verethragna. It is also encountered on engraved gems and in architectural decoration and reliefs.

The rhyton was found in 1876 in a Scythian barrow of the 5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE (the “Seven Brothers” burial mound near the village of Verenikovskaya, Kuban province, in barrow 4).

**Bibliography:**

Smirnov 1909, No. 15.



**14. Handle of a vase,  
in the form of a stag, 5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.**

*Silver, cast and gilded, height: 16.5 cm; weight: 222g.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. S-273. Transferred in 1859 from the Kunstkammer  
as part of Peter the Great's Siberian Collection.*

Handles of large silver vessels, in the form of animals (the overwhelming majority are ibexes, occasionally winged, or moufflons), have survived in large quantities. The lower plate which was fastened to the body of the vessel often bore engraved or even relief images of antique palmettes or heads of the Egyptian god, Bes, executed in the style of Asia Minor.

Several such vessels with handles have survived intact in many of the world's museums; their form is reminiscent of antique amphoræ.

Vessels of identical form depicted, for example, in the hands of tributaries on reliefs decorating the Apadana at Persepolis have different handles, more like ancient oriental ones. Therefore similar vessels, although widespread throughout Achaemenid Iran, were possibly produced in Asia Minor for Persian clients. To date this is



the only handle depicting a spotted stag.

An 18<sup>th</sup>-century drawing of objects from the Kunstkammer depicts the stag with branching antlers. Old inventories of the Kunstkammer note that the handle was found before 1734 in a barrow on the River Bukhtarma near Ustkamenogorsk.

**Bibliography:**

Smirnov 1909, No. 18; Oriental Jewellery 1984, No. 18.



**15. Pendant temple ornaments, 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE.**

*Gold, soldered and decorated with granulation, length: 12.95 cm and 13.15 cm; weight: 100.73g and 101.07g. The Janashia Museum of Georgia, Tbilisi. Inv. No. 26. Acquired in 1908.*

Pendant temple ornaments formed part of the Akhalgori hoard, discovered accidentally in 1908, at the site of a female burial from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE near the settlement of Sadzeguri on the left bank of the River Ksani.

More than a hundred objects survived including gold ornaments (torques, jewellery, earrings, parts of horse trappings, etc.),

silverware, and bronze objects (horse bits and pieces of harness).

These pendant ornaments are masterpieces of the goldsmith's art. The finest granulation is used, individual parts are created from fine wire and thin gold leaf. The bodies of the horses are formed of two crafted halves soldered together. The legs and ears are of gold leaf and the details in relief, even the horses' eyes are soldered on with fine wire.

The form of the temple pendants – a wide plaque surmounted by a large rosette with special springs for fastening – is not found amongst objects from Achaemenid Iran, whereas the figure of the horse, with its horse-cloth ending in a toothed pattern and drop-shaped pendants, "plumes" and harness meticulously portrayed, is indisputably Achaemenid.

The technique employed is also Achaemenid, although ornamental jewellery found in Iran (such as the so-called "Pasargadae treasure" or the women's ornaments found at Susa, dating from the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century BCE) does not have such rich granulation.

The temple pendants of the Akhalgori hoard are an example of metalwork fashioned in the imperial Achaemenid, yet incorporating the achievements of the local metalwork schools, which can be seen in the details of the ornamentation.

#### Bibliography:

Smirnov 1934, pp. 23-29 (detailed description), pl. III.



**16. Bowl, 5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.**

*Gold, chased, height: 10.7 cm; weight: 924g.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No.*

*Si 1727 1/71. Transferred in 1859 from the Kunstkammer  
as part of Peter the Great's Siberian Collection.*

This bowl with its horizontal fluting on the body would be almost indistinguishable from the vessels borne by tributaries to the Achaemenid king on the reliefs of the Apadana at Persepolis, were it not for one detail – the handles in the form of panthers with their heads turned backwards. These are fairly crudely riveted to the vessel and were possibly added somewhat later.

Panthers are extremely unusual in ancient Iranian art of the Achaemenid age: depictions of such beasts are more frequently encountered in eastern Iran and in Siberia. However, the animals are fashioned in the Iranian, Achaemenid style: round eyes, the tensed muscles of the body, and the ribs portrayed as a series of crescent furrows, exactly as in depictions of ibexes, moufflons or bulls in Achaemenid jewellery.

It is not known where this vessel was found. It was sent to Peter the Great in 1716 from Tobolsk by the governor, Prince Matvey Gagarin, amongst items found in ancient graves. It is not impossible that the vessel once formed part of the inventory of a rich burial, such as those of chiefs of the local tribes (Saka) discovered in the Altai.

**Bibliography:**

Smirnov 1909, No. 19; Artamonov 1973, pp. 215-216, ill. 288;  
Oriental Jewellery 1984, No. 4.



**17. Torque, 5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.**

*Gold, diameter: 18.2 cm; weight: 382.9g.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. Z-568. Transferred in 1859 from the Kunstkammer  
as part of Peter the Great's Siberian Collection.*

The technique employed in the construction of this torque is remarkable. It is made of two gold tubes, one fitting over the other and joined on one side by means of a wooden peg and a small chain (the loops to which it was fixed have survived). The ends form sculpted figures of horned and winged lions (each soldered from two cast halves, the heads produced separately). The beasts' horns and necks are covered with soldered compartments for inlay (separately cut insets of gemstones or glass; some insets of Iranian turquoise survive). The body and wings have hollow cavities – crescent, circular or triangular with curved sides – into which turquoise was apparently also inset.

According to classical authors, gold torques formed part of the royal regalia and were sometimes bestowed by the king of kings or a courtier who had performed some particularly distinguished service. They are depicted on Achaemenid sculptures in Iran. Several torques formed part of the Oxus hoard.

Images of mythical beasts are typical of Achaemenid art; those on this torque are considered to be the best examples of their kind in the world. As concerns technical execution and stylistic details, they have their counterparts in a few surviving gold bracelets such as those of the Oxus hoard which are closely related to the torque and in depictions on reliefs, seals, textiles, *etc.*

There is, however, a remarkable singularity about the torque's ornamentation: the cavities for insets on the back of the beast's body are fashioned in quite a different style from those on Achaemenid



objects in the imperial style, but are close to similar details in Achaemenid metalwork of eastern Iran. This peculiarity, which is also characteristic of inlaid gold articles (so-called Saka pieces), is of undoubted importance in locating the region where the torque was produced.

Bibliography: Artamonov 1973, pp. 168, 169, ill. 221; *Oriental Jewellery* 1984, No. 2.



**18. Torque, 5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.**

*Gold, inlaid with turquoise, diameter: 17.3 cm; weight: 311g.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. Z-566. Transferred in 1859 from the Kunstkammer  
as part of Peter the Great's Siberian Collection.*

The torque is made from fine gold wire with heads of lionesses set at the ends, their eyes and ears inlaid with turquoise. The sculpted heads are in the Achaemenid style, but individual features are close to objects of the so-called Saka style, in particular to wooden figures of beasts from barrows in the Altai.

**Bibliography:**

Artamonov 1973, p. 187, ill. 240; *Oriental Jewellery* 1984, No. 6.



**19. Perfume phial, 5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.**

*Gold, inlaid with turquoise, height: 3.5 cm; weight: 25.3g.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. Z-557.*

*Transferred in 1859 from the Kunstkammer as part  
of Peter the Great's Siberian Collection.*

This perfume phial, with its stopper in the form of a bird's head, was fashioned with unusual sophistication using the cloisonné technique. Pieces of turquoise are set in soldered gold grooves on the bird's throat; grooves on the body apparently once held enamel, as is seen in a collection of Achaemenid jewellery. The bird has its claws fastened onto a snake made of wire. Several technical details (in particular the clamps at the sides of the tail, into which bird feathers were apparently fixed) relate this object closely to the aigrette.

This gift marked the beginning of Peter the Great's Siberian Collection; it formed part of a collection of valuable objects presented to his wife Catherine in 1715 on the birth of the heir to the Russian throne, by a factory owner from the Urals, Nikita Demidov. Amongst the gifts there were also ancient items found in Siberian barrows. Ancient relics interested Peter and he ordered the Siberian governor, Prince Matvey Gagarin, to collect similar items. The first consignment dispatched by Gagarin was received in 1716. In 1718 a special edict was published, announcing that everything "curious and of great antiquity" should be collected for Peter. In effect it was this edict that led to the founding of the first Russian museum – the Kunstkammer.

Articles from Siberia arrived in St Petersburg between 1721 and 1726. The Siberian Collection was made up of these articles and of

those found by two special expeditions sent to Siberia to investigate “gold from graves”, one headed by D G Messerschmidt between 1720-1726 and an Academy of Sciences’ expedition headed by G F Miller between 1733-1743. The collection was kept in the Kunstkammer until 1859, when it was transferred to the Hermitage.

**Bibliography:**

Artamonov 1973, p. 199, ill. 270; *Oriental Jewellery* 1984, No. 14.



**20. Cylindrical seal, 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE.**

*Carved sapphirine, height: 5.4 cm.*

*The Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.*

*Inv. No. 12B/254. Donated in 1915 by V. Corbet.*

The seal depicts the triumph of the king of kings Artaxerxes I over the rebellious Libyans. The Old Persian cuneiform inscription contains the name and title of Artaxerxes.

Cylindrical seals came into use in the Near East as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE. They were rolled onto clay tablets, the basic form of written documents in the Near East, and onto the clay stoppers of vessels, etc., serving not only as the owner's or scribe's mark, but also as a type of amulet. Excavations of the Achaemenid capital, Persepolis, have revealed cuneiform documents from archives of economic affairs with imprints from similar seals. The scene depicted on the cylinder could be rolled off continuously as many times as one wished, thus forming a frieze similar, for example, to the sculpted friezes of Persepolis.

Cylindrical seals were used in the Near East up to the early centuries CE – essentially, for as long as clay tablets were in use.



Bibliography:  
Shileiko 1925, No. 1.



**21. Cylindrical seal, 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE.**

*Carved sapphirine, diameter: 1.7 cm; height: 3.5 cm.  
The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No.  
Gl. 849. Transferred in 1925 from the museum attached  
to the former Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

The cylinder shows the king of kings Artaxerxes I or the Persian commander Megabyzes. In front of him is the kneeling figure of the Libyan satrap Inarus who led a revolt and attempted to seize the Egyptian throne in 456 BCE. The revolt was cruelly suppressed. Behind Megabyzes' back are captive Libyans.

**Bibliography:**

Lukonin 1971, p. 14.



**22. Aigrette, 5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.**

*Gold, embossed and tooled with chisels and punches;  
soldered compartments for enamel inlay (on wings and body);  
traces of coloured enamel, height: 15.8 cm; weight: 209.78g.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No.  
Si 1727 1/131. Transferred in 1859 from the Kunstkammer  
as part of Peter the Great's Siberian Collection.*

A mythical vulture plunging its claws into an ibex was a fairly popular motif both in Achaemenid art and in the art of the Saka (in particular one such image made of leather was found in one of the Pazyryk barrows in the Altai). However, the symbolical significance of such images has not been established.

A series of details (the ornamentation on the back of the ibex's body, its upturned hind legs, etc.) relate the plaque to objects of Saka art.

Bird feathers were inserted into the rings soldered onto the vulture's tail; loops on the back of the plaque served to fasten it onto cloth or leather. This is the only evidence that the aigrette was used either as an ornament sewn onto clothing or, more probably, as part of a ruler's headgear (headgear including similar objects is known, albeit on later objects).

**Bibliography:**

Artamonov 1973, pp. 189, 190, ill. 241; Oriental Jewellery 1984, No. 5; Treasures 1994, No. 3.



**23. Persian warrior (fragment of  
a grey sandstone relief), 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE.**  
*22.3 x 20.2 cm. The State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg. Inv. No. S-461.*

This is unquestionably a fragment of the relief decoration of a stairway in one of the palaces (in all probability, the Tripylon) of the Achaemenid capital, Persepolis. The warrior depicted on it, in Persian dress owing much to Elam, with a bow and quiver on his back and a spear in his hand (lost), is one of the regiment of “immortals” – the guard of the Achaemenid king of kings – recruited

from among young members of the nobility, who accompanied the royal court during battle and on festive occasions and who stood guard at court. Portrayals of the “immortals” were executed according to a strict canon which was not altered during the entire course of the Achaemenid period; they decorated the main staircase of many buildings at Persepolis.

It has not been possible to establish how the fragment came to be in the Hermitage. However, one could venture a suggestion. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a Scotsman, Robert Ker Porter, was invited to take up a post at the Russian court as a painter of battle scenes. He soon married a Russian girl, a relative of Alexei Olenin, the president of the Academy of Arts in St Petersburg. In 1818 the Academy sent Ker Porter to Iran to draw up plans and sketch the ruins of Persepolis and other antiquities.

Ker Porter wrote an account of his journey and published it in London. Here he mentions a number of times that he brought back to Russia several “objects of ancient art”. Ker Porter died and was buried in St Petersburg, and there is an album of his sketches of Iranian (Achaemenid and Sassanian) monuments in the Hermitage.

The fate of those objects he brought back is unknown, but it is possible that it was he who brought back both this fragment of relief and several Achaemenid cylindrical seals.

#### Bibliography:

Lukonin 1971, pp. 15, 16.





**24. Seal, 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE.**

*Carved agate, height: 2.6 cm. The State  
Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. Gl. 888.*

Seals in the form of a truncated pyramid, together with cylindrical and scaraboid seals, are typical of the Achaemenid and early Hellenistic ages.

Cylindrical seals were traditional in the Near East and produced chiefly by local craftsmen in Mesopotamia and Iran; pyramids and scaraboids were made mostly by Greek craftsmen in Asia Minor. However, the designs were executed in the “imperial” style of Achaemenid art. This seal shows the Achaemenid king of kings and a winged goat – one of the incarnations of the Zoroastrian god of victory, Verethragna – in single combat. The scene had a symbolical significance: in this combat the king of kings acquired the qualities of the god of victory.

**Bibliography:**

Lukonin 1977b, p. 73; Oriental Jewellery 1984, No. 21.



**25. Seal, 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE.**

*Carved saphirine, diameter: 2.9 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg. Inv. No. Gl. 892.*

This conical seal also belongs to the group of Greco-Persian carved gems. The “star” motif composed of the protomes or heads of various animals is characteristic of the glyptic art of both Asia Minor and Iran. The symbolism of this motif in Iran may possibly be linked with incarnations of the Zoroastrian deity of victory, Verethragna.

The seal came from the collection of L. Ross, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century collector of antiquities.

**Bibliography:**

Lukonin 1977b, p. 89; Oriental Jewellery 1984, No. 23.



**26. Seal, 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE.**

*Carved sapphirine, 3.4 x 3 cm. The State  
Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. Gl. 887.*

The scaraboid form of the seal is typical of the group of Greco-Persian carved gems produced by Greeks from Asia Minor to fulfill orders from Persian courtiers and kings. The twined gold ring of the seal is also of Asia Minor craftsmanship of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

The scene on the seal is of a battle between a noble Persian rider and a Scythian warrior.

Depictions of a battle between Persians or Greeks and “barbarians” were very popular, not only on glyptics but on other objects of art, for example, on the metalwork manufactured by Greeks for Persian or Scythian clients.

**Bibliography:**

Lukonin 1977b, p. 88.



**27. Signet-ring, 4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BCE.**

*Carved sard set in a gold ring, length of gem: 1.7 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. Gl. 891.*

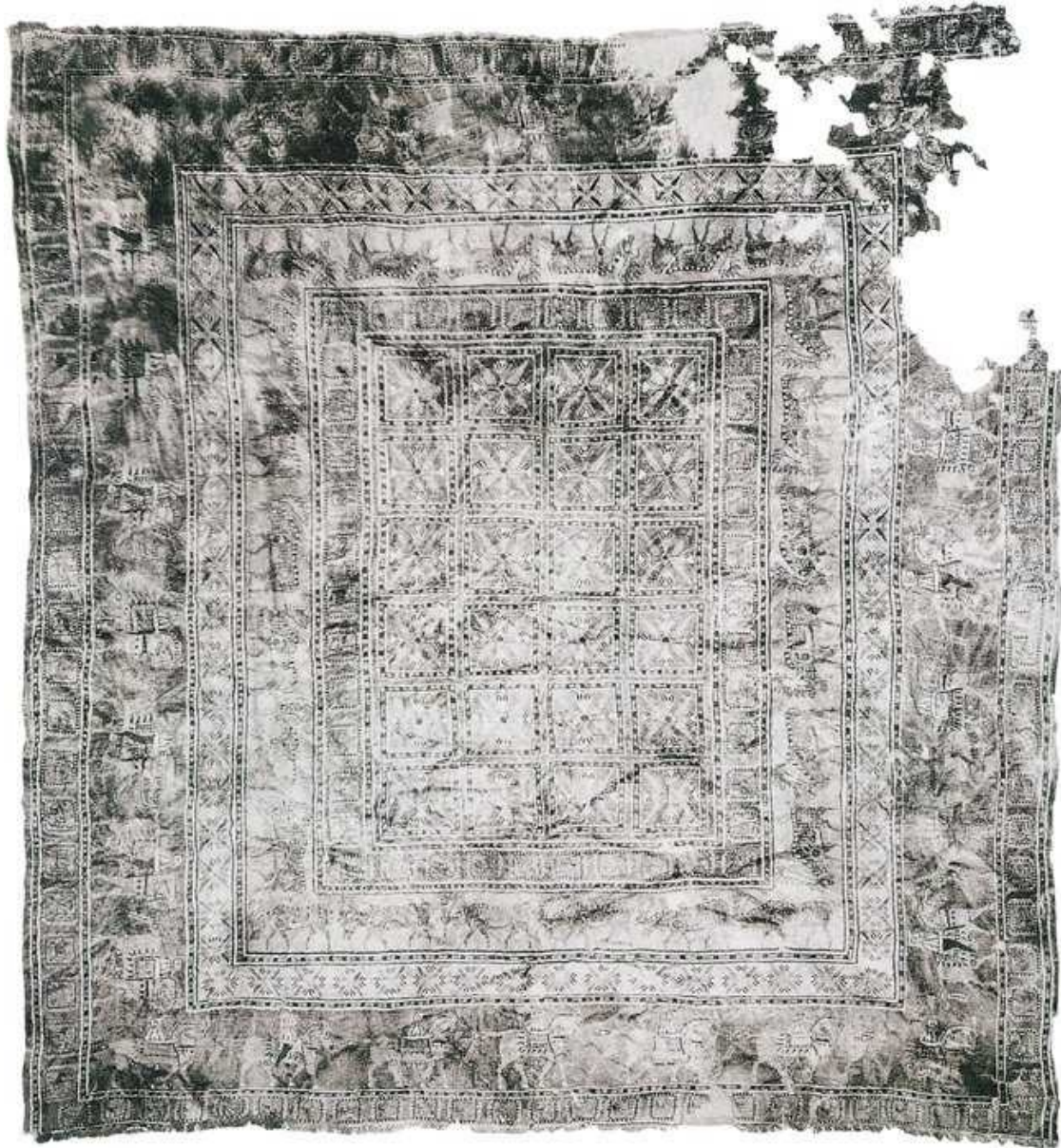
Judging by its shape, this gold ring may be attributed to the 4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BCE.

The monster depicted on the gem – a winged lion with horns – is reminiscent of the fantastical beasts of Median art and frequently appears on official Achaemenid objects, not only carved gems but also sculptures (such as the capitals of columns at Persepolis), metalwork and reliefs. The symbolic significance of this image, undoubtedly associated with the religion of Iran in Achaemenid times, has not been precisely determined.

The signet-ring came from the collection of L. Ross, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century collector of antiquities.

**Bibliography:**

Lukonin 1977b, p. 87; Oriental Jewellery 1984, No. 20.



**28. Pile carpet, 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE.**

*Coloured wool (360 knots/cm<sup>2</sup>), 189 x 200 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. 1687/93.*

*Found in 1949 in Pazyryk barrow V in the Altai.*

This carpet formed part of the extremely rich burial inventory of a Saka chief.

All the iconographic details, as well as the technique employed, display evidence of Persian craftsmanship. This is the oldest known pile carpet. The portrayal of the riders on the fourth and “widest band” is of particular interest: the headgear is typical of Achaemenid



warriors – pointed and apparently made of felt, like a bashlyk (hood) with its tip bent back.

Scythians, Bactrians and Saka, *etc.* were portrayed in such headgear on the reliefs at Persepolis. The horse trappings are also typically Achaemenid, with a horse-cloth decorated with a tooth-patterned border and a bridle decorated with plaques.

Bibliography:

S. Rudenko, “The Fifth Pazyryk Barrow”, KSIIMK, 1951, XXXVII, pp. 106-116; Artamonov 1973, pp. 67-71, ill. 81.



**29. Bowl, 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE.**

*Gold, chased and inlaid, height: 7.9 cm; diameter: 16.1 cm; weight: 677.5g. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. Z-544. Transferred in 1859 from the Kunstkammer.*

The double vessel is formed from a forged hemispherical bowl with a projecting border round the rim, set inside a thin outer bowl with a chased relief design consisting of a central rosette and foliate motifs (stalks with large leaves). The projecting border around the rim of the inner bowl is ornamented with halberd-shaped soldered gold compartments, containing a red paste inlay.

Both double vessels and the cloisonné technique are characteristic of the Achaemenid age. The ornamentation of the bowl is Hellenistic and reminiscent of the famous Megara clay bowls. This bowl bears an Aramaic inscription with the owner's name and the weight of the vessel (it has not proved possible, however, to read the name, owing to the polysemy of the signs of the Aramaic alphabet; the abbreviations signifying the weight of the vessel are similarly ambiguous). The bowl has an almost exact counterpart in a silver vessel in The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the decoration of which, together with the same flowers, includes portrayals of Hellenistic Cupids with flutes and goblets in their hands.

The bowl was sent to Peter the Great from Tobolsk by Prince Matvey Gagarin; in old inventories of the Kunstkammer this bowl was described as "a sort of cap which the Bukhara Tatars wear".

Bibliography:

Smirnov 1909, No. 20; Trever 1940, pp. 67-69, pl. 14; Oriental Jewellery 1984, No. 27.



**30. Central medallion of a bowl depicting the Parthian king of kings Gotarzes (?), late 2<sup>nd</sup> to the early 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BCE.**

*Silver, cast by the cire perdue method and chased, 15.8 x 11 cm; weight: 164g. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. S-284. Transferred in 1939 from the museum of the town of Khanty-Mansiysk, Tyumen province.*

Everything about this medallion is problematic; nothing is known of the exact place and circumstances of its discovery. It has been suggested that the medallion might have been kept for a long time in some local shrine where, to judge by the accounts of Russian travellers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such objects were often encountered.

In all probability the medallion was an inset in a silver plate. This manner of decorating silverware became widespread in Roman metalwork of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE. But the loop at the top of the medallion is not necessary for such objects (it may have been added later) and consequently the purpose of the medallion is not at all clear.

Although the person depicted on the medallion is undoubtedly an Iranian king of kings from a Parthian dynasty, and all the details are executed according to rules well known from Parthian coins, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly which of the many Parthian rulers is portrayed here. More than anyone else, the character resembles the shahanshah Gotarzes I. But if this is so, we then find ourselves faced

with yet another mystery – the mysterious fate of this king of kings. His name is carved into the Parthian relief in the Behistun cliff, where he is portrayed along with other nobles, but there his title is “satrap of satraps”, which is absolutely unique in the Parthian age. In late Babylonian cuneiform documents, his name is mentioned as the Iranian king of kings (up to the year 80 BCE), but it is unclear how he received the title.

In Zoroastrian funeral liturgies there was a special liturgy “for the soul and in memory of the name” of the deceased. For this it was necessary to bequeath money or revenue from lands (most frequently, vineyards) to the temple. In Nisa, near the fortress of Mithradatkirt, was a vineyard which provided the wine for Gotarzes’ liturgy (these particulars are contained in the records of the wine store of Mithradatkirt). Why the “soul and name” of Gotarzes were venerated so far to the east of Parthian Iran is also a mystery.

It should be noted that metalwork of Parthian times remains virtually unknown. This object is almost the only one assigned to such an early period.

Bibliography: Kinzhalov 1959, pp. 197-204.





**31. Saddle-cloth cover, 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE.**

Wool, length: 235 cm; width: 60 cm. The State  
Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. 1687/101.  
Found in 1949 in Pazyryk barrow V in the Altai.

The material was used to decorate a saddle-cloth. The scenes, set in square frames, reproduce a widespread Achaemenid motif (most frequently found on carved gems): serving maids and a queen by a censer containing the holy flame. In all probability the scene reflects a Zoroastrian ritual.

Bibliography:

S. Rudenko, "The Fifth Pazyryk Barrow", KSIIMK, 1951, XXXVII, pp. 106-116 (in Russian); Artamonov 1973, pp. 67-71, ill. 81.



**32. Rhyton plaques, 1<sup>st</sup> century CE.**

*Carved ivory, height: large, 11.5-12 cm; medium, 8-10 cm; small, 6-7 cm; width: 3.5-4 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. Nos. S-312–S-325.*

The applied ivory plaques were mounted on a firm base, most probably of metal, in three rows – large, medium and small. The depictions on the rhyton are of an investiture scene and of a celebration: a Parthian king of kings of Iran on a throne (judging by the iconography, one who reigned during the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE), his heir bearing the symbol of investiture, the crown of power in his hand.

Cupids with musical instruments, acrobats and women dancers are also depicted.

The plaques were found at Olbia during excavations by Boris Farmakovsky in 1906. The set is incomplete and consequently it is not possible to reconstruct the form of the rhyton in its entirety.

**Bibliography:**

Lukonin 1977b, pp. 128-132.





**33. Embroidery depicting horsemen, 1<sup>st</sup> century CE.**

*Purple wool, embroidered in satin and feather stitch (white, yellow, green, brown and purple), length: 66 cm; width: 44 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. MR 1953. Transferred in 1935 from the Museum of Ethnography of the Peoples of the USSR, Leningrad (now St Petersburg).*

This is a fragment of a large tapestry which hung on the walls of a Hunnic chief's burial chamber.

The central and widest band shows a group of riders (three figures survive) on horses of various coats. Round the edges are ornamental



borders depicting figures of infants growing from a flower and who are fighting eagles (upper border), a mythical beast – a winged and horned griffin with birds' and lions' claws (lower border) and purely ornamental motifs.

The borders of the cloth have numerous analogies in Roman art (for example, in the stucco decorations of the Roman villa near the Farnese Palace in Rome). The plant ornament is typically Hellenistic.

The fantastic griffin, however, has many oriental features: such winged and horned griffins were depicted not only during the Achaemenid age but in earlier periods as well (for example, the curl on the griffin's head brings to mind the curls on the griffins from Ziwiye).

The central scene has an extremely dynamic composition, which is also characteristic of Hellenistic art, but the clothes and hairstyle of the horsemen are definitely Parthian.

The cloth was found in the burial chamber of the sixth barrow of the burial site in the Noin-Ula Mountains (northern Mongolia) during excavations by the Tibeto-Mongolian expedition of the Russian Geographical Society in 1924-1925.

#### Bibliography:

Trever 1932, p. 32, pl. 6; Bernshtam 1937, p. 963; Trever 1940, pp. 141-149, pls. 39-44.



**34. Vessel, 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries CE.**

*Clay, glazed, height: 20.8 cm; diameter: 12.3 cm*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. S-352. Donated in 1935 by the Government of Iran.*

The two-handled jar with relief mouldings is characteristic of the western regions of Iran; however, the absence of sufficient comparative material from excavations does not yet enable a precise dating. Vessels of various forms, covered with a dark green, yellow or blue glaze, are found in late Parthian and early Sassanian archaeological layers.

Accompanying documents indicate that the vessel originated from

Susa.

Bibliography:

Lukonin 1977b, p. 134.



**35. Bowl on a foot-ring with  
a portrait of Papak, 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries CE.**

*Silver, hammered from a sheet and gilded; embossed beading  
Around the central medallion, in which a low relief is created  
by hollowing the background, height: 4.1 cm; diameter: 24 cm;  
weight 850g. The Janashia Museum of Georgia, Tbilisi.  
Inv. No. 18.55:53. Acquired in 1940.*

The central medallion bears a portrait of a Sassanian noble in ceremonial headdress with a special symbol and holding a flower.

The image is executed in the typically Sassanian style of the “official portrait” (typical hairstyle, eyes facing straight ahead, “wreathed moustache”, etc.) exactly like those in both monumental rock reliefs and carved seals. Details of the noble’s official dress and

the decoration allow one to assign the bowl to the late 3<sup>rd</sup> to the early 4<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. The inscription on the rim of the bowl (in Middle Persian, dotted, in a single line) reads: “Papak, pitiakhsh, son of Ardashir, grandson of Ardashir, pitiakhsh. Of silver drachmae weight – 53 staters, 3 drachmae (?)”. The title “pitiakhsh” was one of the highest at the early Sassanian court; possibly a pitiakhsh was the second figure in the state and even belonged to the ruling dynasty. Pitiakhsh Papak is known from original early Sassanian sources: he is mentioned in a manifesto of the shahanshah Narseh in Paikuli around the year 293.

The bowl was found at Mtskheta, in a female burial site – stone vault No. 2 of the tomb of Georgian nobles – together with a few Roman silver vessels, carved seals, and a gold aureus of Valerian minted in 253. From the nature of these objects, this female burial dates from the early 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, consequently the Sassanian bowl with the portrait of the pitiakhsh Papak arrived in Georgia almost immediately after its manufacture; it is even possible that it was a gift to the woman who was subsequently buried in this vault.

#### Bibliography:

Lukonin 1980, pp. 35-38; Harper and Meyers 1981, pp. 24, 25.





**36. Tetradrachma (coin), featuring Vahubarz,  
sovereign ruler of Parsa, late 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BCE.**  
*Silver, diameter: 2.9 cm.*



**37. Drachma (coin), featuring Darius, sovereign ruler of Parsa, second half of 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. *Silver.***



**38. Drachma (coin), featuring Artahshatr IV,  
king of Parsa, early 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE. Silver, diameter: 2 cm.  
*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.***

The small kingdom of Parsa (region of Persepolis, Naqsh-e Rostam; capital Istakhr) preserved a certain independence after the collapse of the Achaemenid monarchy. Here, in the Zoroastrian religious centre of the country, from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE priest-kings of a local dynasty ruled. It was a king of Parsa, Papak, who was the father of Ardashir I, the founder of the Sassanid dynasty.

Parsa was one of the few provinces of Seleucid, and afterwards Parthian, Iran which had the right to mint its own coinage. The coins of this kingdom are the only source enabling us to reconstruct a few stages in its history. On the obverse of early coins from Parsa the portrait of the ruler is represented in headgear which is Achaemenid (or “satrapian”, just as on early Parthian coins). On the reverse, the ruler is depicted full length in Median Achaemenid dress. His right hand is raised in a gesture of veneration. He stands before a temple building (possibly the “Kaaba of Zoroaster” – the temple of Achaemenid times at the national shrine of Parsa, Naqsh-e Rostam).

Next to the temple is the royal Achaemenid standard. Also on the reverse is an Aramaic legend with the ruler's name, his title – “divine ruler” – and the designation of the place where it was minted – “the fortress of Parsa”.

The obverse of the Darius coin bears the ruler's portrait in an almost Seleucid helmet crowned with the figure of an eagle in place of the “satrapian” headgear of Achaemenid times. The image on the reverse is different (or more exactly, is deformed): the figure of the bird which, according to Xenophon, crowned the Achaemenid standard, is depicted on some sort of rectangle, whilst the temple building becomes stylised and looks somewhat like a fire altar. The legends too are distorted and the ruler's title changes, he is now “king of Parsa”.

The coin of Artahshatr IV is one of the latest coins from Parsa. The first coins of the Sassanian dynasty can be traced back to this coin.

The lettering of the inscription changes on these coins and is already coming to resemble early Sassanian inscriptions in the form of the letters; possibly the language of the legend is already Persian instead of Aramaic.

The portrayal on the reverse also changes: instead of a scene before a temple or altar, there is a portrait of the ruler's father, or perhaps an anthropomorphic portrayal of the ruler's guardian-deity. The content of the legend, too, changes (here the obverse reads: “King Artahshatr”; the reverse: “Son of the king Mithridates”). The kings have complicated hairstyles with a “crown” of hair or a toothed crown with diverging rays; these crowns are the prototypes of the insignia of Sassanian shahanshahs.



**39. Drachma of the queen  
of queens Purandukht, 630-631 CE.**  
*Silver, diameter: 1.6 cm. The State  
Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

The canon of depictions on the obverse of Sassanian coins was established from the very foundation of the Sassanian state. The coins bear a portrait of the king of kings in a crown each uniquely designed for the king, with the symbols of his guardian-deity and a standard legend containing the king's name and official title: on the denarius of Ardashir I – “worshipper of Ahura Mazda, the ruler Ardashir, king of kings of Iran, descendant of the gods”; on coins of other early Sassanian shahanshahs only the name, of course, changes. The reverse, standard for coins of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries, shows the king's coronation temple, founded when the Shahanshah ascended the throne, and named after him: an altar with a fire blazing upon it, with the figures of the king of kings and the god Ahura Mazda at the sides of the altar. The inscription designates the temple (for example, “fire temple of Shapur”).

Under Ardashir I only the altar was depicted – a brazier with lion's legs and a blazing fire.

Subsequently the scene on the reverse becomes schematic and instead of the temple's name, dates appear (the year of the shahanshah's reign) and abbreviations designating the mint.

As has already been noted, the basic monetary unit in Sassanian Iran was the drachma; gold denarii were very rare and were issued



on special occasions.

The name of the mint, Marv, appears on the reverse of the denarius of Shapur I.

This is the first reliable evidence that Sassanid kings had seized lands in eastern Iran, and the first mention of a mint on Sassanian coins.

The drachma of Varahran II bears a triple portrait: Varahran, the king of kings, in a winged crown (the bird Varaghna was the hypostasis of Varahran's guardian-deity Verethragna), his wife, the queen of queens Shapurdukhtak, in a crown bearing the protome of a griffin (also one of the hypostases of Verethragna), and his son and heir, Varahran, also bearing a zoomorphic crown; on the reverse, next to an altar, stand the king of kings Varahran and Shapurdukhtak (the queen of queens is identified with the goddess Anahita).

The drachma of the king of kings Peroz shows how soon the portrait takes on a standard schematic form on coins. Only the detail of the crown, the fundamental, distinctive sign, is carefully executed. The legend on the obverse changes; only the name of the king of kings is struck on it and part of a Zoroastrian religious formula – “may the might of the king grow”. Having suffered a cruel defeat at the hands of the nomadic Hephthalites, Peroz was obliged to pay them tribute. The drachmae received as tribute were marked with a special imprint containing the names or titles of the Hephthalite or Turkic rulers.

The queen of queens Purandukht was the only woman to sit on the throne of the Sassanid shahanshahs.

In the 360s and 370s, the Sassanids finally subjugated the lands in the east that had previously been under the control of the Kushan sovereigns. The Sassanid princes, vice-regents of these lands, issued coins on the local Kushan pattern (gold and copper) and on the Sassanian pattern (silver and copper), using different iconographic schemes from those on Sassanian drachmae. The drachma of Hormizd bears on its obverse his portrait and titles: “worshipper of Ahura Mazda, the ruler Hormizd, great king of kings of the Kushans” and on the reverse shows Hormizd before the god Mithras. Next to Mithras is the inscription: “god possessing great strength” (one of Mithras' epithets); above is the name of the mint, the town of Herat; next to Hormizd is his name and title.



**40. Seal, 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE.**

*Carved amethyst, 2.3 x 2.1 cm. The State  
Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. Gl. 979.  
Acquired in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.*

This gem bears the portrait of an Iranian queen of queens called Denak. Her complicated hairstyle, with a “crown” of numerous small braids, the rich earrings, and the necklace, are all also characteristic of the iconography of Anahita, the goddess of love and fertility, whose earthly incarnation was considered to be the Sassanian queen of queens (the king of kings’ senior wife).

The two-line inscription on the seal contains the name and official title: “Denak, queen of queens, sovereign over the inhabitants of the harem”. Third-century sources enable one to establish that Denak was the daughter of Papak, the king of Parsa, and both sister and senior wife of his son, the first king of kings of the Sassanid dynasty, Ardashir I. The custom of marriage to close relatives has its root in tribal society. According to Zoroastrian law, marriages with close relatives were considered to be especially honoured and “pure”.

The gem formed part of the collection of the Counts Stroganov and, judging by surviving documentation, was acquired in Georgia during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Bibliography:**

Borisov and Lukonin 1963, p. 74, No. 2; Splendeur 1993, No. 131.



**41. Seal, 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE.**  
*Carved amethyst, 2.7 x 1.9 cm.*  
*The State Hermitage Museum,*  
*St Petersburg. Inv. No. Gl. 978.*

Purchased in Yerevan in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, this seal belonged to a noble, whose name it has not been possible to read with any exactitude, due to the polysemy of the Parthian alphabet. His title mardapet also has no exact interpretation. In all probability the head of the shahanshah's palace household bore this title.

Mardapets were noble courtiers close to the king, sometimes serving him as particularly trusted counsellors; they are often referred to in Armenian documentary sources of the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries.

This is the only seal in the Hermitage collection bearing an inscription executed in the so-called "Parthian script" used only until the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE. This fact, together with the signs of investiture of the individual portrayed – the kulah in the form of a Phrygian cap with a special symbol on it, the earrings, hairstyle, *etc.* – give grounds for considering that this is one of the oldest Sassanian seals.

#### Bibliography:

Borisov and Lukonin 1963a, pp. 48, 74, No. 1; Splendeur 1993, No. 130.



**42. Seal, 4<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Carved cornelian, 2.2 x 1.6 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. 901.*

This seal shows the portrait of a Zoroastrian priest (magus); the inscription names him as Khusrau, son of Aturfarnbag. Judging by the iconographic details (the ringlets in the hair, the necklace with a round pendant, etc.), the seal dates from the mid-to late 4<sup>th</sup> century. The inscription is preceded by a special sign or neshan, possibly the sign of the Zoroastrian temple under Khusrau's control.

**Bibliography:**

Borisov and Lukonin 1963, p. 49, No. 9; p. 76, No. 14; Splendeur 1993, No. 135.



**43. Seal, 5<sup>th</sup> century CE.**

*Carved cornelian. The History Museum, Moscow.*

The gem bears a portrait of a Sassanian noble executed according to the canons of the Sassanian official portrait of the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries. Around the edge of the gem runs the Middle Persian inscription: “Mihr Narseh, son of Varaz”. This gem was the personal seal of one of Sassanian Iran’s most famous statesmen. Mihr Narseh was vuzurg framadar (prime minister) of Iran under several Sassanian shahanshahs. He belonged to the Zoroastrian sect of the Zurvanites, that is, to an unorthodox movement of Zoroastrianism, as a result of which under Varahran V (420-438 CE) he, his wife and one of his sons were made temple slaves (in one of the temples in the province of Parsa he carried out the duties of aturvakhsh – warden of the sacred fire). But whilst a temple slave he remained prime minister of Iran. He also had to erect various public buildings at his own expense (an inscription survives, relating to the construction of a bridge at Firuzabad and sources relate that canals were built at his expense, fruit trees planted, etc.). During the war in northern Iran he was appointed head of the Sassanian army and to this end (since military campaigns necessitated his protracted absence) he was transferred to the king’s domain, also with the status of a slave. At the end of the war he was returned to a different Zoroastrian temple, to the same post of aturvakhsh. Mihr Narseh’s fate specifically demonstrates that the concept of a “slave” in Sassanian Iran signified



first of all a person deprived of the legal rights of a citizen of the country.

The seal was found in Transcaucasia and belonged to the collection of T. V. Kibalchich, from which it was transferred to the History Museum, Moscow.

**Bibliography:**

Kibalchich 1910; Rayevskaya 1971, pp. 263-268.



**44. Seal, 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries.**  
*Carved amethyst, 1.6 x 1.5 cm.*  
*The State Hermitage Museum,*  
*St Petersburg. Inv. No. Gl. 904.*

This gem shows a head in profile portrayed schematically between two outspread wings. The hatched style of the image places the gem in the second half of the Sassanian period, but both style and inscription attest that the gem was made in the western provinces of Iran, where Hellenistic traditions endured for a long time: The inscription with the name of the owner, “Antioch”, is written in

Greek letters but with a grammatical error.

Bibliography:

Lukonin 1977b, p. 157.



**45. Seal, 6<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Carved cornelian, 3.6 x 2.9 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. Gl. 884.*

The gem shows the portrait of the Sassanian noble with the insignia of his power: he wears a headdress (kulah) with a patrimonial badge (tamgha), earrings and a necklace. The inscription on the gem, encircling the figure, indicates his name and title: “Papak, shahrab of the town of Khusraushad-Hormizd”.

The title shahrab was bestowed upon the head of a town and a town district. The shahrab embodied both military and civil power in this district. The town and headquarters of Papak was called “Joy of Khusrau-Hormizd”. It was founded in the west of Iran by the shahanshah Khusrau I (531-579 CE) and thus named in honour of Khusrau’s son, the future shahanshah Hormizd.

This gem was acquired from the Duke of Orleans for Catherine the Great’s collection of gems.

**Bibliography:**

Borisov and Lukonin 1963, p. 48, No. 4; p. 75, No. 6; Splendeur 1993, No. 133.



**46. Seal, 6<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Carved brown-red jasper mottled with black, height: 1.9 cm; bezel: 2.5 x 2 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. Gl. 833. Acquired in the 1920s; formerly in the Shuvalov Collection.*

This seal shows a rider on horseback with a spear in his hand, piercing a seven-headed dragon at the horse's hooves. A radiant halo surrounds the rider's head, to the left is a star, to the right the figure of a scorpion.

The image represents one of the ancient Iranian epic heroes of the Avesta. Nearly all these epic warrior-heroes (like their divine patron, the god of victory Verethragna) fought with dragons – the powers of the evil deity. For example, one of them named Krsaspa “by his virile strength slew the snake Srvara that devoured horses, that devoured men, down whose body poured a stream of yellow poison as thick as a finger”. They slaughtered a great number of the so-called khrafstra engendered by the god of evil: scorpions, snakes, etc. The warrior-heroes were protected by the radiance of Khwarnah, the god of royal and heroic majesty.

It has been suggested that it was this image, so popular both in Iran and Mesopotamia, which served as the prototype for later



depictions of St George.

Bibliography:

Borisov and Lukonin 1963, p. 95, No. 122.



**47. Seal, 6<sup>th</sup> to early 7<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Carved agate, 2.6 x 2.1 cm. The State  
Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. Gl. 861.*

The portrait on the seal is executed in a generalised and fairly crude manner: the craftsman was striving to convey the signs of investiture of the individual portrayed with the maximum of accuracy – his kulah, hairstyle, ribbons, earrings and jewellery.

At the sides of the portrait are a many-rayed star and a crescent moon – symbolic signs which also appeared on late Sassanian coins. The inscription round the edge reads: “Burznesh (?) magus priest, son of Burzengushnasp”.

Bibliography:

Borisov and Lukonin 1963, p. 49, No. 13; p. 83, No. 47.



**48. Seal, 6<sup>th</sup> to early 7<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Carved chalcedony, 1.9 x 2.1 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. Gl. 407. Donated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century; formerly part of a Collection of antiquities acquired in Seistan, Iran, by the Russian diplomat Cherkasov.*

The dromedary depicted on the seal was a symbol (divine incarnation) of several Zoroastrian deities, but above all a symbol of the god of victory, Verethragna. Judging by the inscription, the gem served as a personal seal for one Datfarrukh, son of Barzushtan (?),

who was perhaps a Zoroastrian priest (magus). In the inscription on the seal, Datfarrukh uses a Zoroastrian religious formula – “may the Khwamah [here success, happiness] of the seal’s owner increase”.

Bibliography:

Borisov and Lukonin 1963, p. 49, No. 12; p. 186, No. 753;  
Splendeur 1993, No. 149.





**49. Bowl on a foot-ring depicting Varahran,  
king of Kirman (?), bear-hunting, 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE.**

*Silver, hammered from a sheet, diameter: 28.5 cm;  
height with stem: 3.2 cm; weight: 1820g. The Abkhaziya  
Museum of Local History, Sukhumi. Inv. Nos. 47-71.*

Chasing was used to create a low-relief image; the applied plaques form a high relief (individual details – the rider's face, the horse's crupper, etc. – are embossed). The vessel is incised.

Individual details were possibly gilded. The foot-ring was soldered on after the vessel had been polished, and the production

technique is characteristic of many objects of Sassanian metalwork.

This vessel, a festal bowl, is the earliest known Sassanian vessel with a hunting scene. Originally such vessels bore subjects which reflected the Zoroastrian symbolism of grandeur, might and victorious power: the ruler of Iran overcoming beasts in single combat, these animals being hypostases of the Zoroastrian deities Mithras, Khwarnah and Verethragna. In its first stage of development, the main heroes of this theme were not Iran's shahanshahs but princes – sovereigns of large provinces. On this plate a prince is portrayed in official apparel, with the symbols of his rank – a specific type of headgear (kulah) with a precious diadem and a special badge, with a necklace, and in ceremonial dress with fibulae and a precious belt.

These accessories, which altered during the course of the Sassanian epoch, but which always reflected the owner's rank like a uniform, lead us to believe that the rider portrayed on the bowl was a sovereign prince and lived at the beginning of the Sassanian epoch (in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century). Both the badge on his kulah and the dotted Middle Persian inscription on the back (in the so-called Parthian script, of which in fact only the owner's name and the weight of the vessel can so far be read: "...Varahran. Weight 432 drachmas") may point to the fact that the prince portrayed on the vessel is the son of the shahanshah Shapur I, Varahran, king of the Kirman province, afterwards shahanshah of Iran, Varahran I (247-276 CE). The bear is evidently a hypostasis of the god of victory, Verethragna, and consequently the entire scene symbolises the victoriousness of the king. Executed in the Sassanian style, the hunting scene on this vessel is rendered purely canonically: the depiction represents its beginning and end simultaneously (the bear is caught in a lasso and the same bear lies under the horse's hooves) and the horse is shown at a flying gallop; the twist of the rider's body, however, is very original.

The bowl was found in the village of Krasnaya Polyana (near Sukhumi) in a kitchen-garden, before 1946. Possibly it formed part of the burial inventory of a local nobleman's tomb (it seems a Roman provincial coin of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE was discovered with it and several other objects whose fate is at present unknown).

Bibliography:

Melikhov 1952, pp. 71-79; Lukonin 1980, pp. 35-38; Harper and Meyers 1981, pp. 50-55.



**50. Bowl with a goddess on a panther  
and protomes of beasts, 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE.**

*Silver, hammered from a sheet and gilded; low relief produced by hollowing the background, high relief formed of separately tooled applied plaques; chased and punched, diameter: 23 cm; weight: 801.9g.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. S-74. Acquired in 1886.*

The bowl, undoubtedly an imitation of late Roman silverware, depicts a goddess of Asia Minor, Cybele, on a panther, Maenad blowing her horn and, round the rim, figures of gladiators fighting



beasts. Analogies to individual elements of the bowl's decoration exist not only on Roman metalwork but also on late Roman glass vessels, coins, *etc.*

The style of the images, especially the protomes of beasts in the medallions, along with the nature of the medallions' frames, the plant ornament and so on, closely link this bowl to the early Sassanian court school of Bishapur in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

But even without these links it is clear that the vessel was produced by an Iranian craftsman, albeit one who had served his apprenticeship under Roman masters. Within the confines of an alien theme, and not yet having any of his own Iranian devices to represent Zoroastrian symbols, the craftsman has nevertheless totally reinterpreted the scene shown round the rim of the bowl. The figures of the gladiators have become mere background decoration, whilst the observer's attention is concentrated on the protomes of beasts – a lion, a lioness, a horse, a wild boar, a bear and a zebu-like bull (the hypostases of the Zoroastrian deities) in the medallions. Thus the bowl stands at the beginning of Sassanian metalwork: adopting foreign models, the craftsmen endowed them with a local, Iranian meaning. On the reverse of the bowl there is a scratched Sogdian inscription in the so-called Sarnaqand script: "From [the property off Franch] (?)".

The bowl was part of a hoard discovered in 1866.

#### Bibliography:

Smirnov 1909, No. 36; Livshits and Lukonin 1964, p. 173; Lukonin 1980, pp. 36-38; Marschak 1986, pl. 97; Trever and Lukonin 1987, No. 1; Splendeur 1993, No. 72.





**51. Kilik, 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE.**

*Silver, hammered from a thick sheet and gilded;  
relief details produced by hollowing the background  
(the stem and handles cast and soldered on to the kilik),  
diameter: 12.3 cm; height with stem: 5.7 cm; weight: 676.1g.  
Art Museum of Georgia, Tbilisi. Inv. No. R 134.*

Along the border of the kilik's rim is an undulating vine and various kinds of birds. On the body, in the medallions, are a portrait of Varahran II (repeated twice), his right hand raised in the so-called "gesture of adoration" – kings and courtiers were portrayed in this attitude before a deity or a fire altar; the queen of queens Shapurdukhtak in a ceremonial headdress with a flower in her hand; the son of Varahran II and Shapurdukhtak, heir to the throne, Varahran, king of Sakastan, with the "crown of power" – the diadem of a king of kings in his hand – and in ceremonial headdress crowned with the protome of a horse (one of the hypostases of the god of victory, Verethragna).

The area between the medallions is decorated with foliate

ornament.

This kilik is the first in a series of early Sassanian vessels which initially portrayed only the Sassanian shahanshahs and members of their families, but later (late 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries) showed the state's most important noblemen. The form of the vessel, and its ornament, undoubtedly imitate articles of Roman metalwork contemporary with the kilik, whereas the portraits in the medallions are executed according to the severe canons of depiction of Sassanian coins. The scene as a whole represents the investiture of the shahanshah by the supreme Zoroastrian deity, Ahura Mazda. The ceremony itself took place in a temple, by an altar with a blazing fire; it was depicted on the reverse of Sassanian coins, including the coins of Varahran II.

All the elements of such a depiction (apart from the altar) also feature in the portraits on the kilik.

The kilik was found in Georgia before 1917, in the village of Sargvashi. Possibly it was part of a nobleman's burial inventory.

#### Bibliography:

Lukonin 1980, pp. 28-38; Harper and Meyers 1981, p. 25.



**52. Bowl depicting Varahran, King of Kushans, 4<sup>th</sup> century.**  
*Silver, hammered from a sheet and gilded; low relief produced by hollowing the background, high relief formed of separately tooled plaques soldered to the bowl; chased and punched. The foot-ring is missing but traces of solder remain, diameter: 27.6-28 cm; weight: 636g. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. S-24. Acquired in 1894 from the Archaeological Commission.*

The scene depicted combines early Sassanian Zoroastrian symbolism (the wild boar is a symbol of the god of victory, Verethragna) with a dramatic episode from a hunt for wild boar among reed-beds; the prosaic, genre character of the theme could already be considered

more important. The scene on the bowl sharply differs from the standard hunting composition. The craftsman strives to convey the ferocity of the wild boar leaping from the reeds, the horse's fright as it rears up on its hind legs, and even the rider's attempt to stay in the saddle (he pulls up his legs and seizes the horse's neck). Patches of gilding create a beautiful decorative effect. However, many of these features very soon became standard too: a series of silver bowls is known on which the horse and rider are depicted in exactly the same way, and one can find individual elements of this composition – such as the boar leaping from the reeds – on other late Sassanian objects, on seals and in stucco decoration.

Judging by a number of the details, above all by the rider's crown which bears the horns of a moufflon, the person portrayed on the bowl is prince Varahran, who reigned from c. 390-420 over the Kushan kingdom, recently conquered by the Sassanids. Gold and copper coins struck in Varahran's name show him in exactly the same headgear. His title on these coins is "great king of the Kushans". This bowl, along with several others, was the work of a school of metalworkers employed at the court of the Sassanid vicegerents of the Kushan state in Marv. This may perhaps be one of the first products of this school. On the reverse of the bowl is a deeply incised Sogdian inscription in the so-called Samarqand script: "Lord Shav of Chach [literally 'of the Chach'land'] 39 staters". Next to the inscription is an engraved tamgha (badge) which is identical to that on coins of the rulers of Chach (Tashkent region) during the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Both the tamgha and the lettering of the inscription are evidence of the fact that soon after its creation this bowl was already to be found in the treasury of Shav, the lord of Chach.

The bowl was discovered in May 1893 by a peasant from the village of Kercheva in Perm province.

#### Bibliography:

Livshits and Lukonin 1964, pp. 170-172; Lukonin 1967; Marshak and Krikis 1969, pp. 62-66; Livshits 1979, p. 57, No. 6; Harper and Meyers 1981, pp. 72-74; Marschak 1986, pl. 7; Trever and Lukonin 1987, No. 7; Splendeur 1993, No. 55.





**53. Silver bowl on a foot-ring depicting Narseh,  
Great King of Armenia (?), hunting ibex, late 3<sup>rd</sup> century.**

*Silver, hammered from a sheet and gilded; low relief details produced by hollowing the background; high relief details on plaques separately tooled and attached to the background, height: 4.9 cm; diameter: 29.1 cm. Museum of the History of Azerbaijan, Baku.*

Like the bowl from the Sukhumi Museum, the composition here already possesses all the essential features of the standard “hunting scene”, however, as in, the rider is portrayed in a non-standard attitude (with his back to the observer). Only one wounded ibex is shown.

The ibex is one of the hypostases of the god of victory, Verethragna; thus, the composition also has a symbolic



interpretation.

The rider's headgear is original – a close-fitting cap with a luxuriant plume: in its essential features it reflects the ceremonial crown of the king of Parsa, Shapur, the son of Papak (c. 208-212), a prince of the Sassanid line who had not yet seized power throughout Iran. At that time the Sassanids ruled the province of Parsa and were closely associated with the most important Zoroastrian temple in that region, the temple of Anahita situated at Istakhr.

Because of a number of details, however, the depiction on the bowl cannot be dated earlier than c. 270-290. A number of circumstantial details indicate that the image is that of the son of the shahanshah Shapur I, Narseh, who at that time held the north-western provinces of Iran and bore the title "great king of Armenia".

Like all early Sassanian vessels, this bowl is an important historical source, allowing one to reconstruct many details of the almost unknown history of the early Sassanian monarchy.

The bowl was found in 1968, during excavations of the burial site near the town of Shemakha (Azerbaijan), in a "stone chest", the grave of a nobleman, dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries.

#### Bibliography:

Khalilov 1976, pp. 146-149; Lukonin 1980, pp. 36, 37; Harper and Meyers 1981, pp. 48-50; Bretanizki 1988, pl. 16.



**54. Bowl depicting Shapur II hunting lions, 4<sup>th</sup> century CE.**

*Silver, hammered from a sheet and gilded; low relief produced by hollowing the background, high relief formed of applied plaques tooled separately; chased and punched, diameter: 22.9 cm; weight: 828g.  
The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. S-253.*

The bowl shows a symbolic hunting scene typical of late Sassanian art. The shahanshah Shapur II (309-379 CE), twisting round in a “Parthian bend”, shoots an arrow at a rampant lion – a hypostasis of the deity of royal strength and power, Mithras. The same lion, already smitten, lies beneath the horse’s hooves. This bowl is undoubtedly a masterpiece of Sassanian metalwork. Unlike all other vessels, the depiction is three-dimensional and without unnecessary details; the scene is skillfully enclosed within a circle, fine lines indicate the folds of the silk clothing and the lion’s gaping jaws are marvellously depicted.

Despite the freedom of the design and its very successful inscription within a circle, it is nevertheless constructed out of totally canonical elements. For example, the recumbent lion is shown in exactly the same pose as on other silver plates and even on rock reliefs.

The bowl was discovered in 1927 near the village of Turushevo in Viatka province.

Bibliography:

Orbeli and Trever 1935, pl. 6; Harper and Meyers 1981, pp. 197-199; Trever and Lukonin 1987, No. 3; Splendeur 1993, No. 52.



**55. Boat-shaped bowl, 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Silver, hammered from a sheet, with applied high relief plaques; underneath traces of solder of an oval base, length: 26 cm; width: 9.2 cm; height: 6 cm. The History Museum, Moscow. Inv. No. 83746. Acquired in 1947.*

The bowl was found in 1947 during the ploughing of a field near the village of Bartym in the Beriozovsky region of Perm province. Both before and after this find other silver vessels have been discovered within a limited area around the village. The distribution of the finds and their various datings have led to the assumption that they were once kept in some sort of shrine situated at this place.

At the sides of an altar are two very complex grylli – in this instance in the form of pheasants made up of a fantastic combination of human heads (body and chest), horns of a beast with an open jaw (rear part of the body) and fish tails and fish (legs).

Such fanciful combinations are found in late Roman and Sassanian glyptics. They are undoubtedly linked to some sort of complicated symbolism, possibly symbolising all the fauna of the universe, but their exact significance has not yet been determined.

The dating of this bowl is based on its form and iconographic details.

**Bibliography:**

Bader 1949, p. 85; Bader and Smirnov 1954, pp. 17-19, ill. 7.



**56. Jug with Senmurv, 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Silver, moulded from a sheet, embossed and gilded (stem and handle soldered on separately); chased details, height: 33 cm; weight: 1041g. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. S-61.*

On both sides are depictions of the Senmurv, a mythological creature from ancient Iranian myths, in a medallion. This creature, with the head and claws of a beast of prey, bird's wings and a fish's tail, symbolised the entire animal kingdom and was revered by the Iranians from time immemorial. In one of the late Zoroastrian works, *Decision of the Wise Spirit*, one finds the following account of the Senmurv:

“The nest of the Senmurv is in a blessed tree with many seeds. And each time that it flies off, a thousand seeds are scattered from the tree, and when it returns it breaks a thousand boughs and all the seeds are scattered from them. And the bird Sinamrosh also perches nearby and it gathers all these seeds and it confides them to where Tishtrya [the star Sirius, god of rain] draws the waters to himself. And when Tishtrya has drawn all the waters to himself, together with seeds of all kinds [of plants], he sends them to earth with the rain. And all the plants in the world grow from these seeds and these plants are of service to mankind.”

It is this “tree of all the seeds” which is depicted on the sides and lid



of the jug. Depictions of the Senmurv often appear not only on metalwork but also on other objects, in particular on silk textiles from which the ceremonial robes of Sassanian shahanshahs were sewn.

**Bibliography:**

Smimov 1909, No. 83; Marschak 1986, pl. 199; Trever and Lukonin 1987, No. 21; Splendeur 1993, No. 96.



**57. Bowl depicting**

**Bahram Gur and Azadeh, 6<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Silver, hammered from a sheet and gilded; low relief produced by hollowing the background; chased and punched; foot-ring soldered, diameter: 21.7 cm; weight: 1155.6g. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. S-252.*

The bowl depicts a scene from the history of Prince Bahram – the future shahanshah of Iran, Varahran V (420-438 CE). Because of his hunting exploits he was given the nickname Gur – onager or wild ass. Firdawsi's poem *Shahnama* (10<sup>th</sup> century) relates that once he went hunting on a camel, accompanied by his beloved, Azadeh, a singer and musician (she played the chang).

Boasting to her of his skill, Bahram suggested that she herself should choose a victim from a herd of wild gazelles. However, Azadeh announced that real art would be to turn a female gazelle into a male and a male into a female. Bahram did this by means of arrows: with well-aimed shots he fired two arrows into the head of a female, thus causing her to grow "antlers", then, with a sickle-tipped arrow, he severed the antlers of a male. Firdawsi states that Azadeh

took fright, exclaiming: “This art of yours is from the daevas [evil deities]”, whereupon Bahram, enraged, trampled her beneath his camel and henceforth hunted without women.

The subject of Bahram Gur and Azadeh was depicted on Sassanian silver vessels of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries (apart from this bowl, two others are known – one of them also in the Hermitage, the other in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) and also on late Sassanian stucco decorations and carved gems. They represent the entire story according to the rules of the Sassanian genre, blending the beginning and end of the action – with the figure of Azadeh cast beneath the camel’s hooves.

This theme became popular in Iranian art again in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, when it was depicted first on ceramics (on bowls and tiles) and metal vessels and then in manuscript miniatures. It is interesting to note that the miniatures reproduced the very scene which had hitherto been known from Sassanian works of art.

Works of art from the Sassanian age indisputably attest that this story was already well known in Iran, at any rate in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. But was it already linked to the Sassanid shahanshah Varahran V? 9<sup>th</sup>-century Arab historians (Tabari, Ibn al-Faqih), who used written sources from the Sassanian age and oral traditions of Varahran V, relate that he was nicknamed Gur as a prince and they mention that he loved to ride a camel and that he performed two exploits whilst hunting: with bow and arrows he shot down swift-footed ostriches and with a single arrow he transfixed a gazelle to a lion that was attacking it. There are also accounts that these exploits were illustrated in paintings on walls.

One late Sassanian plate featuring an ostrich hunt is known (from a private collection in Japan) and a Byzantine silk textile of the 8<sup>th</sup> century shows the second exploit – the impaling of deer and lion with a single arrow. It is interesting that these exploits were not subsequently illustrated. All these stories were brought together for the first time in Firdawsi’s poem.

Firdawsi devoted 2600 distichs to the reign of Bahram Gur. In his poem Bahram Gur is represented as the model of a skilled hunter and knight. It is not known whether a “romance” of Bahram Gur already existed in Sassanian times, or whether various exploits and romantic adventures of different heroes, widely known through the oral art of the gosan, were united around the figure of this king, who

was not famed for anything during his lifetime. But this only took place later, in the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries, the age of Islam, when Arab, and in the 10<sup>th</sup> century Persian, books were composed on the history of the kings of ancient Iran on the basis of Sassanian historical works and oral traditions. One such book is the large *Shahnama* created at the demand of the vicegerent of the town of Tus in the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, by four experts in the history of ancient Iran; it was used by Firdawsi as the basis for his poem. The Middle Persian inscription on the outside of the bowl was evidently engraved soon after its manufacture: "Property of Mihrbozed. 71 staters and 23 drachmae by weight".

The bowl formed part of a hoard found in the summer of 1927 near the village of Turushevo in Viatka province.

#### Bibliography:

Orbeli and Trever 1935, pl. 11; Marschak 1986, pl. 183; Trever and Lukonin 1987, No. 13; Splendeur 1993, No. 51.



**58. Bowl depicting Khusrau II  
and courtiers, late 6<sup>th</sup> to early 7<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Silver, hammered from a sheet and gilded; low relief produced by hollowing the background; chased and punched, diameter: 26 cm; weight: 985.6g. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. S-520.*

The scene on the bowl is fairly rare in metalwork, an official composition of a court reception seen mainly on rock reliefs.

On a throne supported by figures of winged horses is the shahanshah of Iran, Khusrau II (591-628) (judging by details of his individual crown and other insignia) and his courtiers in official dress. Subsequently, under Islam, such illustrations became standard for scenes of court receptions. Of interest is the lower segment of the



bowl showing a “hunting composition”, no longer symbolical but simply an ordinary genre scene of a royal hunt for moufflons in the mountains, possibly also showing Khusrau II (he wears a different crown): the king shoots at the moufflons, twisting round in a “Parthian bend”, and a frightened bird flies out from under the hooves of the horse.

The bowl was discovered before 1908 on the exposed edge of a river terrace above the River Sylva near the village of Strelka in the Perm region.

**Bibliography:**

Orbeli and Trever 1935, pl. 7; Harper and Meyers 1981, pp. 67, 68; Trever and Lukonin 1987, No. 9; Splendeur 1993, No. 61.



**59. Jug with the face of a goddess, 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries.**  
*Silver, moulded from a sheet, embossed, chased, punched and gilded (the neck produced separately, the join masked by a tooled relief rim, handle missing), height: 14.5 cm; weight: 358.3g. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. S-60. Transferred in 1926 from the Moscow Kremlin Armoury.*

Several small details of the ornament connect this jug closely with the lobed bowl decorated with goats. It is possible that both vessels were made in the same workshop.

The jug portrays a woman's face corresponding exactly with the Sassanian ideal of feminine beauty (of which a description survives

in the late Sassanian work, *Khusrau, Son of Kavadh, and His Page*). The woman wears a complicated diadem and headdress composed of various plants. This, together with the frieze of *Senmurv* on the neck of the jug, may be evidence that the image is that of the goddess of plants, *Ameretat*. Two medallions on the jug's body contain the history of some unknown hero, impaling a rampant tiger with his sword and tearing the jaw of a wild boar. Although prototypes of the scene of a king's single combat with a beast go back to Iranian art of the Achaemenid age, at the early Sassanian, "symbolical" stage of development in metalwork, only the Iranian shahanshah was portrayed thus. This jug depicts neither the shahanshah nor a prince, but simply a noble knight. The symbolic genre has been reduced to that of the heroic exploit. The heroic genre (hand-to-hand struggle with a beast, lone hunt on foot for a beast, a battle of strength, etc.) is characteristic of late Sassanian metalwork of the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries. The jug dates from this period.

Possibly the exploits of the hero depicted on this jug, as on other examples of late Sassanian metalwork, were illustrations of legends which have not survived but which would have been sung by Sassanian minstrels (*gosans*) at the courts of kings and nobles.

The original provenance of the jug is unknown. Before 1910 it was in the collection of Prince Vladimir Orlov, and then entered the Kremlin Armoury.

#### Bibliography:

Smirnov 1909, No. 82; Trever and Lukonin 1987, No. 28; Splendeur 1993, No. 95.



**60. Vessel, 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Clay, thrown on a potter's wheel, with sized polychrome decoration on a slip layer, height: 46 cm. The Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Turkmenistan, Ashgabat.*

The form of the vessel is common. Certain details, such as the mouldings on the handles, enable us to assign this example to the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century.

There are four scenes on the vessel: a noble wearing a wedding garland and holding a fan and a bowl of fruit is seated on a takht,

next to his bride who has a flower in her hand; the same noble on horseback is seen shooting an arrow at a bird; mortally ill, he lies on a couch, accompanied by a mourner, and a priest who, judging by the specific gesture of the right hand, is reading prayers; the noble, bound in a shroud, is borne on a litter to a Zoroastrian graveyard.

The painted decoration has many interesting details: the background strewn with red trefoils, the picture of a pomegranate, the garlands resting on a special stand, the jug, some kind of signs reminiscent of the letters of the Middle Persian alphabet, *etc.* Several details are indisputably similar to those of contemporary Central Asian Sogdian paintings, and faces, especially the eyes, depicted exactly like those on contemporary painted ceramics from Marv or early Islamic pieces. But it is undoubtedly a Sassanian noble who is portrayed. The banquet scene on the vessel is a standard element also found on silver bowls and particularly often on marriage gems (carved seals) with Sassanian texts wishing that the marriage will be happy. The hunting scene is also a standard element.

Thus, the bird at which the noble is shooting is portrayed exactly as on, for example, seals of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The funeral – although this is the only known depiction of such rites – is typically Zoroastrian: in accordance with Zoroastrian beliefs there is an even number of litter bearers and of accompanying mourners, the gesture of the priest singing the Yasna is characteristic, the shroud of the deceased is girdled with the Zoroastrian belt (*kustik*), and there is a wheeled litter. The entire life story of the noble is illustrated on the vessel in only four scenes. It unwittingly brings to mind four lines of a Persian *ruba'i* (lyrical quatrain), a literary genre widespread in the early Islamic period and most probably based on a prototype in Sassanian poetic texts.

They speak of the world's mortality, of the vanity of desires, of man's emergence from dust and return to dust, of the potter shaping a vessel from clay as god created man from clay.

Not a single genuine *ruba'i* has survived from Sassanian times, but here are several lines from a late Sassanian poem, The Admonitions of Vehzat-i Frav-Peroz:

(22) When the body decomposes and the qalib [mould for a clay vessel] is broken,  
the soul has forgotten the body; just as when the potter finishes work, the qalib is  
of no use to anyone...

(23) When fate closes the eyes – the body of man is such that it cannot rise, and his



heart is in such pain that it beats not, the hand is so broken that it cannot be raised, and the legs so shattered that they will not walk...

(25) And thus the body as flesh and bone on the funeral bier is borne to the graveyard, and the family mingles with strangers, and might and power pass to another owner, and the wife thinks of another husband and possessions pass to another.

(28) The soul is alone and the body, only a body as flesh and bone, lies apart... The dog and the bird sit next to it and quarrel over the prey.

(29) And the great and the small and the noble and the rich man and the beggar and the slave – even the very least of men will come to this.

The vessel was found in a Buddhist stupa at Marv. It was used by the Buddhists as a fine vessel to store holy relics – Buddhist palm-leaf manuscripts. It was not, of course, intended for this purpose. In eastern Iran, Zoroastrians were buried in such vessels, and also in special clay ossuaries. According to Zoroastrian beliefs, the corpse defiled the sacred earth and the deceased were laid on couches specially carved into cliffs (or later in India, at the top of clay “towers of silence” – dahma) where birds devoured them. The bones were collected and buried either in clay vessels, or in ossuaries (mainly in eastern Iran), or in specially carved niches in cliffs.

The images on the vessel are an extremely rare example of Sassanian painting (there is one single, small fragment of Sassanian mural painting found at Susa in western Iran: it consists of the remains of a king’s figure on a red horse).

Possibly such painting is yet to be unearthed by excavations of Sassanian towns, for it is surely with good reason that many early Islamic works, as well as sources contemporary with the Sassanids, describe the walls of reception halls and the iwans of Sassanian palaces as being decorated with paintings.

#### Bibliography:

Pugachenkova 1967, pp. 91-95, pl. 67; Lukonin 1977b, pp. 214-217, 219-221.



**61. Bowl, 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Glass, height: 7.3 cm, diameter: 10.4 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg. Inv. No. Kz-6247.*

This is a typical example of a late Sassanian glass bowl. It was cast in an open mould and the facets were carefully polished. All the examples known at present are damaged, but in order to conceive the effect these vessels produced, one must imagine an almost colourless or slightly tinged glass covered with small and polished mirror-facets reflecting the light. Such vessels have been found during a number of excavations in Iran (for example, at Gilan) and in the Caucasus. One such vessel was found in the grave of the Japanese emperor Ankhan (c. 535 CE), another has been kept at the Japanese temple treasury of Shosoin since the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Several examples have been found in Mesopotamia and Iraq.

This particular vessel was found in one of the graves near the village of Komunt (Northern Ossetia).

All these vessels are amazingly uniform as regards their dimensions (7.6-9.7 cm in height, 9.4-12.2 cm in diameter) and as a rule they have an identical number of rows of facets. This may indicate that they were produced in the same place or perhaps that

they had a specific purpose.



**62. Aquamanile, 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Bronze, cast, inlaid with light-coloured paste for the eyes and the necklace with four round pendants. The handle is hollow, soldered to the body; in the centre of the handle is a funnel with two rings for the attachment of a lid, height: 34.5 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. Kz-5765. Purchased in Daghestan (Russia).*

Bronze sculpture of the Sassanian age is very rare. A few bronze busts are known, portraying the Iranian shahanshahs of the Sassanian era (although doubts have been expressed as to their authenticity), two or three bronze figurines also representing

shahanshahs, and finally this aquamanile. It forms part of a group of marvellous bronze aquamaniles, incense burners and vessels in the form of various birds and beasts, in which the art of Iran and its neighbouring lands was so rich during the early medieval period. A goat wearing a necklace is a widespread motif in Sassanian art, possibly as the symbol of one of the Zoroastrian deities.

**Bibliography:**

Trever 1959, p. 324, pl. 20; Trever and Lukonin 1987, No. 47.





**63. Lobed bowl, 7<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Silver, hammered from a thick sheet and gilded; low relief produced by hollowing the background, length: 22.9 cm; weight: 869.2g. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. S-285. Donated in 1940 by the Kiev Museum of Western and Oriental Art on the occasion of the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the State Hermitage Museum.*

Goats at the sides of a tree constitute a very ancient figurative motif, dating back at least to the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE. However, it is not known whether this motif had any sort of symbolical significance in Sassanian Iran, apart from in the usual benedictory sense.

All the illustrations on the bowl (goats at the sides of a tree; griffins with birds' heads and wings and the claws and bodies of a beast of prey; a recumbent lion) are represented here exactly as they are on Sassanian carved gems and stucco decorations.

It is this circumstance – the construction of the vessel's motif out of standard elements, each of which is found separately on other objects – which deters one from regarding the bowl's theme as a symbolical depiction of the universe, although it shows water and dry land, flowers, birds and beasts. The purpose of lobed vessels is also unclear. The participants in ceremonial banquets are represented with such bowls in their hands in some works of monumental art.

This bowl was found in 1815 or 1823 in the Ostrozhsky district of Volynskaya province.

**Bibliography:**

Smirnov 1909, No. 76; Trever and Lukonin 1987, No. 33; Splendeur 1993, No. 84.



**64. Leg of a throne, 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Bronze, cast, height: 29 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg. Inv. No. Kz-6267.*

The zoomorphic legs of shahanshahs' thrones (takhts) are commonly represented on Sassanian objects. However, only four bronze examples have survived (two in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, one in the Hermitage and one in the Nizami Museum, Baku).

They all depict a protome – more exactly the head, body and leg –

of a savage griffin with the beak of a bird of prey, a wolf's pricked ears, a "collar" of fur and a lion's claws. This terrible fantastical beast was a symbol in Sassanian Zoroastrianism of Verethragna, the god of victory, and its head appeared at the top of the crowns of Sassanian princes and queens.

During excavations of the Sassanian town of Shush, a clay mould for the casting of such a leg was discovered.

Bibliography:

Lukonin 1977b, p. 204; Trever and Lukonin 1987, No. 49; Splendeur 1993, No. 28.



**65. Figure of a cockerel, 8<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Bronze (brass), cast, inlaid with copper and engraved,  
height: 41.5 cm. The Russian Museum of Ethnology, St Petersburg.  
Inv. No. 2046/2. Acquired in 1909 from von Peters.*

It has not yet been precisely established what function was served by these early Islamic metal vessels in the form of birds or beasts. Apparently they were used either as aquamaniles or incense burners.

The technique of this cockerel-shaped vessel is close to the figure of the eagle, although the latter is inlaid with silver and copper whereas here only the eyes of the cockerel are inlaid with copper.

Judging by the colour of the metal and the different ornamentation on the tail, the latter is a later addition.

Two holes in the body and neck suggest that a handle was attached here (as on the figure of an eagle in the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin) and that the vessel was used to hold water, which would have been poured into it through an orifice in place of the tail or through a hollow handle.

Near the left eye are traces of a word written in naskhi script. It is difficult to determine the vessel's place of manufacture. We must assume that this object, like the eagle figure, was made at the centre of the Arab Caliphate, in Iraq, or the western regions of Iran.





**66. Jug with flautist and  
fantastic beast, 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Bronze, cast, height: 43 cm.  
The State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg. Inv. No. Kz-5725.*

The jug has its origins in wine-jugs of this form which were typical of Sassanian Iran. It is decorated with scenes that also have their origins in the repertory of Sassanian and Zoroastrian motifs.

The central scene consists of the figure of a flautist in a long pleated garment, standing next to a winged and horned dragon with

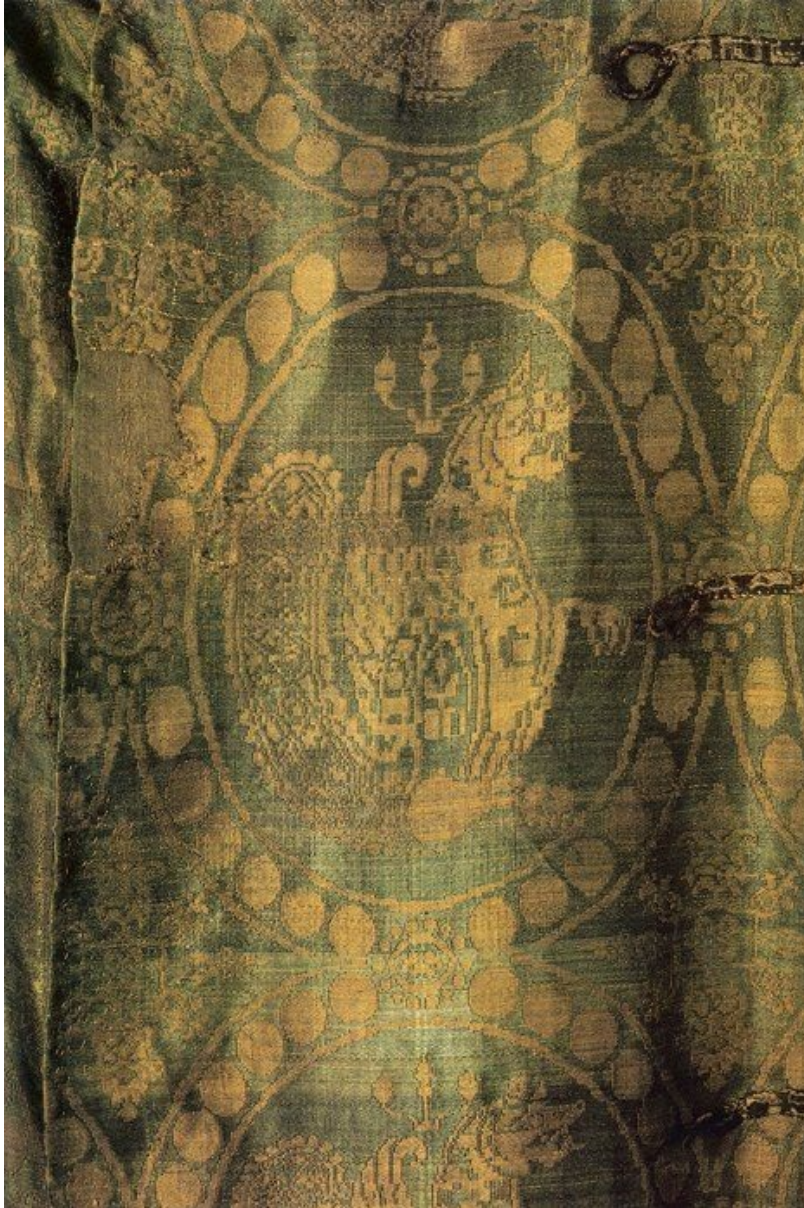
lion's claws, and it is found on a number of Sassanian objects, such as silver plates.

If it is based on a Sassanian iconographic scheme, then this fantastic creature evidently symbolised the entire animal and plant kingdoms; it has the head and claws of a carnivore, the horns of a herbivorous animal, the wings of a bird and plant shoots growing from its body. In that case the flautist standing next to it would represent the Zoroastrian deity of the animal and plant kingdoms, possibly the goddess Haurvatat or Ameretat. The rampant winged dragons represented on the neck of the jug are also Zoroastrian in their symbolism.

Judging by its shape, the style of the motifs and also by the fact that the central scene breaks the canonic rules, the jug was undoubtedly produced after the fall of the Sassanian state, when Sassanian compositions and forms were reproduced without any deep understanding of their symbolism, and yet were fashioned in a brilliant, traditional style, although one that was already becoming demoded.

#### Bibliography:

Marshak 1972, p. 80; Trever and Lukonin 1987, No. 50.



**67. Caftan with Senmurvs, 9<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Silk (samite weave), length: 140 cm; width: 227 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. Kz-6584.*

It is rare that clothes in such a good state of preservation are found in archaeological sites, such as this Caftan found in a ruined grave at Moshchevaya Balka (Northern Caucasus).

The cut of the caftan is indisputably local: all the men's caftans found at Moshchevaya Balka have a close-fitting top fastened with galloon ribbons and a wide skirt with slits for riding; however, they are usually made from ordinary textiles and only decorated with silk,

which was as valued as gold during the early Middle Ages.

Thus the caftan in question is undoubtedly the costume of a chief of the local Adygo-Alan tribes. It was lined with squirrel fur; silk textiles of varied provenance (Sogdian, Chinese and Byzantine) were used for the trimmings and to reinforce the hems from inside.

Their variety was determined by the course of the trade route (the “Silk Road”) which led over the north-western passes of the Caucasus near Moshchevaya Balka and linked Byzantium with Central Asia and the Far East, by way of the Greek colonies on the Black Sea coast of the Caucasus.

This route was the reason why an enormous quantity of silk textiles accumulated in these parts of the Caucasus; caravans passing through were obliged to pay for the right of using a pass, for guides, porters, horses, *etc.* Usually in such cases the cloth was cut up and a small piece would be allotted to each person; in sewing garments one such piece would be joined to others. But this chief’s caftan was entirely sewn from one piece of silk.

The silk is of marvellous quality, dense, heavy and lustrous, and decorated with a motif consisting of a right-facing figure of the fantastic Iranian beast, the Senmurv, placed in a medallion surrounded by beading. Between the medallions are palmettes of intertwined lotuses, which were also frequently depicted on objects of art from Sassanian Iran.

This theme remained in the repertory of textile decoration for a particularly long period – until the 13<sup>th</sup> century, by which time its origins had been, of course, long forgotten – and they helped spread this image throughout the world, as far as ancient Russia and Scandinavia. Silk was used to sew the ceremonial robes of the Iranian shahanshah and it is surprising that a garment of this precious material should have been found in a region so far from any large centres.

#### Bibliography:

Ierusalimskaya 1972; Jeroussalimskaja 1978; A A Ierusalimskaya, The Caucasus on the Silk Road. Catalogue of the Temporary Exhibition, St Petersburg, 1992, No. 1; Splendeur 1993, Nos. 127, 128; Great Art Treasures 1994, No. 448.



**68. Ewer, by Abu Yazid, 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries.**  
*Bronze, cast and punched, with ring-matted background,  
height: 64.8 cm. Art Museum of Georgia, Tbilisi. Inv. No. V5.*

This outstanding example of early Islamic bronzeware bears a dated inscription which includes the craftsman's name. In spite of that, however, the date remains disputed. The circular Arabic inscription round the crown, executed in plain Kufic with decoration on the tips of the, downstrokes of the letters "ra", "za" and "nun", reads as follows:

"Blessings. Of the works of Abu Yazid, of those made in Basra in the year sixty-



nine”.

In the original the last word of the inscription is “sixty”. This word would not fit into the space left for it and its end is cramped, whereas the following word, “blessings”, is written very freely, being the first of the inscription.

This is very important in dating the vessel insofar as it should be assigned to 60 AH (688-89 CE) according to the inscription, whilst its decoration suggests a date one or two hundred years later.

The complicated ornament of the bottom and sides of the foot, the neck and the widening of the handle at the top go back to the decoration of 8<sup>th</sup>-century Central Asian silverware, and in its almost abstract stylisation it is close to 9<sup>th</sup>-century Mesopotamian stucco.

One can match the date on the inscription with the ornament if one assumes that the inscription was not finished owing to a miscalculation of its space.

In that case, after the word “sixty” the full text would have had the conjunction “and” followed by the word “hundred” or “two hundred”. The later dating – such as 269 AH (882-883 CE) suggested in 1972 by Boris Marshak – was disputed by Géza Fehérvári, but supported by James Allan. In the style of its decoration and the suggested later date of manufacture, the ewer is very close to one of the same shape in the Keir Collection, England.

Several other ewers of analogous form are known, the decoration of which is sometimes similar to the ornament of the ewer in question, but more frequently of later date with counterparts among Khurasan and Central Asian bronzeware of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In general, castbronze ewers of the 8<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries reveal an astounding stability of form coupled with a rapid evolution of the decoration.

This ewer was manufactured not in Iran but in Iraq, yet it relates to a number of pieces that in many ways defined the development of medieval Iranian and Central Asian bronzes. One observes in its form the combination of Byzantine and Sassanian traditions which is characteristic of early Islamic art.

#### Bibliography:

Dyakonov 1947a; Marshak 1972, p. 72; Fehérvári 1976, pp. 25-27, 32, pl. 1a; Allan 1976; Melikian-Chirvani 1976b, p. 291.



**69. Figure of a horse, 10<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Bronze (brass), cast, turned and engraved, height: 36 cm;  
length: 42 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.  
Inv. No. IR-1984. Transferred in 1925 from the State Academy  
for the History of Material Culture; formerly in the A. Bobrinsky Collection.*

The figure of the horse once formed a main part of a complex sculptural group, for judging by the insert on the back and the lack of ornamentation on the saddle-cloth there was originally a rider. A shaft was fastened to the pintle fitted on the horse's crupper: in all probability this was the base of a lamp and the sculptural group once served as a lamp stand.

The figure is richly decorated with engraved designs of people, birds, beasts and foliage. The background is punched. Arabic inscriptions were engraved on the pendants of the crupper-strap under the tail, but only the text on the right pendant has survived (the script is Kufic):

“Allah's blessings on the owner of this object”.

From the form of the lettering one can confidently date the article to

the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

Bibliography:

Orbeli and Trever 1935, fig. 84; Dyakonov 1947b; Islam 1985, p. 115, No. 24; Masterpieces 1990, No. 10.



**70. Incense burner, 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries.**  
*Bronze, cast and chased, height: 39 cm.*  
*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*  
*Inv. No. IR-2324. Purchased in 1935.*

This incense burner in the form of a pheasant originally had a detachable tail so that incense could be inserted; this part was later soldered on and sealed up. Judging by its individual details, in particular the tooling of the feathers and the rosette on the breast, the vessel has a certain similarity to the incense burner in the shape of an eagle of 180 AH (796-97 CE). However, the stylisation of the entire form of the pheasant has been taken a great deal further.

Bibliography:  
Dyakonov 1947b.



**71. Tray, 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Bronze, embossed and tooled with punches, diameter: 73.5 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. Kz-2321.*

*Acquired in 1926 from an inhabitant of the village of Kubachi, Daghestan.*

In trays dating from the first centuries of Islam one can trace the same general tendency as in ewers: early examples (7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries) follow the traditions of the formerly Byzantine provinces of Syria and Egypt, whereas later examples (9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries), whilst preserving their link with these traditions, display increasingly Iranian decorative motifs. This particular tray is tooled with a great



variety of patterns, but the basic decorative motif is a medallion encircled by beads. The total absence of any sort of figural representation and the rhythmic division of the surface are less like Sassanian decoration than that of early Islamic architectural stucco work.

The tray is close to earlier examples (8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries) in which the Iranian features are much less strongly expressed: the similarity is revealed in the rhythmical organisation of the decorative surface and in a number of details (a vase with a plant in a medallion, shoots emerging from the sides of a vase, buds with petals curling outwards, small rosettes in the background, etc.).

#### Bibliography:

Orbeli and Trever 1935, fig. 68; Marshak 1978, Marschak 1986, pl. 206; Masterpieces 1990, No. 8; Great Art Treasures 1994. No. 408.



**72. Tray, 10<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Bronze, embossed, diameter: 58 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. IR-2322. Transferred in 1925 from the  
State Academy for the History of Material Culture;  
formerly in the A. Bobrinsky Collection.*

This tray is one of the very latest surviving early Islamic tray-plates. Many details link it to earlier examples of this group, but the general composition of its imagery is new and unlike the decoration of any other object. The mounted hunter (Bahram Gur), pairs of beasts that confront or regard each other, and a lion attacking another creature, are all frequently depicted on similar items. However, the motifs are portrayed here in another order than the usual, logical one: Bahram

Gur is not sited in the centre but above, by the rim. The figures of the beasts are enlarged and more significant than that of the rider on his camel, who seems lost amongst them. Instead of the luxuriant foliage decorating other trays there remain only frail, hardly perceptible twigs.

The scene of the pouncing beast, the eagle carrying a woman, Bahram Gur and Azadeh are all of Iranian origin, already known to Sassanian art. The Iranian tradition has almost entirely forced out the traces of the Byzantine inheritance taken up in the 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries in early Islamic art. However, the plate's stylised images are closer to Islamic objects of the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries than to Sassanian ones: the disposition of the motifs is haphazard; we have no idea what Bahram Gur is shooting at; the gazelles are bigger than the lions; the figure of the woman on the eagle's breast is very small. All the themes have acquired a decorative rather than a symbolic significance.

#### Bibliography:

Orbeli and Trever 1935, fig. 69; Marshak 1978; Marschak 1986, pl. 204.



**73. Jug, 10<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Silver, chased (handle, legs and soldered birds' heads on the body are cast), height: 17 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. V3-796. Acquired in 1896 from the Imperial Archaeological Commission.*

This jug is distinguished from others by its fanciful form and luxuriance of decoration. The birds in relief on the body are similar to the birds on 12<sup>th</sup>-century Khurasan bronze vessels. Even the vessel's legs are made in the form of small birds. A Senmurv is depicted on the neck of the vessel; a peacock with a ribbon round its neck and a twig in its beak, and two other birds are also shown. The

Sassanian motif is distorted: the position of the Senmurv's feet is unusual – it is not flying but standing. The background is ring-matted, which is traditional for works from both Central Asia and Khurasan, but the absence of any purely Central Asian features obliges one rather to assign the vessel to Khurasan. Despite the extreme refinement of the decoration, the Kufic inscription, in 9<sup>th</sup>- or 10<sup>th</sup>-century script, is very simple both in its calligraphy and content: "Allah's blessings and prosperity and joy be upon al-Husain b Ali". The formula is typical of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The name and patronymic referred to in the inscription are those of the famous Shi'ite martyr, son of Ali and grandson of Muhammad; no title or nisba is given.

The historian Ibn al-Athir relates an episode occurring in the 920s and involving al-Husain ibn Ali Marwarrudi. This was a man who had led a difficult life, a Shi'ite and rebel who had spent long years in prison. After being freed he joined the retinue of the Samanid Amir of Bukhara. Once al-Husain rebuked the son of the vicegerent of Nishapur (the capital of Khurasan) who had offered the Amir water in a plain ewer: "Surely your father must be able to send good, graceful ewers from Nishapur – My father sends such as you [i.e. rebels] and not ewers from Khurasan." And al-Husain bowed his head, compelled to remain silent. Although it is impossible to prove, it is perfectly conceivable that it was this al-Husain ibn Ali from Khurasan who ordered this purposely graceful ewer.

#### Bibliography:

Smirnov 1909, No. 128; Marshak 1976, pp. 155, 156; Marschak 1986, pl. 127.





**74. Lamp stand, 11<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Bronze (brass), cast and engraved, height: 44 cm.*

*Ahmad Donish Institute of History, Archaeology,  
and Ethnography of the Tajik Academy of Sciences, Dushanbe.*

Bronze lamp stands consisting of a round base on three legs, with a figural shaft and a flat plate on top, were very widespread in Iran during the 10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Two types of base are known for these stands – lobed and circular. The earliest of them date from the late 10<sup>th</sup> century, the latest from the early 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The stand in question was discovered in 1965 during excavations at the site of Khulbuk in the south of Tajikistan. The stand is fairly modestly decorated: on two of the four facets of its shaft the same benedictory Arabic inscription is engraved in Kufic script against a clear background:

“Allah’s blessings on the owner of this”.

The dating of this object to the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century is supported by archaeological evidence, since the site of Khulbuk was destroyed in the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century.

Such a dating is not contradicted by the epigraphic evidence – the intertwining letters, “sad” and “qaf”, and also the somewhat archaic formula itself, “Allah’s blessings” (later it would simply be “Blessings on the owner of this”).

#### Bibliography:

Art of Central Asia 1980, ill. 64; The Antiquities of Tajikistan. Exhibition Catalogue, Dushanbe, 1985, No. 726.



**75. Incense burner, late 10<sup>th</sup> to early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Bronze (brass), forged, pierced and engraved,  
height: 15.7 cm. The Institute of History of the  
Academy of Sciences of Turkmenistan, Ashgabat.*

Vessels on a low foot with bodies widened at the top and with openwork ornamentation, such as this one found in Serakhs, Turkmenistan, in 1970, have only attracted the attention of scholars in the last half century. At present four similar pieces have been published, three of which are decorated round the upper rim with Arabic inscriptions so close to each other in their lettering that the must surely be from the same workshop (see SPA 1938-1939, vol. VI, pl. 1290a; Arts of Islam 1981, No. 38). The upper part (lid?) of all these objects is missing, although one can assume that it was also openwork.

It is the openwork decoration and the small size of these pieces which lead one to assume that they served as incense burners.

The Arabic benedictory inscription is executed in lettering characteristic of the late 10<sup>th</sup> to the early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries (opposite):

“Blessings and happiness and joy and prosperity...”.

Bibliography:

Atagarryyev and Khodzhageldyyev 1972, p. 28;

Pugachenkova and Rempel 1982, p. 253.



**76. Saucer, 11<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Silver, tooled with punches, gilded and nielloed (king's eyes),  
diameter: 10.3 cm. The State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg. Inv. No. S-499. Acquired in 1951.*

This saucer, discovered in a hoard of the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries, near the village of Muzhi in the Yamalo-Nenetsky national region, depicting a palace reception, has been related to the art of Central Asia of c. 6<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries.

However, the peculiar two-horned hats of the courtiers and other peculiarities suggest a different attribution. Such hats were worn by courtiers and slave-guards of the Ghaznavids who ruled the territories of Khurasan and southern Transoxiana in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and the eastern part of these domains in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The characters' footwear resembles that in paintings at the Ghaznavid palace in Lashkari Bazar in Afghanistan.

The composition on the saucer is very similar to that of a silver medal of about the 10<sup>th</sup> century, found at Nishapur, but many decorative details have their analogies amongst Khurasan 9<sup>th</sup>-century



silverware. All of this compels one to assign the piece to the beginning of Ghaznavid rule in Khurasan in the late 10<sup>th</sup> to the early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries when the famous Mahmud Ghaznavi was proclaimed king. Possibly it is he who is portrayed on the saucer; the similarity between his and the face of the main figure lends full support to such an assumption.

Several features of the composition lead one to assume that the saucer was made within the tradition of late official Sassanian metalwork. But the iconography of the royal reception here is already of a later type, elaborated during the 9<sup>th</sup> century in Khurasan and by the 13<sup>th</sup> century dominant throughout the world of Islam.

Bibliography: Trever 1960; Marshak 1971, pp .66-68, fig. 29; Marschak 1986, pl. 33; Masterpieces 1990, No. 19.



**77. Fragment of textile, 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Silk (lampas weave), 38 x 16.5 cm. The State  
Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. IR-2012.  
Transferred in 1925 from the History Museum, Moscow.*

In a large medallion (more than half a metre in diameter) the figure of a lion-clawed griffin rampant at the sides of the Tree of Life is symmetrically repeated. The Tree of Life is highly ornamented and below it there are plant shoots branching off to the right and left in the form of garlands of lotus flowers, filling the entire space within the medallion: the figures of the griffins are represented against this

background. The medallion is framed by a two-line Arabic inscription (in Kufic script) against a background of leafy stalks and palmettes, which is poorly preserved.

The inscription begins below, under the Tree of Life, from whence the words diverge to the right and left (half the text reads as a mirror image). So far only the first word has been deciphered – barakat, “blessing”.

Only a part of the right-hand griffin figure has been preserved on this fragment of textile.

A larger fragment of the same textile, depicting the central part and right half of the medallion’s design and giving one an impression of the image as a whole, is now in the Museum of Georgian History, Tbilisi.

Earlier it was kept in Svaneti (Georgia) in the Church of St George at the village of Syuti, from whence the Hermitage piece also came.

The textile is executed in the so-called lampas weave which appeared in Iran during the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries and heralded a new stage in the development of Near Eastern weaving.

#### Bibliography:

Meisterwerke 1912, vol. III, pl. 179; Ketskhoveli 1972.



**78. Incense burner, by Ali ibn Abu Nasr, 11<sup>th</sup> century.**  
*Bronze (brass), cast and engraved, height: 27.5 cm; length: 23.5 cm.*  
*Ahmad Donish Institute of History, Archaeology, and Ethnography*  
*of the Tajik Academy of Sciences, Dushanbe. Inv. No. 571/1.*

This incense burner in the form of a feline predator (a lynx, to judge by the ear-tips) was found during excavations at the site of Khulbuk (southern Tajikistan) in 1978. Its construction differs slightly from that of similar objects – the head and neck are not detachable but fold forward on a hinge.

The incense burner is decorated with engraved and pierced

ornaments. The decoration is especially luxuriant on the head and neck, where one should note the narrow strips filled with circlets dotted in the centre.

It is this design which links the incense burner to a large group of Khurasan objects of the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries. Engraved palmettes, rosettes and “knots” are found on the paws and the back of the body. Along the body, on both sides, there are cartouches with Arabic inscriptions in Kufic script:

“Made by Ali ibn Abi Nasr”;

“To every work – [its] accomplishes..”.

Insofar as the incense burner has an archaeological dating – not later than the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century (when Khulbuk perished) – it enables us to date other, similar incense burners more accurately (earlier they were assigned to the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries). The palaeographical analysis of the inscription is entirely in accordance with this date.

#### Bibliography:

Art of Central Asia 1980; UNESCO Courrier, November 1980, pp. 40, 41; The Antiquities of Tajikistan. Exhibition Catalogue, Dushanbe, 1985, No. 716; Oxus. 2000 Jahre Kunst am Oxus-Fluss in Mittelasien. Museum Rietberg, Zurich, 1989, No. 93.





**79. Incense burner, 11<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Bronze (brass), cast, inlaid with copper and silver and engraved, height: 45 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. IR-1565.*

This incense burner in the form of a feline predator (in all probability a lynx) belongs to a large group of similar objects, apparently widespread in their time. At least nine complete figures and five detached heads have survived. The breast and head of the lynx are inlaid only with copper discs. In the cartouche on the breast letters of a Kufic inscription are executed in silver:

“Ali ibn Muhammad al-Tajji (?)”.

The nisba of the person is still incomprehensible. The inscription does not indicate whether the name belongs to the owner or the craftsman. There are bands on the neck and body with engraved Arabic inscriptions, benedictory in their content, written in Kufic script. The text is repeated several times, beginning with the words:

“with happiness and blessings”.

and ending as usual with:

“to the owner of this”.

From the nature of the script, the ornament in the form of five-leaved palmettes and the modest inlay, this object can be assigned to the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

#### Bibliography:

Orbeli 1938; Dyakonov 1947b; Mayer 1959, p. 37; Islam 1985, p. 129, No.5; Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World, Philadelphia-London, 1988, p. 42, fig. 11; Arts of Persia 1989, p. 172, pl. 4; Masterpieces 1990, No. 18; Great Art Treasures 1994, No. 403.



**80. Incense burner, 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Bronze (brass), cast, inlaid with copper and silver  
and engraved, height: 20.7 cm. The State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg. Inv. No. IR-1669. Purchased in 1958.*

Amongst the various types of incense burner which were widespread during pre-Mongol times, one fairly frequently comes across similar examples, with a circular body on three legs and an open half-cupola with a bird on top.

Along the rim of the half-cupola words of an Arabic inscription in naskhi script are fitted into two cartouches; it has not yet been possible to decipher it. On the body, between two guilloches, are

three cartouches separated by medallions containing vegetal ornamentations. The cartouches contain an Arabic inscription in Kufic script, its background tooled with punches:

“Happiness and blessings and perfection”.

(the third word is slightly deformed: “alif” in the middle is represented like “lam”). The letters “alif” and “lam” of the definite article are intertwined.

Next to the medallions of this band are engraved pairs of birds which were probably covered with silver leaf (traces remain on one bird). Silver inlay also survives on the figure of the bird on top of the incense burner. It is possible the silver inlay was added later than the copper inlay of the inscription.

At the bottom, a pacing beast (probably a lion) is depicted in a medallion. The background here is also matt-tooled with punches.



**81. Incense burner, 11<sup>th</sup> century.**  
*Bronze (brass), cast and engraved, height: 36 cm.*  
*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*  
*Inv. No. IR-2323. Purchased in 1936.*

This incense burner in the form of a cockerel, which now stands firmly on clipped claws and rests on its wing-tips, does not correspond to its original appearance. It clearly had long claws (like the eagle and cockerel), projecting a little, which made the object unsteady.

Therefore props were essential, of the type seen on the aquamanile



in the shape of a hawk kept at the monastery of St Catherine in the Sinai Peninsula (see Weitzmann 1964, p. 122). The oval holes on the reverse of the wing-tips are the traces of these props (the hole below in the centre of the body is apparently of later origin). Insofar as there are no traces of a handle on the upper part of the object, one can confidently assume that it served as an incense burner.

The treatment of the plumage on the legs and wings links this vessel with earlier ones. The human figures in the large medallion on the cockerel's breast and in the small one on its back have their counterparts amongst silver medallions of the Buyid period; hence one can assign this particular incense burner to the late 10<sup>th</sup> to the early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries.

#### Bibliography:

Orbeli and Trever 1935, fig. 82; Dyakonov 1947b; Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World, Philadelphia-London, 1988, p. 42, fig. 9.



**82. Ewer, by al-Fadl, late 10<sup>th</sup> to early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Bronze (brass), cast, forged, engraved and inlaid  
with copper, height: 37 cm; diameter: 22.5 cm.*

*Museum of Georgian History, Tbilisi. Inv. No. MS 134.*

The ewer is decorated with benedictory Arabic inscriptions executed in Kufic script (on the neck, the shoulders and the fluting of the body) and in naskhi script (on a flute, but the text is incomprehensible). On another flute under the pouring lip the craftsman's signature is written in Kufic script:

“Made by al-Fadl”.

(although the name could also be read as “Ba Fadl”).

The intertwined letters “alif-lam” and other factors, as well as some ornaments, allows the fabrication of this ewer to be assigned to the late 10<sup>th</sup> to the early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Bibliography:

Collections 1902, p. 199, pl. XIV.



**83. Cauldron, 11<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Bronze (brass), cast and engraved, height: 53.4 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. TP-161.*

*Transferred in 1925 from the State Academy for the History of Material Culture; formerly in the A. Bobrinsky Collection.*

The cauldron was cast in a mould consisting of two halves (the souldering is visible under the rim). The ornament on the upper part consists of relief arcs but the everted rim is more richly decorated, with two rosettes and two cartouches with an Arabic inscription in Kufic script:

“Happiness and blessings” and  
“blessings and to the owner of this”.

The inscription, standard in the first cartouche, is unusual in the second one where the word “blessings” is repeated with the conjunction “and” after it, unnecessarily in this particular instance. The background of the inscription is decorated with twigs and

palmettes. The words:

*“happiness... prosperity”*

are also engraved on the cauldron in plain Kufic.

It is not clear when this shape emerged. Only a small number of cauldrons with spherical bodies is known. One of them, completely analogous in form and decoration, is in the Tehran Archaeological Museum. The rim of that cauldron also bears rosettes and three inscriptions in “floriated” Kufic:

*“Blessings to the owner of this Muhammad ibn Ishaq II to all times – their duty”.*

From the nature of the script one can date the cauldron to the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

There is one more cauldron in the Tehran Archaeological Museum, also with a spherical body and two massive handles, but its everted rim is narrow and has two small, horizontal projections. The dating of this cauldron is hindered by the absence of ornament and inscription. The third, smaller cauldron with a spherical body (height 29.5 cm) on three legs and with two massive handles is in the Linden Museum, Stuttgart and originates in the Ghazni region (see Kalter 1982, D 48).

The everted rim and upper part of the body are richly decorated with ornament and an inscription with silver inlay. This object dates from the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, from the nature of their script, the earliest examples of these cauldrons date from the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Their place of manufacture remains unclear.

Two more cauldrons, of a shape akin to these three items, also exist; one of them is in the Art Museum of Georgia in Tbilisi and the second was in a private collection in Tehran.

They are also on three legs, with two massive handles and an everted rim, but unlike the above mentioned cauldrons they have a long pouring lip.





**84. Cauldron, late 10<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Bronze (brass), cast and engraved, height: 70 cm;  
diameter: 64 cm. Art Museum of Georgia, Tbilisi. Inv. No. 1/1.*

It is the only one of its form in the collections of the former Soviet Union (there was another cauldron with a pouring lip in a private collection in Tehran). The cauldron was cast in a mould consisting of three parts: two hemispherical halves (the soldering is visible under the lip and on the inside) and a lower round part with legs and relief ornament.

The ornament on the lowest part of the cauldron is unique insofar

as, at the time, if part of the object was not visible to the observer, it was left undecorated.

The everted rim is adorned with an undulating tendril with long leaves, which is similar in style to early Islamic objects. There is a short inscription on the lip: "Blessings on the owner of this object".

The character of the Kufic script, with split apices on several letters, dates the cauldron to the late 10<sup>th</sup> century.



**85. Incense burner, 12<sup>th</sup> century.**  
*Bronze (brass), forged, pierced and engraved,  
height: 21 cm. The Institute of History of the Academy  
of Sciences of Turkmenistan, Ashgabat.*

This openwork incense burner, found in 1970 in Serakhs, Turkmenistan, apparently had a handle on one side. The upper part folds sideways on a hinge.

Its shape attests to the variety of incense burners in existence during the pre-Mongol period.

Bibliography:

Atagarryyev and Khodzhageldyyev 1972, p. 32.



**86. Lamp stand, 11<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Bronze (brass), cast and engraved, height: 89.5 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. IR-1449. Transferred in 1925 from the  
State Academy for the History of Material Culture;  
formerly in the A. Bobrinsky Collection.*

This stand is possibly formed from the parts – the base and the shaft – of two different, although roughly contemporary, objects, insofar as the diameter of the base at the top is a little wider than that of the shaft. Both parts are decorated with engraved and pierced ornament. The edge of the base is badly damaged and not all its decoration is



clearly visible, but it is possible to make out imitation feathers as on early figural vessels: there were evidently bird's heads here, as on other similar objects. The palmettes on the shaft are also of an archaic form. All these indications enable one to date the article to the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

Bibliography:

SPA 1938-1939, vol. VI, pl. 1283a.



**87. Bucket, late 11<sup>th</sup> to first half of 12<sup>th</sup> century.**  
*Bronze (brass), cast, forged and engraved, height  
(without handle): 17.5 cm. The Russian Museum of Ethnology,  
St Petersburg. Inv. 16260. Transferred in 1948 from the  
Museum of the Peoples of the USSR, Moscow.*

The outer surface of the bucket's body is decorated with five bands of engraved details. The second band is filled with an Arabic inscription in Kufic script:

“with happiness and blessings to the owner of this and perfection and prosperity”.

The letters “alif” and “lam” of the definite article are intertwined

(this is fairly seldom encountered); the word “salamat” contains a mistake (“waw” instead of “mim”).

The inscription is an ordinary benedictory one, but its word order differs from that of dozens of similar texts. The fourth band is divided into five parts; each part contains large medallions with figures of birds and, above them, small medallions also with bird figures and depictions of plants.

The group of objects with a matt-tooled background is assigned to Khurasan in the 11<sup>th</sup> to the early 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, but their centre of production has not been determined.



**88. Mortar, 12<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Bronze (brass), cast, engraved and inlaid with copper, height: 13.6 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. IR-1465. Transferred in 1925 from the State Academy for the History of Material Culture; formerly in the A. Bobrinsky Collection.*

A fair number of such mortars have survived (more than fifty are known). They are usually cylindrical in shape, but the external surface of the body is sometimes rounded or faceted, and the top and bottom edges may be wide and everted. However, the decoration of the outer walls can be varied and a typology of these objects' forms and decorations has not yet been established.

All the mortars known at present, date from pre-Mongol times – 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, it is difficult to imagine that during the 14<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries mortars fell into disuse and were no longer

manufactured (though it is true that early mortars might remain serviceable for a very long time).

The Hermitage mortar is very richly decorated both with copper inlay and with various designs and inscriptions.

Above, on the everted rim, are six cartouches separated by medallions. The cartouches contained Arabic inscriptions which are badly damaged.

The decoration of the external surface of the sides consists of three bands: on the first there are six cartouches with an Arabic inscription in naskhi script: "Long fame and happiness and power... and constancy and support and length of life to the owner of this."

The second band bears ornaments. The third one resembles the first in its decoration, but the Arabic inscription – its exact counterpart as regards content – is written in Kufic script.

At the base there are six cartouches along the edge, separated by medallions containing palmettes.

The ornament in the cartouches is faint. In the centre is a large six-leaved palmette, the background is tooled with a punch.

One peculiarity of the Kufic inscription must be pointed out – the intertwined letters "alif" and "lam".

On this evidence, and also that of the punched background, the mortar can be assigned to the group of articles manufactured in the province of Khurasan in the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries.





**89. Ink pot, second half of 12<sup>th</sup> to early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Bronze (brass), cast, engraved and inlaid with silver and copper, height: 10.5 cm; diameter: 8.2 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. IR-1533.*

*Transferred in 1925 from the State Academy for the History of Material Culture; formerly in the N. Veselovsky Collection.*

Evidence of widespread literacy in the Muslim world exists in the form of hundreds of manuscripts and in the numerous names of calligraphers and painters known from historical sources. The multitude of ink pots and qalamdāns (pen-cases) that have survived tell the same story. These objects were manufactured from a wide variety of materials. This is a typical example of a richly decorated bronze ink pot. Judging by its construction (the presence of loops on the body and edge of the lid), such ink pots were carried by being tied to the belt by string threaded through the loops. The shape is characteristic of ink pots in pre-Mongol times.

The decoration of the lid consists of six bands: the first four are ornamental, the fifth bears an Arabic inscription in naskhi script against a background of spiral stalks with palmettes:

“Glory and happiness and power and perfection and constancy and success and... generosity and praise and duration of life to the owner of this.”

On the vertical edge of the sixth band there are three cartouches with Arabic inscriptions in Kufic script against a background of spiral stalks:

“Happiness and blessings and prosperity and perfection and generosity and gratitude and obedience to the owner of this”

Inside the body is a wide flange scalloped around the opening. It has a band with an Arabic inscription in naskhi script against a background of spiral stalks with palmettes:

“Glory and happiness and power and prosperity and constancy and duration of life to the owner of this.”

The rich finish and the nature of the background worked in scrolled tendrils permit an attribution of this ink pot to master craftsmen active during the late 12<sup>th</sup> to the early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is curious to see the punched background, which is usually found on more modestly decorated pieces.

#### Bibliography:

Masterpieces 1990, No. 29.



**90. Ewer, by Mahmud ibn Muhammad al-Harawi, Herat, 577 AH (1181-1182 CE).**  
*Bronze (brass), forged and inlaid with silver and copper,  
height: 38.5 cm. Museum of Georgian History,  
Tbilisi. Inv. No. MS 135.*

This famous ewer, by the master craftsman Mahmud ibn Muhammad al-Harawi, bears an inscription indicating that it was made in the town of Herat; its importance in scholarly terms is equal to that of the bucket of 559 AH (1163 CE).

There are a fairly large number of articles of similar form in

various collections around the world. The ewer has suffered damage during its long life and now bears the marks of a previous restoration: the upper part of the neck and handle plainly come from other objects and the wide side of the foot has been added; on the lower part of the body are numerous rivets, evidently holding an internal patch in place.

The inscriptions on the neck, in Kufic script, consist of the usual benedictions. The body has twenty-four flutes ornamented and inscribed in naskhi script, running from top to bottom. Ten flutes contain a Persian verse inscription (in hazaj metre, each flute has one line – bait). The eleventh flute has an Arabic inscription with the name of the craftsman and the date:

“A beautiful ewer – most beautiful –  
I possess,  
Who has its like in the contemporary world?  
Everyone who has seen it said “It is very graceful.”  
And nobody has seen one [a ewer] that was its equal.  
Look at the ewer – it animates the spirit,  
And this is the water of life that flows from it.  
Each drop of water that flows from it onto my hands  
With every hour brings some new delight.  
Look at the ewer – everyone will praise it,  
[It] is worthy to serve such a great man as you.  
Any eye which sees it will open wide  
And will be unable to say if there is anything better!  
This is the garment of water [i.e. the ewer] – it is made in Herat,  
Who in a hundred years will make its like?  
The seven lamps of heaven, though they are proud,  
Are on good terms with those who make such ewers.  
Let there be favour for him who creates such things,  
Uses pure silver and produces such things.  
In happy times he [the craftsman] will give the ewer to a friend,  
In misfortune he will make it for an enemy.  
The work and engraving of Mahmud ibn Muhammad al-Harawi  
In the month of Sha’ban the year five hundred and seventy-seven.”

#### Bibliography:

Collections 1902, p. 199, pl. XV; Gyuzalyan 1938.



**91. Cauldron, by Mahmud al-Qazwini, 12<sup>th</sup> to early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Bronze (brass), cast and engraved, height: 32 cm; diameter: 78 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. TP-162.*

*Transferred in 1925 from the State Academy for the History of Material Culture; formerly in the A. Bobrinsky Collection.*

This large cauldron has a hemispherical body on three legs and an everted rim with four flanges projecting to the sides. Ring-handles were fitted to two of these, together with figures of beasts (their heads were broken off at a later date). On the third flange an animal chase is depicted against a background of scrolled tendrils with palmettes.

The fourth flange – the pouring lip – is in the form of a shallow rectangular depression covered with an ornamented grille; in cartouches, to its right and left, against a background of scrolled tendrils, is the craftsman's signature in Kufic script:

“Made by Mahmud al-Qazwini.”

To judge by the nisbas of the craftsmen, one can assume that such cauldrons were manufactured in Marv (four nisbas), Tus (two nisbas) and also perhaps in other regions of Iran – Qazwin and Hamadan (a cauldron with a craftsman's name including the nisba “Hamadani” is now in the Tehran Archaeological Museum). The Hermitage cauldron is analogous with the one found at Istakhr, near Persepolis, but the latter is on higher legs and has differently shaped flanges bearing neither ornament nor inscription.



The origin of the form of these cauldrons remains uncertain. Miniature ceramic vessels with an everted pierced rim and two vertical handles, a form very reminiscent of these cauldrons, were found at Paikend in strata from the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries (see Kondratyeva 1961, pl. IV/5, pp. 225, 226).

The same type of miniature ceramic cauldron (13.1 x 9.4 cm) was found during excavations in Nishapur at Village-tepe (see Wilkinson (s.a.), p. 318, No. 89 – dating by stratigraphy is difficult).

In the Samarqand Museum of Culture and Art of Uzbekistan there are three clay hemispherical cauldrons with a narrow everted rim, four rectangular projections and two vertical handles (one of them has a projecting pouring lip), but they are not archaeologically dated. It is perfectly possible that the ceramic forms reflected the influence of metalwork and in that case one could assume that such cauldrons (termed “cauldrons with a cruciate rim”) were first produced in the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries.

A few small bronze (brass) cauldrons of the same form are known (with diameters ranging from 13-18 cm). One of them was found at Istakhr, another in Anatolia, but their archaeological date is unknown.

One of the small cauldrons in the Tehran Archaeological Museum has an ornament of rings with dots in the centre which links it to a large group of vessels dating from the late 7<sup>th</sup> to early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. The miniature bronze cauldron (diameter: 3.6 cm) from the burial site of Asht in the Ferghana Valley remains an isolated instance (see Litvinsky 1978, pp. 134, 135, pl. 34/21). The dating of the cauldron to the time of these kurum-graves (1<sup>st</sup> century BCE to the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE) is unlikely in any case.

The ornament of the cauldron of Mahmud al-Qazwini is close to that of Khurasan metalwork of the pre-Mongol period. But taking some of its peculiarities into account (the original form of the handles, the location of the inscription by the pouring lip, the dimensions), there is still no clear answer to the question of where it originated.

#### Bibliography:

Mayer 1959, p. 59; Khodzhageldyyev 1974, 1975 and 1979;  
Masterpieces 1990, No. 34.



**92. Mirror, 12<sup>th</sup> century.**  
*Cast bronze (brass), diameter: 18 cm.*  
*The State Hermitage Museum,*  
*St Petersburg. Inv. No. IR-1577.*

The decoration of the mirror consists of bands, the second of which bears an Arabic inscription (in Kufic script against a background of scrolled stems with palmettes):

“Blessings and happiness and joy and success and generosity and victory and intercession and support and strength and... duration [of life] and growth to the owner of this.”

On the third band is an animal chase against a background of undulating tendrils with spiral shoots and palmettes.

The Arabic blessing, of course, allows one to associate the mirror with a very wide area and not necessarily with Iran. However, the absence of the definite article “al” (only one word has it here) bears witness that the inscription is not entirely Arabic in nature, and this enables one to relate this object to Iranian metalwork.

This is further corroborated by the background ornament of undulating tendrils with palmettes – a characteristic feature of 12<sup>th</sup>-century Khurasan bronzes.

The lettering of the inscription also supports the dating to the 12<sup>th</sup> century.



**93. Bucket, first half of 12<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Bronze (brass), forged and engraved, with a cast handle, height: 22.5 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. IR-1485. Transferred in 1925 from the museum attached to the former Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

This thin-walled bucket has a flat base and a massive cast handle; it is decorated with three bands of engraved ornament.

In the first band is an Arabic inscription in naskhi script on a background of spiral stems with two palmettes:

“Long fame and happiness and success and prosperity and supremacy and... a high standing.”

The choice of blessings is unusual, two words are undecipherable. It is possible that this bucket served as a bath-house pail (satl).

Bibliography:

SPA 1938-1939, vol. VI, pl. 1291A.





**94. Ewer, by Nasir, 11<sup>th</sup> to early 12<sup>th</sup> centuries.**  
*Bronze (brass), cast, forged, engraved and inlaid with copper,  
height: 37.5 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.  
Inv. No. SA-12680. Transferred in 1930 from the former  
Asiatic Museum of the USSR Academy of Sciences.*

This ewer, with a large pumpkin-shaped body and a long, upright neck, once had a handle, flat at the top and decorated with a row of beads in the middle. The neck is now wrongly soldered and its pouring lip turned towards the side of the body where the handle was fixed. On the neck there are three bands of ornament. The first has

an Arabic inscription in naskhi script against a background of scrolled tendrils with two palmettes at the centre:

“Glory and happiness and power and prosperity.”

The third contains a hare and two dogs against a background of scrolled tendrils with three palmettes at the centre.

There are five bands on the body. The first is filled with an Arabic inscription in Kufic script:

“Happiness and benediction and perfection and... success and...”

In the second band there is an imitation of a Kufic inscription. The third band has an Arabic inscription in large naskhi script:

“Long fame and happiness and prosperity and success...”

This band is interrupted in the middle by a cartouche with two roundels at the ends; there is a lozenge in the centre of the roundels and in the cartouche itself the craftsman’s signature in Kufic script:

“Made by Nasir.”

The background of the roundels and the cartouche is tooled with punches; next to the letters there are two birds’ heads.

The fourth band occupies the greater part of the body’s surface; at the front (under the craftsman’s signature) is a decorative scalloped medallion with scrolled tendrils, and at the sides two large roundels with Sirens and fine bands with an undulating stem and leaves. The place where the handle was fixed is without ornament, but lower down there is a horseshoe-shaped cartouche with scrolled stems and three palmettes in the centre (beneath it is a vegetal ornament engraved at a later period).

The fifth band contains an undulating stem. No other works by Nasir are known. From the character of the ornament and inscriptions such objects are usually assigned to the 12<sup>th</sup> to the early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries and linked to the province of Khurasan.

But in this particular case the style of some of the letters in the Kufic inscription (for example, the intertwined “qaf”) enables one to speak of a somewhat earlier date for the ewer’s manufacture (the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century). This ewer should be included in the class of objects bearing inscriptions on a punched background.



**95. Bucket, by Muhammad ibn Nasir ibn Muhammad al-Harawi, late 12<sup>th</sup> to early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Bronze (brass), cast, inlaid with silver and copper, engraved and gilded, height to rim: 18.8 cm; diameter: 21.5 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. IR-1668. Purchased in 1955.*

In form and function this bucket is very similar to other Herat buckets from the same era; however, one is immediately struck by a number of differences. The edge of the rim is broken into twelve facets, the decoration of the outside surface forms twelve sections, and there are relief figures of animals on the base. The bucket is

richly gilded. One can assume that the gilding was not original, since traces of matt-tooling are visible through it in several places; such tooling is often found on 12<sup>th</sup>- and early 13<sup>th</sup>-century Khurasan bronzes.

The history of the bucket can only be traced back as far as the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when it was in the collection of L. Fould in Paris; after that it came into the possession of the Petersburg jeweller, A. K. Fabergé. The bucket has been described in an article by L. Gyuzalyan (in which there is a reading of all the inscriptions); nevertheless a number of questions remain unanswered.

The script on the rim, which contains the owner's name, is very careless and is consequently hard to decipher. It could be assumed that it was added later, although a thick layer of gilding impedes the detection of traces of any earlier inscription. The reading of the word *li-tajir* ("for the merchant") arouses suspicion: the ligatures here are imprecise. It is strange that the merchant has the epithet *bahadur al-Islam* (hero of Islam), although *bahadur* is usually applied to military ranks. Moreover the epithet only occurs during the Mongol era, which also argues for the fact that the inscription was added later. The reading of the owner's *nisba* "*al-Bistami*" has also remained hitherto problematic.

The striking difference between the bucket's decoration and that of all other similar objects can hardly be explained by the influence of the client's taste, as Gyuzalyan suggests.

#### Bibliography:

Mayer 1959, p. 71; Gyuzalyan 1978; Islam 1985, p. 137, No. 2.



**96. Ring, late 12<sup>th</sup> to early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Silver, cast and engraved, with carved cornelian, height: 2.5 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. IR-1678.*

*Transferred in 1958 from the Museum of Ethnography of the Peoples of the USSR, Leningrad (now St Petersburg).*

The ring is decorated with engraved vegetal ornament. The hexagonal cornelian is fixed in place with claws. The names of the prophet Muhammad and the Shi'ite imams are carved on the stone in naskhi script.

The ring formed part of a hoard found in the ruins of ancient Gurgan and was made no later than the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. Since the majority of articles of jewellery from the pre-Mongol period have come from unsupervised "looting" or from chance finds rather than scholarly excavations, the Gurgan hoard is important in dating them. The fixture of the stone with claws is characteristic of a number of pre-Mongol rings found during excavations in Central Asia.

**Bibliography:**

Oriental Jewellery 1984, No. 44.





**97. Vase, early 13<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Faience, pressed in a mould, height: 28 cm.*

*Museum of the History of the Peoples of Uzbekistan, Tashkent.*

The vase is in the form of a cylinder on three short legs, with a conical neck. This shape is found in early 13<sup>th</sup>-century ceramics, albeit infrequently. The dark blue glaze is characteristic of many examples of 13<sup>th</sup>-century faience.

The body of the vase was made in a ceramic mould and decorated with human figures standing in arches. Similar motifs are also fairly often found on 13<sup>th</sup>-century ceramics, although a dancer is usually depicted in such scenes (see SPA 1938-1939, vol. V, pl. 770; Bahrami 1949, pl. VII; Mahboubian 1970, No. 196).



**98. Jug, [5]90 AH (1194 CE).**

*Faience, painted in lustre; double firing,  
height: 16.5 cm. Museum of the History of the  
Peoples of Uzbekistan, Tashkent. Inv. No. 192/17.*

Lustreware is justifiably considered the acme of Iran's ceramic production and the height of its development occurred in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, even though the first lustre articles only appeared in Iran itself in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century (see Grube 1966, pp. 71, 72; Watson 1975, p. 65).

This jug seems to be one of the early examples of lustreware. Its shape is typical of 13<sup>th</sup>-century pieces; its surface is richly decorated. Two bands contain Persian verses and the band in the middle of the body also contains the date of manufacture: "the month of Sha'ban, year five hundred and ninety" ("ninety" is written legibly but the word signifying the hundreds is very cramped, though the first letter "kha" is clearly delineated, hence it must be "khamsarniatun" – "five hundred").



**99. Jug, late 12<sup>th</sup> to early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Clay, modelled from two halves (upper and lower) stamped in a mould, height: 14.2 cm (the neck and handle are missing).*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. SA-15422.*

The upper part of the jug is decorated with an arcade with eight arches. Four of the arches contain a royal banquet: a king, two servants, one of whom is holding a jug and bowl, a queen and a servant with an incense burner. Under two of the arches we see the same figure in a short garment and patterned stockings; in the first scene he is carving, bowed over a stone, and in the other he carries on his shoulders a horse together with the girl mounted on it.

Two more scenes are fitted onto the most damaged part of the jug: here the scenes of the servant with the incense burner and the man carrying the horse and girl are repeated.

The vessel could have been made in some outlying town or other from matrices brought there, in all probability moulds manufactured in Nishapur, for excavations of workshops there have unearthed very similar examples.

On the edge of the fragment of one of them, part of a composition has been preserved in which a man in patterned stockings carries on his shoulders a horse and a girl. In the L. A. Mayer Memorial

Museum in Jerusalem there is a jug with the scene of a royal banquet, the matrices of which were made with the help of imprints from the same original that served for the Hermitage jug. The mould in the Hetjens Museum, Düsseldorf, with a scene of a royal banquet, is a replica of the same model.

The subject depicted on the Hermitage jug is an illustration to the legend of the Sassanid king Khusrau Parwiz, his wife Shirin and the general Farhad who loved her and whom Khusrau destroyed.

In miniatures and manuscripts of Nizami's poem *Khusrau and Shirin* from between the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, artists often depicted the scene of Farhad carrying Shirin's horse together with its rider. In the poem this occurred when Farhad was breaking a path across the mountain of Bisutun (Behistun), and Shirin came to look at his work. The horse slipped, but the stonemason stopped it falling, lifting it onto his powerful shoulders.

The potters' quarter of Nishapur was destroyed in the Mongol invasion of 1220-1221. However, the vessel was already broken when found (thrown on a rubbish tip), *i.e.* it arrived at the site of Khauz-Khan appreciably earlier than 1220.

Nizami finished his poem in 1180, but it was only at the very end of the 1180s that he presented it to Qizil Arslan, one of the Seljuk rulers of Iraq.

Therefore the interval between a possible prototype, a miniature which supposedly existed in the original manuscript of the poem, and the mould for the vessel is too short – no more than twenty years. It is also unexplained how a manuscript from the library of Qizil Arslan in Ganja could have turned up in Marv, especially in view of the complicated political situation in Iran at the time.

The first miniatures illustrating Nizami's poem *Khusrau and Shirin* and repeating in detail the vessel's subject, date from the late 14<sup>th</sup> century.

It is well known that from the 8<sup>th</sup> century onwards in Iran, oral tales of the past were widespread, in particular those about the shahanshah Khusrau Parwiz, his wife Shirin and the general Farhad.

Thus, the author of the *Fars-nama* (a work undoubtedly written before Nizami's poem) informs us that on the Sassanian relief of Taq-i Bustan, Khusrau is depicted and his horse Shabdziz, Shirin and the general Farhad, and that Farhad broke through the mountain of Behistun which is next to Taq-i Bustan – that is, he knows those

same tales which are missing from Firdawsi's *Shahnama* but are found in Nizami's poem and depicted on the vessel from Khauz-Khan.

In this case it is possible that it was not the miniatures which influenced the composition on the vessel, but the reverse – such vessels (or more likely metal ones which, as has been proved, they imitate) had an influence on the formation of the canonical composition of later miniatures.

This jug was found in 1960 at the site of Khauz-Khan in Turkmenistan, on the old road between Serakhs and Marv.

Bibliography:

Balashova 1972.





**100. Bowl, late 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Faience, painted in enamels and gilded;  
double firing, height: 8.7 cm; diameter: 18.5 cm.  
Museum of Oriental Art, Moscow. Inv. No. 729 II.  
Acquired in 1920 from the K. Nekrasov Collection.*

The bowl has a strict hemispherical form and a slightly conical foot. Its external surface is decorated with a band of ornament, whilst the inside is decorated with figural designs against a light background. A narrow strip with an inscription and ornamental motifs completes the decorative composition (the inscription has not been deciphered).

**Bibliography:**

Maslenitsyna 1975, p .178, No. 26, pl. 12.



**101. Bowl, 13<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Faience, painted in enamels; double firing, height: 7.8 cm; diameter: 18 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. IR-1301. Transferred in 1925 from the museum attached to the former Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

The bowl is richly decorated inside: next to the rim there is a narrow band with an Arabic inscription in Kufic script:

“Long fame and growing happiness and complete victory and steady fame and power... long fame, long fame, long fame and growing happiness... and happiness (?) and benediction (?)... and duration [of life] to the owner of this”.

The figure of a rider is placed inside the central medallion.

On the outer wall next to the rim there is an inscription in naskhi script:

“[Long fame] and growing happiness and complete victory and steady fame and prosperous life (?) and power and success and prosperity and power and duration [of life]...”.

The painting and inscription are restored in several places along the rim and consequently the inscription cannot be deciphered in full.



**102. Goblet, 13<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Faience, painted in enamels; double firing, height: 11.5 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. IR-1311. Transferred in 1925 from the museum attached to the former Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

The goblet is decorated with polychrome enamels. On the outer walls there are banqueting figures and along the outside rim there is an Arabic inscription in Kufic script on a blue background (the inscription is carelessly written and not all the words are clearly legible):

“Happiness and benediction and power and success and prosperity ... and long fame and growing happiness and complete victory and fame and duration of life (?)”

Along the inside rim there is also a band with an Arabic inscription in Kufic script on a background of intertwined stems:

“Long fame and growing happiness and complete victory and steady fame and increasing endeavour and power”.

**Bibliography:**

Kverfeldt 1947, fig. XV; Islam 1985, p. 133, No. 44.





**103. Tiles, 660-661 AH (1262-1263 CE).**

*Faience, painted in lustre; double firing. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. Nos. IR-1046-IR-1056.*

*Transferred in 1925 from the museum attached to the former Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

From the late 12<sup>th</sup> century, cruciform or star-shaped tiles were widely used in architectural decoration, covering large areas of wall. The tiles were painted in lustre and many of them bore inscriptions (Koranic or secular). One very rarely comes across tiles painted in enamel: only in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century do tiles with gold and enamel painting appear.

The Hermitage possesses over a thousand whole tiles and fragments from the mausoleum of imamzade Yahya in the town of Varamin (see Wilber 1955, pp. 109-111). Amongst them are sixty



accurately dated examples, which allow one to state that the entire set of tiles was produced between the month of Dhu-al-hijja 660 AH (October-November 1262 CE) and the month of Rabi' al-akhir 661 AH (February-March 1263 CE).

The overwhelming majority of the inscriptions on these tiles consists of extracts from the Koran. This can probably be explained by the fact that they decorated a mausoleum. However, in the same set one also comes across entirely secular inscriptions – one of the tiles of the published panel bears verses from Nizami's *Laila and Majnun* (see Gyuzalyan 1953).



**104. Vase, second half of 13<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Faience, painted in lustre; double firing, height: 80 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. IR-1595.*

*Acquired in 1885 from the V. Bazilevsky Collection.*

The making of a large, thick-walled vase has presented numerous difficulties to potters of all periods. In this particular instance all the technical difficulties have been overcome and we see a genuine masterpiece of the ceramic art of 13<sup>th</sup>-century Iran.

The vase is richly decorated with figures of people, animals, birds and vegetal ornament, executed in high relief. There is a large drop of light blue glaze on one of the figures of musicians in the

uppermost band. The craftsman may have added this in order to show that it alone separated this article from the perfect work of art whose creation was the prerogative of Allah.

Bibliography:

Yakubovsky 1938; SPA 1938-1939, vol. V, pl. 701.



**105. Bowl, second half of 13<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Bronze (brass), cast and inlaid with silver and gold, height: 14.3 cm; diameter: 17.7 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. VS-976. Transferred in 1925 from the museum attached to the former Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

The shape of the bowl places it in a large group of 13<sup>th</sup>- and 14<sup>th</sup>-century objects of the same type, which have a richly decorated external surface. They all possess a foot with a wide base, but on this particular bowl the narrow stem of the foot was broken off and a new one soldered on in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The decoration of the bowl's external surface consists of several bands: the first is filled with an Arabic inscription, the script close to thuluth, the letters "alif" and "lam" greatly extended and widened at the apex; the background formed of an undulating stem with spiral shoots, semi-palmettes and leaves:

'Glory and eternity and praise and welcome and kindness and bestowal and magnanimity and generosity and docility and demureness and knowledge and fidelity and light and endeavour and... beauty and prosperity and profusion and... wealth...".

The text of the inscription is in rhythmic prose. Such texts appear on 13<sup>th</sup>-century objects. Even the lettering is subordinated to a certain

rhythm. In order not to break the symmetry of the recurring verticals formed by the hastae of the letters “alif” and “lam”, the upstrokes of the “ta marbutah” letters are unusually extended and either behind the words or above them nine extra “alifs” have been added.

The bowl was very richly inlaid with silver, whilst gold was inlaid in the grooves between the bands and round the edges of the large roundels. The presence of a gold inlay enables one to date the bowl with confidence to the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.





**106. Candlestick, by Ruh al-Din Tahir, 725 AH (1324-1325 CE).**  
*Bronze (brass), cast and inlaid with silver, height: 47.8 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. IR-1980. Transferred in 1966 from the Museum of History and Architecture, Bakhchisaray.*

The candlestick, with a typically 14<sup>th</sup>-century shape, is richly decorated with silver inlay, inscriptions and vegetal ornament.

The name of the craftsman is inscribed on the candle socket in naskhi script:

“Made by Ruh al-Din Tahir.”

The two other cartouches on the socket contain, apparently, a hadith. The most important inscription was set in the six cartouches on the shoulders of the candlestick. However, it was subsequently damaged and in part rewritten over the old text. The original text survives in four cartouches, in naskhi or thuluth script.

The translation of the beginning of the inscription presents certain difficulties as the first word was later rewritten: the outlines of the

letters were executed with a cruder instrument than the remaining words in the same cartouche. What is now visible reads as:

“work, or business, or product,”

but this word is not contextually linked to the whole inscription.

The next two signs could be variously interpreted. One clearly reads “sham’d...”, *i.e.* “sham’d[an]” – “candlestick”. However, the suffix “...an” is indecipherable. Placed above this word is the demonstrative pronoun “in” – “this”.

Since the words in all the cartouches are written to be read from the lower right-hand corner to the upper left, one can suggest the following reconstruction of the beginning of the inscription (the two signs before the first word may be part of the suffix “...an”, but placed in front by the craftsman, which one sometimes finds in inscription): “owner (?) of this candlestick most great lord, king of viziers, refuge [patron] of the Hajj and of the two shrines [*i.e.* Mecca and Medina] Imad al-Dunya wa’l-Din Muhammad Falaki, may his victory be assured and may his success increase... in Muharram the year 725 of the Hijra”.

None of the remaining words in the first three cartouches, or in the sixth either, were subjected to later reworking, with the exception of the nisba in which the first letter “fa” (or “qaf”) was changed to “jim” (or “ha” or “kha”), but this is easily detectable.

The side warts display a standard inscription in large thuluth script against a background of scrolled tendrils with leaves:

“Glory – the lord our sultan of sultans of the Arabs and non-Arabs, king over the brows of nations, righteous, fighter for the faith.”

It would be very important to establish the identity of the Imad al-Dunya wa’l-Din Muhammad Falaki mentioned here. It is possible that he was a vizier. A medieval text mentions that in Shiraz a certain Amir Afdalullah, son of Imad al-Din Muhammad Falaki Tabrizi, died in 751 AH (1350-1351 CE). The name of the deceased’s father fully coincides with the name of the candlestick’s owner, but with the additional nisba “Tabrizi”. However, Amir Afdalullah died in Shiraz. Therefore it is difficult now to determine exactly where the candlestick was made.

Bibliography: Masterpieces 1990, No. 50; Great Art Treasures 1994,

No. 407.



**107. Ewer, late 13<sup>th</sup> to early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Bronze (brass), forged, engraved and inlaid with silver and gold, height: 31 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. IR-1479. Transferred in 1925 from the museum attached to the former Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

The shape of the ewer clearly goes back to that of wares made in Mosul during the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (the cast handle is possibly also Mosul work, but of the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century and attached to the ewer at a later date). The ornamentation and inscriptions relate the ewer to a later period – the late 13<sup>th</sup> to early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The neck of the ewer is covered by a lid, inside there is an openwork grille with plant ornamentation. Around the rim and bottom part of the neck and on the foot there are imitation inscriptions. Inscriptions, albeit not entirely literate ones, are found on the neck and in four medallions on the shoulders. They are written in a large naskhi script and have a background of spiral stems with leaves:

“Long fame, happiness, success and power”;

“More glorious (?) – our lord, most great and grand owner, and beneficent, revered, most great.”

In two roundels on the shoulders seated people are depicted with crescents in their hands; eight roundels on the body contain seated flautists, although the flutes themselves are missing (on earlier objects with such figures the instruments are usually depicted). The vegetal design with a three-lobed leaf is similar to the ornamentation of Iranian bronzeware of the late 13<sup>th</sup> to early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. A whole series of objects with portrayals of musicians should also be assigned to this same period. The centre of production for these items remains unknown.





**108. Vessel, first half of 14<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Copper, forged, tinned and engraved, height: 12 cm;  
diameter: 23.5 cm. The State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg. Inv. No. IR-2167. Purchased in 1938.*

A number of bronze vessels, of the same shape and decorated with gold and silver inlay, are known. Their function, however, is not clear, although they were probably water containers.

The decoration consists of four bands: in the first and third is an animal chase against a background of scrolled tendrils, whilst the second band is decorated with twelve roundels containing the signs of the zodiac, between them there is plant ornamentation and the words of an Arabic inscription (the first eight words form a line of verse written in the basir metre):

“Glory and victory and success and prosperity and grandeur and glory and honour  
and generosity and...”

(the final word is incomprehensible). The fourth band contains geometrical ornament.

It is important to note that the vessel is made of copper which was not used in the manufacture of pots before the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century (before this copper alloys – brass and bronze – were used). It has not yet proved possible to determine the exact period when copper articles appeared in Iran, since very few early examples have survived. In the Syro-Egyptian region the earliest copperware also

dates from c. 1330.



**109. Bucket, by Muhammad-Shah al-Shirazi, 733 AH (1333 CE).**

*Bronze (brass), forged, cast (handle), engraved and inlaid with silver and gold, height: 48.7 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. IR-1484. Transferred in 1925 from the museum attached to the former Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

This bucket, inlaid with gold and silver, is one of the most interesting articles of 14<sup>th</sup>-century Iranian bronzeware, as it bears the names of both craftsman and owner and also its date of manufacture (the inscriptions on the upper rim and middle of the body have been published by L. Gyuzalyan).

From the inscriptions it seems that the craftsman worked during the rule of Mahmud Inju (governor of southern Iran, based in its administrative centre, Shiraz). It is possible that the bucket was also made in this town. This assumption is supported by the expression included amongst the sultan's titles: "...inheritor of Solomon's kingdom..." As A. S. Melikian-Chirvani has shown, the province of Fars was considered the "kingdom of Solomon" (see Melikian-Chirvani 1969, p. 21).

It has not been possible to learn anything about the owner of the bucket mentioned in the inscription – the Amir Siyavush al-Rizai

(or al-Risali?).

**Bibliography:**

SPA 1938-1939, vol. VI, pl. 1363b; Gyuzalyan 1963; Masterpieces  
1990, No. 51.



**110. Tray, first quarter of 14<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Bronze (brass), forged, engraved and  
inlaid with silver, diameter: 69 cm.*

*Art Museum of Georgia, Tbilisi. Inv. No. 1/48.*

The tray was once very richly decorated with silver inlay, of which nothing now survives. In its time it was clearly one of the masterpieces of the art of metalwork in Iran, which reached the apogee of its development in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

The shape is typical of 13<sup>th</sup>- and 14<sup>th</sup>-century trays and was widespread not only in Iran (or Iraq) but in the Syro-Egyptian region as well.

The scene of a palace reception in the centre of the tray is remarkable. The headgear of the chief protagonists is typical of the



Mongol period. The figures of angels with the sun in their hands, above the rulers' heads, link this scene to miniatures painted in Iraq during the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. One might, therefore, hazard the conjecture that this tray was made in Iraq, which at the time formed part of the Mongol state of the Ilkhans. This suggestion naturally requires further corroboration, since the metalwork of 14<sup>th</sup>-century Iraq is practically unknown.

The inscriptions on the tray are only in Arabic, which is also characteristic of the 13<sup>th</sup> to early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries; the script is naskhi and thuluth. A blessing is inscribed on the extroverted rim. On the bottom there are three inscribed bands: the first band consists of the same blessing; the second bears the titles of a sultan (using the epithets current in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, although the sultan is not named); the third band contains Arabic verses.

One further inscription was placed in the small cartouche within the central rosette under the throne. It is now so damaged that it is only possible to decipher one word at the beginning:

“Made by...”

This then was the craftsman's name. One must assume that the craftsman was fully aware that his tray was a masterpiece, to have placed his signature in such a prominent position.

Elements of Chinese ornament in the tray's decoration allow one to attribute it with confidence to the first quarter of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

#### Bibliography:

Komaroff 1992, p. 11, ill. 4.



**111. Bowl, 811 AH (1408-1409 CE).**

*Copper, forged, tinned and engraved, height: 12 cm; diameter: 23.9 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. IR-2173. Acquired in 1890 from the Imperial Archaeological Commission.*

This is probably one of the very earliest metal bowls of this form, although ceramic bowls of similar form date from the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The external surface of the bowl is richly decorated. Unlike analogous bowls of a later date this one bears a cartouche on the inside of the rim with the name of the owner and a date: “The owner and possessor of this is Imam-Quli... 811”, and also an extract from a ghazal of Hafiz (in thuluth script, the mozari metre; the order of the hemistichs is not upheld): “Morning has come. O cupbearer, fill the bowl with wine.

The turning of the heavens does not tarry, hasten!  
Before the destruction of this transient world  
Shatter [i.e. inebriate] us with a bowl of red wine!  
If you seek delight, then cast off sleep!”

Six cartouches on the outside bear extracts from other ghazals of Hafiz (in thuluth script and in the mojtas metre): “You will be able to perceive the mystery of Jam’s bowl When you can turn wineshop dust into antimony for the eye.

Be not without wine and a musician, for under the dome of heaven With this melody  
you can banish sadness from the heart.

But ever since you have yearned for your lover's lips and a bowl Do not claim there is any other business you can perform."

In the second band six cartouches contain extracts from yet another of Hafiz's ghazals (in nastaliq script and in the ramal metre): "What will be better than thought of wine and the bowl Until we see what the end will be.

How much can the heart mourn that nothing remains of the days,  
Tell me: if heart and days disappear, what is left?

Drink wine, do not grieve and do not heed the buffoon's admonitions, What faith can one have in the words of the multitude?"

The remainder of the surface is decorated with vegetal ornament. The background to the ornament and inscriptions is filled with widely spaced cross-hatching, which from the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century was a characteristic feature of Iranian copper and bronze (brass) ware. Here the cross-hatching is widely spaced, which is evidence of its early manufacture (later the hatching becomes finer). The thuluth script also indicates an early dating for the bowl, although on the second band there is already a different script – nastaliq – which is unusual on 15<sup>th</sup>-century wares. Nastaliq takes its definitive form during the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, but is only used in copying manuscripts. It is used for inscriptions on objects from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century.

This bowl is also unusual in that it bears extracts from various ghazals of Hafiz: as a rule one object will bear extracts from a single ghazal.

#### Bibliography:

Ivanov 1960b (presents the texts of the inscriptions in the Arabic script); Arts of Persia 1989, p. 183, pl. 26; Masterpieces 1990, No. 75; Komaroff 1992, No. 29.



**112. Miniature: *The Shah's Hunt*, c. 1460-1470.**

27 x 37.5 cm and 25.5 x 37.8 cm. Manuscript: *Silsilat al-Dhahab of Jami*. Date of completion of copy: 956 AH (1549 CE).

Calligrapher: Shah-Mahmud al-Nishapuri. *The National Library of Russia, St Petersburg*. Inv. No. Dorn 434, f. 816-82a.

This large-format double composition is glued into a later manuscript of the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century in which it occupies the final pages. It is possible that it was cut into two parts at that time.

Its palette of dark grey and brown tones is unusual in 15<sup>th</sup>-century miniatures of the schools known to us. The treatment of plants, clouds and mountains links it to Herat miniatures of the 1460s.

It is of interest to note that another double miniature of a Hunt with a similar composition has since been published, and this was indisputably painted in Herat at the end of the 1490s (see Lukens-Swietochowski 1979, p. 210, pls. LXIII, LXIV).

Some are of the opinion that the miniature in question should be associated with Uzun-Hasan Aq-Qoyunlu, *i.e.* with the western regions of Iran (see Robinson 1979b, p. 241, ill. 140, 141).

G. Pugachenkova attributes the origin of this unique miniature to

Mavera al-Nahr during the rule of Khalil-Sultan (1405-1409) or the young Ulugh Beg. The grounds for such an attribution are that the banner supposedly carries Timur's heraldic emblem – a lion and the sun – and that the flora and fauna are typical of the Kashka Darya region in southern Uzbekistan (see Pugachenkova 1979, p. 51, and Pugachenkova 1980, pp. 72-74). In our view these arguments are totally unfounded (see Ivanov 1977, p. 154; Ivanov 1980b, pp. 68, 69).

Bibliography: Martin 1912, pls. 60, 61; Akimushkin and Ivanov 1968, p. 13, pls. 18, 19.





113. Frontispiece of a manuscript (left half), c. 1330-1340.

25 x 21 cm. Manuscript: *The Revival of the studies on Faith of al-Ghazzali*. The National Library of Russia, St Petersburg. Inv. No. Dom 255, f.2a.

The art of manuscript illumination attained a very high standard in the 14<sup>th</sup> century in Iran. Usually the first two pages and the end of the manuscript would be richly decorated, although the contents were also illuminated with ornament around the chapter titles and in the margins, etc.

The 14<sup>th</sup> century was evidently a turning point in the development of manuscript illumination, for during this period new forms of

composition were created and their palette changed.

The manuscript of al-Ghazzali's *The Revival of the Studies on Faith* belongs to this transition period, to judge from similar and accurately dated manuscripts. The left half of the double frontispiece is reproduced here (the right half is in a poor state of preservation).

The illustration betrays the influence of an earlier period: the composition still divides into two separate parts not linked by the common frame; medallions with ornament are depicted in the left margins. But at the same time new features appear, such as vertical cartouches which connect the upper and lower parts of the page decoration. The floral ornament is large. The interlace in the corners of the cartouches is very characteristic of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

The palette – gold, dark blue, green, white and brown (red?) – is traditional.

Bibliography: Akimushkin and Ivanov 1979, p. 36, ill. 19.



114. Miniature: Parrot and Raven in a Cage, mid-1420s.  
8.2 x 4.2 cm. S. Khanukayev Collection, St Petersburg.

In the collection of the late S. Khanukayev there are seven odd sheets of works by various authors: around the edges of each page are written verses (ghazals) of Humam Tabrizi; the middle section has extracts from the poems of Imad Faqih-i Kirmani; in the centre is the text of Sa'di's Gulistan. The final folio of the manuscript has been preserved and we know the exact date when the copy was completed – “the last days of the month of Rajab 829 [AH; early June 1426 CE]”.

All the miniatures illustrate the Gulistan. Their small size and sparse scenery and the colour range dominated by yellowish-brown tones indicate that they belong to the Shiraz school of the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, although they are not by the leading masters of that time. The manuscript's Shiraz origin is also indicated by the layout of the text on the page and the triangular medallion with plant ornament in the margins.







the copy convey a vivid impression of the Herat school of painting during the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

The miniature reproduced here is an illustration to the poem *Khusrau and Shirin*. It depicts the meeting of Farhad and Shirin in the mountains. This episode is one of the most popular amongst illustrators of the story of King Khusrau, the beautiful Shirin and the stonemason Farhad. It appears on the 12<sup>th</sup>-century jug, in the earliest known illuminated manuscript of Nizami's poem (Baghdad, 1386-1388), and in a multitude of later copies.

In its depiction of the basic group of figures the miniature in the Hermitage manuscript closely resembles the relief on the 12<sup>th</sup>-century jug, which points to the persistence of tradition in the portrayal of the most popular themes. The miniature corresponds exactly in showing characters against a background of steep, inaccessible mountains with sharp peaks, which take up almost the whole sheet and even overlap the margins. The posture and movements of a man carrying a heavy load on his shoulders are conveyed with great mastery.

#### Bibliography:

Dyakonov 1940; Balashova 1972, p. 100, fig. 8; Timur 1989, Cat. No. 38.



**116. Miniature: *Relatives Visit majnun*, late 15<sup>th</sup> century.**  
 11.7 x 16.5 cm. Manuscript: *Majnun and Laila of Khusrau Dihlawi*. The National Library of Russia,  
 St Petersburg. Inv. No. Dom 395, f. 20b.

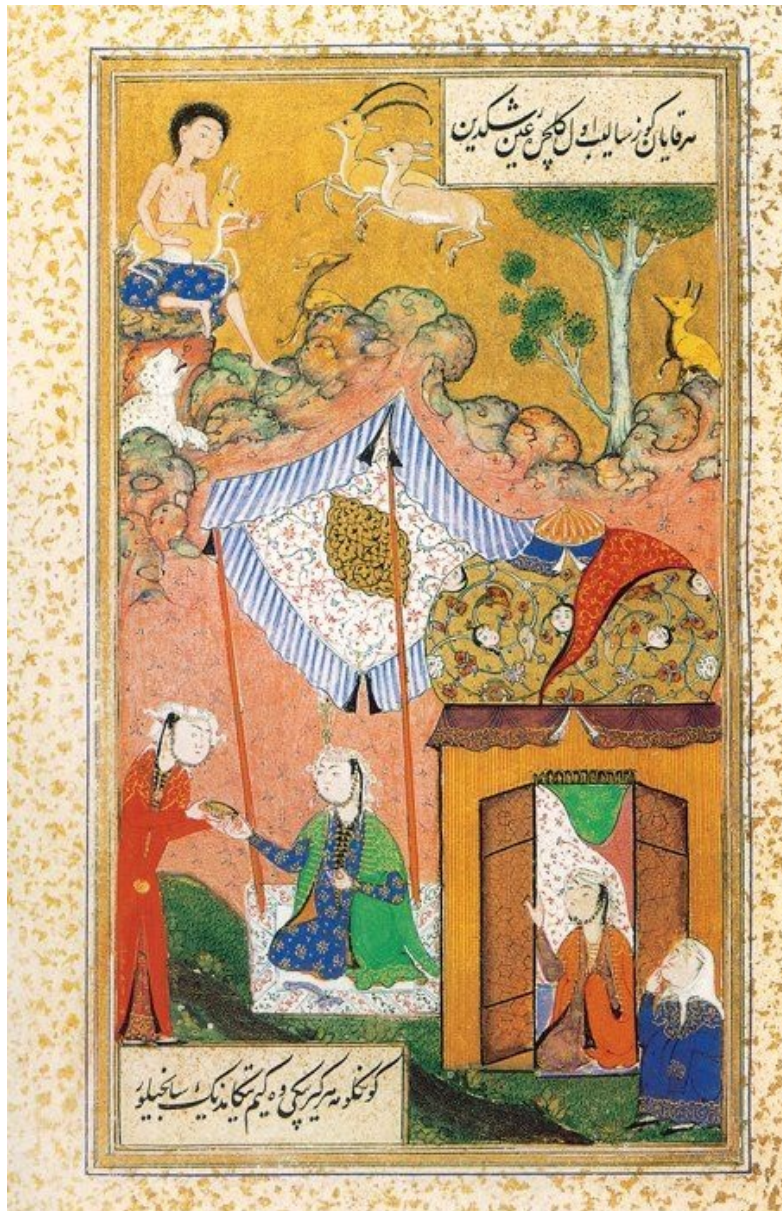
Two miniatures of this manuscript have been well known to scholars for a long time. One (f. 20b) is dated to 900 AH (1495 CE), but this is rare among miniatures; the miniature opposite is undated.

The human figures, slim and elongated, with small, rounded faces almost devoid of any expression, are all treated absolutely identically, which would indicate the work of a single artist. The

landscape (especially the plane tree with variously coloured leaves) is very characteristic of the work of artists of the Herat school of the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. It is not out of the question that this is a work of Bihzad himself.

**Bibliography:**

Akimushkin and Ivanov 1968, No. 21.



**117. Miniature: *The Lovers' Meeting*, c. 1520-1530.**  
 7.3 x 12.8 cm. Manuscript: *Diwan of sultan-Husain Baykara*.  
 Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian  
 Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg. Inv. No. V 284, f. 20a.

This small manuscript is a masterpiece of Persian book design during the early years of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is very probable that it was produced for some important person, which would explain such a high artistic level of calligraphy, illumination and binding.

Although collections of lyric poetry – diwans – were fairly seldom illustrated, in this particular case there are five miniatures, one of

them reproduced here. The colour scheme and the treatment of figures and landscape are evidence that the present work belongs rather to the Herat school of the 1520s than to that of Tabriz.

Bibliography:

De Bagdad à Ispahan 1994, No. 37.





**118. Plate, Mashhad, 878 AH (1473-1474 CE).**

*Faience, painted in cobalt, height: 9.1 cm; diameter: 35 cm.  
The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. VG-2650.  
Purchased in 1973 from R. Omarov (Derbent).*

The shape of this plate is characteristic of late Iranian faience. The paste used for the plate is white, very porous and soft. The colour of the cobalt painting is subdued and the glaze does not cover the foot and the space around it.

The plate is richly decorated inside and on the second band there is an inscription in Persian, partly verse (mozari metre), partly prose: “The courtyard of the eye’s abode I washed [with tears], but what use is there in that, for this is not a place worthy of the host of dreams about you! This plate was completed in Mashhad in the year 878.”

An object with an exact indication of its place and time of manufacture is very rare amongst works of Iranian applied art.

Another faience vessel is known, a spittoon, also made at Mashhad, of 848 AH (1444-1445 CE; in the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh). On the basis of these facts we can now speak of the production of faience at Mashhad in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, of which our previous knowledge was only from written sources.

Bibliography:

Ivanov 1980a (the article includes the Persian text of the inscription); Timur 1989, p. 227, fig. 84; Masterpieces 1990, No. 76; Great Art Treasures 1994, No. 416.



**119. Plate, first half of 16<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Faience, painted in cobalt, diameter: 37 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. VG-732. Purchased in 1929 from*

*S. Magomedov (Kubachi).*

During the Safavid period wares with underglaze painting in cobalt dominated Iranian ceramics. This technique was already known in the 13<sup>th</sup> century in Iran (Kashan ware, decorated with blue point, dates from around that time). It became widespread in connection with the influence of Chinese porcelain, which began to be exported to the countries of the Near and Middle East in the 14<sup>th</sup> century; this trade flourished particularly well under the Safavids. Cobalt ceramics were produced at Kirman, Mashhad, Yazd and many other Iranian towns.

The painting on this plate is executed in various shades of cobalt against a white background, under a clear, colourless glaze. The technical and stylistic features of the plate relate it to models which scholars group with the so-called Kubachi ceramics. Most scholars consider the town of Tabriz or some other town in north-western Iran to be the likeliest centre for its production. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, cobalt-painted ceramics were produced in the province of Khurasan.

Bibliography:

Masterpieces 1990, No. 81.



**120. Jug, by Javanbaht ibn Husain, last quarter of 15<sup>th</sup> century.**  
*Bronze (brass), forged and inlaid with gold and silver, height: 12.7 cm.*  
*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. IR-2044.*  
*Acquired in 1923 from the State Museum Reserve.*

The entire surface of the jug is covered with fine foliate ornament with gold and silver inlay. In the cartouches on the neck and body there are verses by the famous poet and mystic of the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Qasim-i Anwar Tabrizi (mojtass metre, script close to thuluth):

“When the reflection of eternity’s sunrise came into sight,  
 The charm of a friend appeared in the atoms of the universe.  
 The door of mercy’s treasury was fastened with wisdom’s lock,  
 The time of our happiness came to fulfilment – the door was opened.  
 The jug of eternity’s wine was always pure,  
 But reaching the bowl of our heart the wine became purest of all.  
 Word of a friend reached the bazaar of all created beings,  
 Judgement Day, that had been unknown, had arrived!



A thousand enlightened souls are sacrifices to the Shah of the Arabs [i.e. Muhammad]

And the joy of Qasimi was made perfect with love for him.”

At the bottom in the centre is the craftsman’s signature (in a script close to thuluth):

“Made by the slave – Javanbaht ibn Husain.”

This jug belongs to a large group of objects (basically jugs of identical form) decorated with gold and silver inlay, fine vegetal ornament and Persian verses (apart from the verses of Qasim-i Anwar Tabrizi, one finds extracts from the ghazals of Hafiz and other Persian and Arabic verses). For a long time they have been attracting the attention of scholars and from c. 1920-1950 there was a romantic notion that they were produced by Iranian craftsmen working in Venice (see Mayer 1959, pp. 17, 18). In the early 1960s, however, it became clear that the “Venetian” theory did not bear criticism: the Persian inscriptions speak against it, for it is difficult to imagine that there was some sort of clientele demanding objects with Persian inscriptions in Venice during the late 15<sup>th</sup> to early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The craftsmen’s nisbas, “al-Birjandi” and “al-Baharjani” and other details attest an eastern Iranian (Khurasan) origin for these articles (see Ivanov 1964).

In 1962, The British Museum acquired a similar jug, made in 903 AH (1497-1498 CE) by the craftsman Muhammad-Ibrahim al-Guri, and since then there has been no further doubt as to the Khurasan origin of these pieces (see Grube 1974, p. 246).

Such a precise attribution does not answer every question, but rather poses new ones. In actual fact, there was some sort of break in the tradition of bronzeware decoration in 15<sup>th</sup>-century Iran. The most surprising evidence of this is the absence of any portrayals of living creatures, the very fine vegetal ornament and the slender lettering of inscriptions. The reasons for these changes are unclear.

The jugs in question were made in north-eastern Iran in the province of Khurasan (and possibly even at Herat). One might even hazard the conjecture that we are faced with the products of two or three workshops and that we have before us the works of several generations of craftsmen. But this hypothesis requires more detailed evidence and, above all, research into ornamentation.

It should be added that there is another jug with these same verses

of Qasim-i Anwar: it was made in 889 AH (1484 CE by the craftsman Mubarak-shah ibn Husain (this is how his name should be read, and not Husain ibn Mubarak-shah, see Allan 1982c, No. 25).

Bibliography:

Masterpieces 1990, No. 80; Komaroff 1992, No. 10.



**121. Dagger and sheath, late 15<sup>th</sup> to early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Steel, skate-skin; forged, engraved, inlaid with gold  
and decorated with jewels, length of sheath: 43.4 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. OR-3380.*

*Transferred in 1886 from the Tsarskoye Selo Arsenal.*

The dagger has a two-edged, slightly curved blade; the steel handle and steel sheath are richly decorated with high relief depictions of dragons, kylins and birds, and with floral ornament (at a later period the heads of all the living creatures were hacked off by a fanatical Muslim). On the reverse side of the sheath there is a gold-inlaid

floral ornament. The sheath bears a single line (bait) of a Persian poem, written in mozari metre:

“I wanted so much to have a gleaming dagger.  
That each of my ribs became a dagger.”

This bait is often found on blades. In the middle of the sheath there is a green insert of treated skate-skin (length: 9.2 cm). Insofar as the cartouche on the blade contains a similar decoration to that on the hilt and sheath, it would seem that the end of the blade was at one time broken off and a new one forged on, which was longer, and this necessitated lengthening the sheath.

Further evidence that the original blade was shorter can be seen in the proportions of an intact and similarly ornamented dagger in a steel sheath from the Topkapi Saray Museum, Istanbul. The same verses are found on its blade. (The relation of hilt length to blade on the Istanbul dagger is approximately 1:1.25, whilst for this dagger it is approximately 1:2.25. But if we compare the relation of hilt to sheath in the Istanbul and Hermitage daggers, we arrive at 1:1.5 and 1:1.8 respectively).

As a result, one can say that a certain proportion of 15<sup>th</sup>- and 16<sup>th</sup>-century Iranian daggers had short blades. This observation is of interest because many Iranian dagger blades have later, Turkish or Indian, sheaths and hilts.

The grounds for the dating and location of this dagger were set forth by Anatoli Ivanov. One detail needs to be stressed, which is important in tracing the attribution of some objects – this is the fact that the gold background was stamped with a fine ring punch.

The same tooling of a background may be noted on the silver bowl from the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., which in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century belonged to the ruler of Gilan (see Melikian-Chirvani 1976a, pp. 25-27).

We will see this method of tooling the background in later objects too, although some other technique, rather than punching, was employed: the background that resulted is composed of very fine granulation.

#### Bibliography:

Ivanov 1979a, pp. 65, 66, No. 1.



**122. Bucket (satl), second half of 15<sup>th</sup> century.**  
*Copper, forged and engraved, height: 12.3 cm. The State  
Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. IR-2177.  
Purchased in 1926 from S. Magomedov (Kubachi).*

In shape the bucket resembles 14<sup>th</sup>-century objects. A Persian inscription in four cartouches decorates the top of the bucket (ramal metre, thuluth script):

“Always when my moon [i.e. beauty] enters the bath-house, The golden disc of the heavens [becomes] a bucket, the crescent moon is the handle.  
So that my moon should always enter the bath-house,  
My eye will become a bucket of water, my eyebrow the handle.”

This poetic excerpt gives us the object’s name – satl – and at the same time indicates its purpose – a bath-house pail. These objects are well represented at various stages of the development of Iranian metalwork.

It is very much of interest to note that the second line of the quoted excerpt is found in the memoirs of the Herat writer of the late

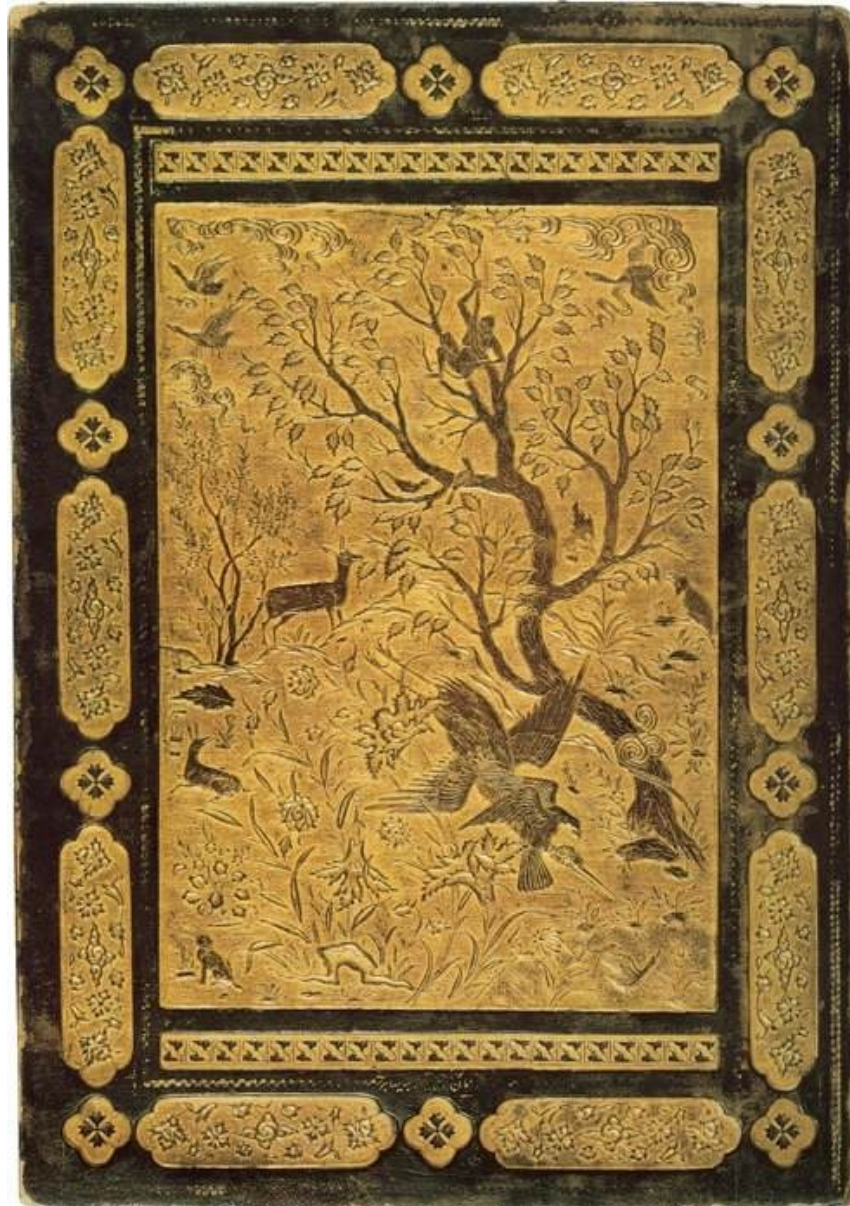


15<sup>th</sup> to early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, Zain al-Din Wasifi (see Wasifi, vol. 2, p. 227).

The large foliate ornament assigns the bucket to a group of objects which date from the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> to the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. It has not yet proved possible to determine their exact place of manufacture.

Bibliography:

Masterpieces 1990, No. 79; Komaroff 1992, No. 26.



**123. Book binding, by Muhammad-Zarnan  
ibn Mirza beg Tabrizi, early 16<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Leather, tooled and decorated with gold, 33.8 x 23.5 cm.*

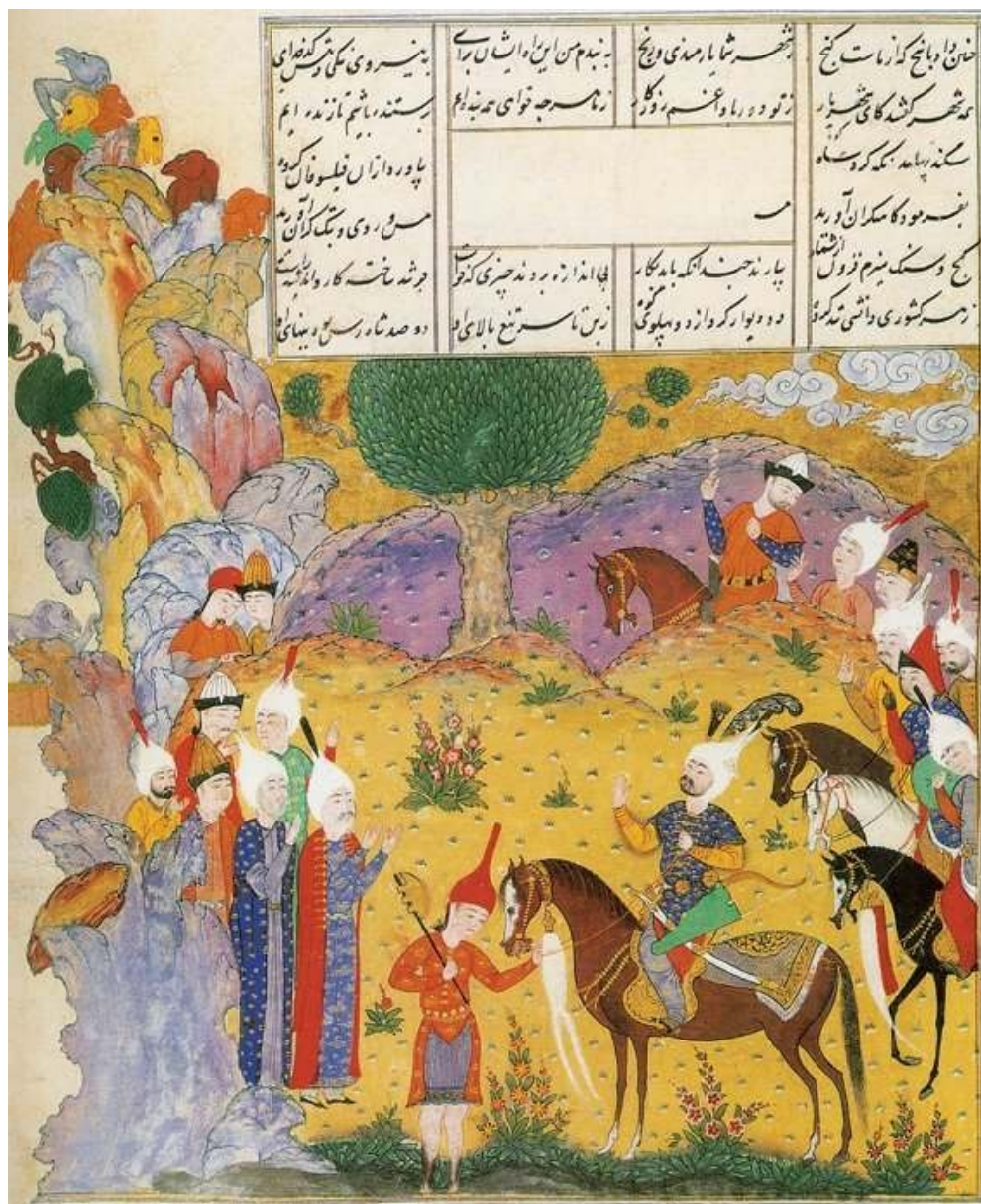
*Manuscript: Kulliyat of Nawai, 1001-1004 AH (1592-1596 CE).*

*The National Library of Russia, St Petersburg. Inv. No. Dorn 558.*

The two identical covers of black leather (the flap is missing) belong now to a fairly modestly decorated manuscript of Nawai's Kulliyat. The contrast between the magnificent binding and the modest manuscript is very striking and leads one to suspect that the binding belonged to some earlier and more sumptuous manuscript.

The signature on the lower part of the binding, hardly noticeable now, names Muhammad-Zaman, the son of Mirza beg Tabrizi, and undoubtedly an outstanding craftsman in his day. Apparently this is his only surviving work.

The Turkish writer of the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Mustafa Ali, mentions Muhammad-Zarnan among the craftsmen who left Iran for Turkey.



**124. Miniature: Iskander Sets Out  
in Search of the Water of Life, mid-1520s.**

20.5 x 24 cm. Manuscript: *Shahnama of Firdawsi*.

Calligrapher: Muhammad al-Harawi. Date of completion  
of copy: 931 AH (1524 CE), Tabriz. Branch of the Institute  
of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences,  
St Petersburg. Inv. No. D 184, f. 338a.

In the miniatures of this manuscript one can trace the process of consolidation of the Tabriz school of miniatures, which took place during the mid-1520s. In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, Tabriz already had its school of miniatures, whose most brilliant representative was Sultan-Muhammad Iraqi. Around 1520 Bihzad came to Tabriz,

together with the future Shah Tahmasp, and he became the head of the court library – kitabkhanah. Apparently other artists from Herat also arrived with him. In the mid-1520s a new style of the Tabriz school appeared, which was soon to produce such masterpieces as the miniatures of the *Khalnama*, the *Shahnama* from the former Houghton Collection and the *Khamasa* of Nizami (British Library).

Bibliography:

Gyuzalyan and Dyakonov 1934, pp. 27-30; De Bagdad à Ispahan 1994, No. 39.





**125. Miniature: Polo Game, late 1520s.**  
 13.8 x 10.4 cm. Manuscript: *Khal-nama* of Arifi.  
 Calligrapher: Tahmasp al-Husaini (Shah Tahmasp I).  
 Date of completion of copy: 931 AH (1524-1525 CE),  
 Tabriz. The National Library of Russia,  
 St Petersburg. Inv. No. Dom 441, f. 26b.

One can assume that the miniatures in this manuscript copied by the young Shah Tahmasp I were executed by the best artists of his court workshop. Judging by the different styles, the miniatures were executed by various artists, although all were from the same school.

The artist who produced this miniature painted two others with a

similar theme (18a and 39a). The particular treatment of landscape and faces – small, rounded, with bushy eyebrows – is characteristic of his style. He also conveys movement with great skill.

Bibliography:

Akimushkin and Ivanov 1968, No. 31.



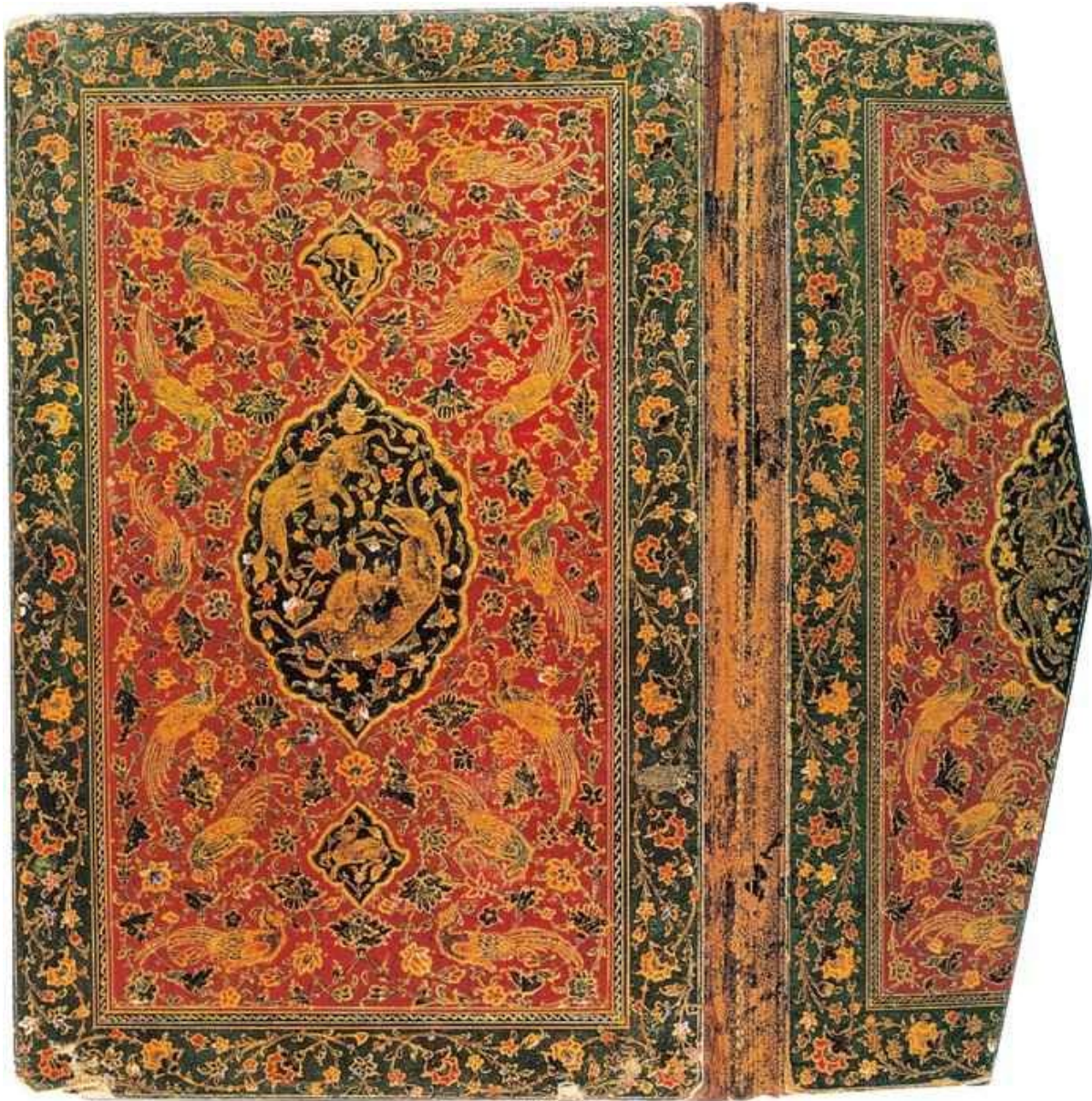
**126. Miniature: *The First Sermon of Hasan ibn Ali*, by Qasim ibn Ali, 932 AH (1526 CE).**  
 21 x 15.8 cm. Manuscript: *Ahsan al-Kibar* of Muhammad al-Husaini al-Varamini. Calligrapher: Khizr-shah.  
 Date of completion of copy: 837 AH (1433 CE). The National Library of Russia, St Petersburg. Inv. No. Dorn 312, f. 373b.

The miniatures in this manuscript were executed over ninety years after the copy had been completed. There are 39 miniatures in the manuscript, four of them added later, possibly in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. One of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century miniatures bears the signature of Qasim-i Ali, i.e. Qasim ibn Ali. This artist was a contemporary of Bihzad and not inferior to him in his artistry. Very little is known of his life, but judging by the less vivid palette of this copy's miniatures by comparison with those of Tabriz in the 1520s, one can assume that Qasim-i Ali worked in Herat and was still alive in the mid-1520s.

Bibliography:

Akimushkin and Ivanov 1968, pp. 15, 16, 21, 36, No. 35.





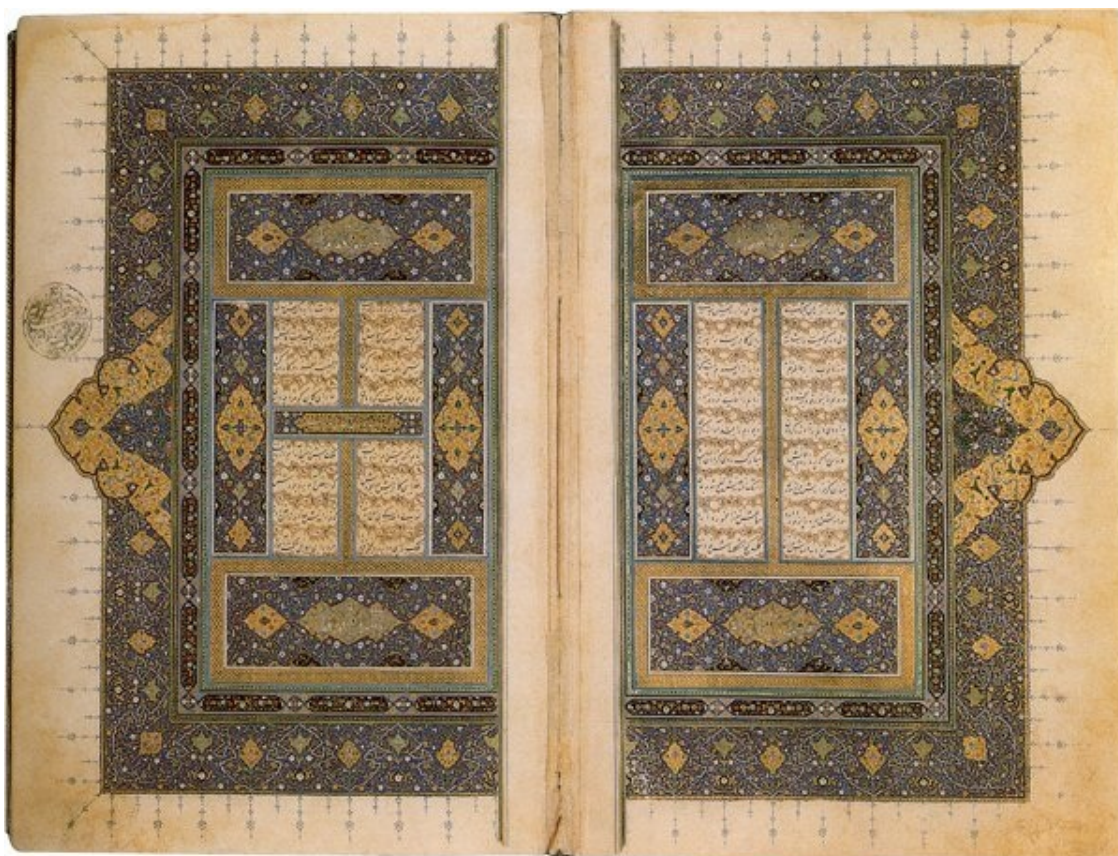
**127. Book binding and flap, late 1520s.**

*Papier-mâché and leather, decorated with painting and lacquered, cover: 29.6 x 18.8 cm; flap: 29.6 x 9.2 cm. Manuscript: Khal-nama of Arifi. Calligrapher: Tahmasp al-Husaini (Shah Tahmasp I). Date of completion of copy: 931 AH (1524-1525 CE), Tabriz. The National Library of Russia, St Petersburg. Inv. No. Dom 441.*

The binding resembles leather ones in the layout of its decoration (division of surfaces into borders and medallions). Both covers and the flap are identically painted. The inside of the binding is of dark red leather. Two frames surround the central field. On a wide frame, in the corners and in the middle of the central field, cartouches and



medallions are displayed, decorated with a fine tracery of black foliage on a dark blue background.



**128. Frontispiece of a manuscript, c. 1525-1535.**

*35 x 24 cm (when open). Manuscript: Khusrau and Shirin of Nizami. Calligrapher: Sultan Muhammad Nur. Date of completion of copy: 937 AH (1530-1531 CE), Herat.*

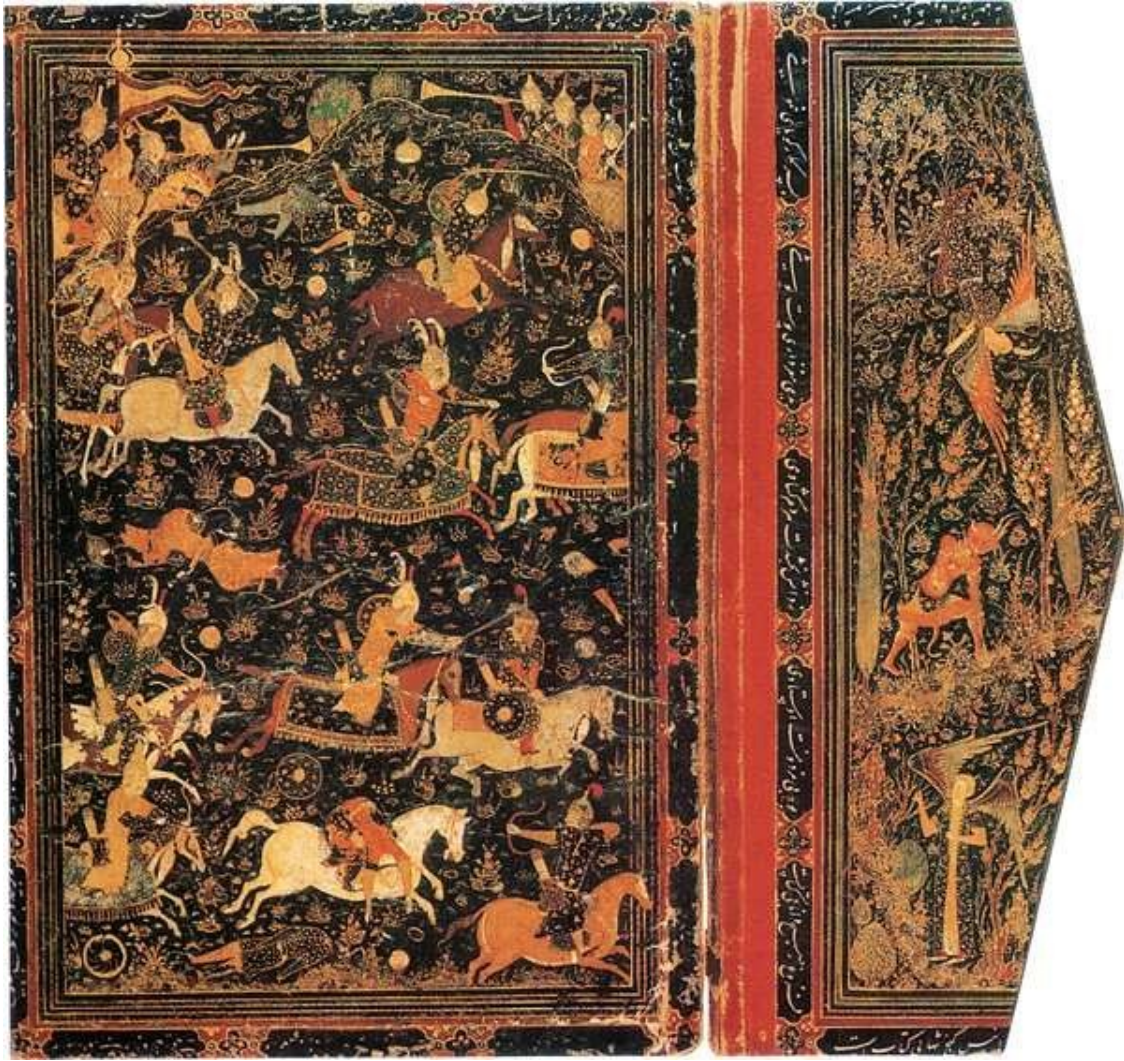
*The National Library of Russia, St Petersburg. Inv. No. Dom 346, f. 1b-2v.*

This manuscript was copied at Herat by the famous early 16<sup>th</sup>-century calligrapher Sultan-Muhammad Nur. Apparently the illumination was also executed in this town. The text of this magnificent manuscript is on paper of various colours, with beautiful headpieces at the beginning of the sections of the poem and gold-mottled margins, but the decoration was not completed for empty spaces have been left on several pages, probably for miniatures.

The text opens with a double frontispiece in which dark blue and gold dominate. The form of its decoration is very close to that of late 15<sup>th</sup>-century frontispieces, but in the 1520s several differences are noticeable: to the left and right of the first frame large, triangular, scalloped medallions containing ornament have appeared, the foliate decoration has become finer and the number of borders round the central field has increased.

All in all the Herat tradition is apparent as much in the composition and colour range as in the use of coloured arabesque-islami on a gold background in the medallions of the central field.





**129. Book binding, 983 AH (1575-1576 CE).**

*Papier-mâché and leather, decorated with painting and lacquered,  
cover: 41.6 x 26 cm; flap: 41.5 x 14 cm. Manuscript:*

*Silsilat al-Dhahab of Jami. Calligrapher: Shah-Mahmud al-Nishapuri.*

*Date of completion of copy: 956 AH (1549 CE), Ardebil.*

*The National Library of Russia, St Petersburg. Inv. No. Dom 434.*

The binding of the manuscript *Silsilat al-Dhahab* provides us with the rare opportunity of proving that bindings existed separately from the manuscripts, which apparently only preserved their original bindings in extremely rare instances. This binding bears the precise date of manufacture on the flap, 983 AH, thus it was made 27 years after the book itself had been completed.

The covers and flap are decorated with painting, supplemented with background mother-of-pearl, against a black background. In the

first, and fairly wide, border, Persian verses (hazaj metre) are written in cartouches, in white point, but today only the text on the flap can be fully deciphered:

“A book is a bright treasury and a companion.  
A book is the gleaming of the dawn of knowledge.  
A master [mentor] will be unnecessary,  
For every moment it bestows new insight.  
A wise companion, clad in leather,  
Although possessing eloquence, it is silent,  
In the months of the year nine hundred and eighty-three.”

The themes of the illustrations are a banquet, a battle and a fairy-tale garden. The treatment of plants and clouds is evidence that all the compositions were done at the same time. The various types of headgear in the scenes on the covers are somewhat surprising, although it is possible that the making of the binding coincided with those years when the fashion for the turban crowned with a cone was waning.

The inside is of dark red leather and is decorated with cartouches and medallions with tracery foliage against a dark blue, turquoise and yellow background, and also with cartouches and medallions containing tooled ornament on a gold background.





**130. Miniature: *Shah's Hunt*, mid-16<sup>th</sup> century.**  
 21 x 31.7 cm (each). Manuscript: *Silsilat al-Dhahab* of Jami.  
 Calligrapher: Shah-Mahmud al-Nishapuri. Date of completion  
 of copy: 956 AH (1549 CE), Ardebil. The National Library  
 of Russia, St Petersburg. Inv. No. Dom 434, f. 1b-2a.

This large-format double composition is glued at the beginning of Jami's poem, but does not illustrate it.

In its bright palette and treatment of figures, this miniature belongs amongst the late products of the Tabriz school. It is possible that the treatment of the mountains already displays features which were to reach their full development in the workshops of Qazwin and Mashhad, c. 1560.

This work by a talented, unknown artist is a true masterpiece of the Persian miniature.

#### Bibliography:

Ashrafi 1966, pp. 6, 7; Akimushkin and Ivanov 1968, Nos. 42, 43; Bretanizki 1988, pl. VIII.



**131. Fragment of a carpet, early to mid-16<sup>th</sup> century.**  
*Pile-woven wool, 258 x 250 cm. The State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg. Inv. No. VG-994. Transferred in 1925 from the  
museum attached to the former Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

The composition and design of the carpet are characteristic of patterns attributable to Tabriz. It should be noted that designs with a large central medallion are typical of north-western Iranian carpets; they were also very popular in the decoration of book bindings and illuminated pages of manuscripts. In its ornamentation and composition the carpet resembles miniatures of the Tabriz school during the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

**Bibliography:**

SPA 1938-1939, vol. VI, pl. 1204a; Shandrovskaya 1960, p. 153.





**132. Velvet chasuble, 16<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Silk, woven in silver thread, with appliquéd velvet design; stitched from 24 pieces (size of largest piece 80 x 60 cm), height: 136 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Transferred in 1930 (?) from the History Museum, Moscow. Inv. No. IR-2327*

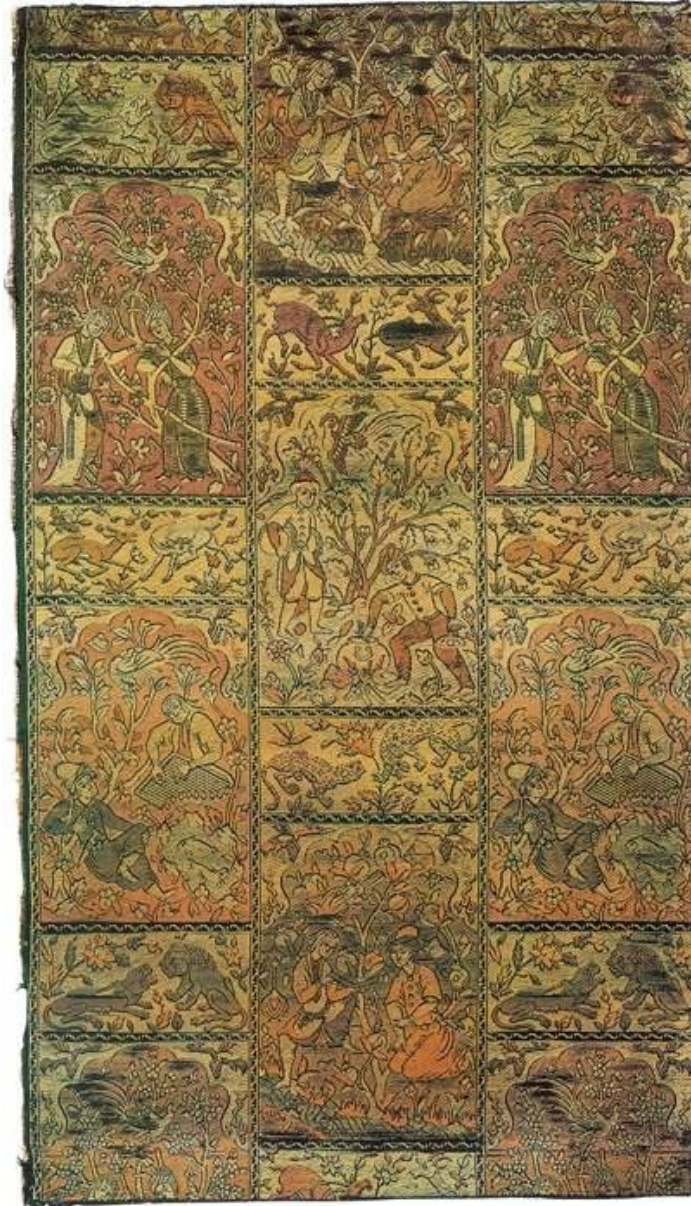
The best Iranian textiles of the Safavid period were thematic, *i.e.* they depicted characters from miniature paintings, illustrating various literary works. On this velvet, an episode from the poem *Laila and Majnun* is shown. The textile design consists of repeated scenes of the young Majnun sitting in the wilderness among the

beasts, with a deer on his lap.

The movements of the figures are free and the poses natural, secondary figures are skilfully placed around the central figure of Majnun.

**Bibliography:**

Meisterwerke 1912, pl. 195; Kverfeldt 1940, pl. III; Treasures 1994, No. 26.



**133. Fragment of textile, mid-16<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Silk (twill weave), 47 x 26 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. VT-1010. Transferred in 1925 from the museum attached to the former Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

This is one of the finest examples of 16<sup>th</sup>-century textiles with figural compositions. The decoration of the cloth consists of vertical stripes with four repeated scenes set in rectangular frames: a garden scene, a musical scene, “reading” and “preparing dinner”. The design employs the traditions of 16<sup>th</sup>-century textiles, with a skilful



arrangement of scenes and a free disposition of the figures, a “classical” treatment of the characters with an exact rendering of everyday details and a high standard of technical execution. The period of the textile’s manufacture, the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, can be established by means of a comparative analysis of the costumes reproduced on textiles and on dated miniatures. The basic means of dating is the characteristic headgear, in the form of a turban crowned with a cone, which was worn in Iran under the first Safavid shahs during the second and third quarters of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century.

**Bibliography:**

Kverfeldt 1940, fig. II; Pirverdian 1969.



**134. Fragment of silk textile, 16<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Silk, woven in silver thread (satin weave), 118.5 x 33 cm.*

*Museum of Oriental Art, Moscow. Inv. No. 616 II.*

*Transferred in 1919 from the History Museum, Moscow  
(before 1919 in the P. Shchukin Collection; textile purchased in  
1887 in Istanbul from the antique dealer, Kelekian).*

The long, narrow fragment of cloth has a vertical composition. The light-coloured design stands out in contrast against a dark red background. The pattern on textiles with figure subjects is based on a repetition of the motif and does not have a compositional centre, since these textiles were intended for clothing and woven as a whole

piece. This textile fragment was possibly part of a robe.

**Bibliography:**

Maslenitsyna 1975, p. 91, ill. 81.



**135. Caftan, last quarter of 16<sup>th</sup> century.**  
*Silk (satin weave), length: 140 cm. The Moscow  
Kremlin Armoury. Inv. No. TK 2845.*

The caftan is made of light blue silk with a repeat motif on the yellowish-green lining and trimmed with grey-blue cotton. An article such as this, made from precious cloth which has not been refashioned and which is in a good state of preservation, is a highly unusual phenomenon. This caftan must take its place amongst other such unique works of applied art.

One might conjecture that it was made in Iran and brought to

Moscow as an ambassadorial gift. In Russia as a rule such textiles were termed kamka kizylbashskaya (Kizylbash damasks). It is possible that this is that very caftan of “Kizylbash damask” which can be traced through the inventories of the Tsars’ possessions (clothing) beginning with Tsarevich Ivan Ivanovich (late 16<sup>th</sup> century).

Bibliography:

Meisterwerke 1912, pls. 196, 197; Treasures of Applied Art 1979, p. 27, No. 34.





**136. Seal, 802 AH (1399-1400 CE).**

*Carved chrysolite, mounted in silver, height: 2.4 cm.  
The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. SA-8481.*

The seal is flat and almond-shaped. There are two lines around the edge. The centre of the seal is entirely filled with the inscription in thuluth script against a clear background:

“Amir of amirs of Azerbaijan Miran-Shah ibn Amir Sahibkiran Amir Timur Gurgan, 802”.

This is the earliest seal with an exact date. Subsequently, especially from the 16<sup>th</sup> century on, dates on seals became the rule. It is possible that the seal in question was made in Azerbaijan (north-western Iran) during the reign of Miran-Shah.

**Bibliography:**

Veselovsky 1910b; Timur 1989, Cat. No. 127.



**137. Seal, late 13<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Carved nephrite, 1.2 x 1.4 cm. The State  
Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. HP-2035.  
Acquired in 1925 (?) from the Shuvalov Collection.*

The seal is a flat oval representing a lion. Around the edge runs a band with a Persian verse inscription (motaqareb metre) in naskhi script. The inscription is clear:

“May all your affairs be as you desire!  
And may the Lord be your protector!”

This verse fragment was first noted on a tile of 669 AH (1270-1271 CE; see Kühnel 1931, p. 230, fig. 10), therefore, one should assign the seal to a later period. This is the only example amongst later seals (apart from 19<sup>th</sup>-century seals) bearing the figure of an animal.



**138. Seal, first half of 15<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Carved nephrite, 1.6 x 2.2 cm. The State*

*Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. SA-13650.*

The seal is almond-shaped, with a flat face and convex reverse, into which one long and two short leaves are carved. Around the edge of the face are two incised lines, the centre is occupied by an inscription in thuluth script on a clear background:

“Gouhar-Shad, daughter of Ghiyath al-Din Tarkhan”.

This seal belonged to the wife of Timur’s son, Shah Rukh, and the mother of such outstanding public figures of the 15<sup>th</sup> century as Ulugh Beg, Baysunghur and Muhammad-Juki.

Gouhar-Shad played an important role in the political life of the Timurid state in Khurasan and was famed for her part in furthering the construction of buildings. She was executed on 9<sup>th</sup> Ramadan 861 AH (31 July 1457 CE), on the order of Sultan Abu Sa’id. The seal may have been made at Herat.

**Bibliography:**

Ivanov 1971; Timur 1989, Cat. No. 128.



**139. Seal, second half of 15<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Carved lapis lazuli, diameter: 1.8 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. IR-2102. Acquired in 1975 from the S. Yurenev Collection.*

In the two halves of the seal there is an inscription in thuluth script against a clear background:

“Relying upon a merciful [Allah]. Pir-Muhammad ibn Shams al-Din.”

The lettering, the seal surface filled with the inscription alone, the absence of any decorative element in the inscription’s background and the circular form of the seal itself, are all typical features of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

It has not been possible to determine who the owner was from historical sources, since this combination of names occurs frequently.



**140. Seal, 926 AH (1519-1520 CE).**

*Carved cornelian, diameter: 2.4 cm. The State  
Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. IR-1871.  
Acquired in 1964 as part of the G. Lemmlein Collection.*

There are two lines around the edge of the seal. The script of the inscription is thuluth, the background is clear. In the centre there is a square with the name (?) of the owner which has not yet been deciphered and the date 926 AH (1519-1520 CE). In the segments around the edge are the names and epithets of Muhammad and the Shi'ite imams:

“...al-Mustafa and Haydar, Sijjad [i.e. Zain al-Abidin] and Baqir and Ja'far and Musa and Riza and al-Taqiyin and al-Askari and Mahdi.”

The shape and lettering of the seal continue the 15<sup>th</sup>-century tradition, but the letters are becoming smaller and fill the space allotted to the inscription more densely.





**141. Seal, [I]115 AH (1703-1704 CE).**  
*Carved glass, 1.4 x 3.1 cm. The State  
Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. IR-1779.*

The face of the seal bears a verse inscription of two lines (motaqareb metre) and a date. The script is nastaliq, the inscription is clear:

“At the day of resurrection the body [of the dead] will tremble, Muhammad will appear when Abdullah cries for help. [1]115.”

Iranian seals of the 17<sup>th</sup> century are fairly frequently oval (sometimes with a convex face), although one cannot yet affirm that the shape is typical of the period.

It should be said that the verse inscription with the owner's name is a relatively new phenomenon. The clear background of the inscription could be considered somewhat unusual, in that the background of inscriptions during the 17<sup>th</sup> century was as a rule decorated with a scrolled stem and flowers. This type of background appears on Iranian seals from the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.



**142. Seal, 1247 AH (1831-1832 CE).**  
*Carved cornelian, 2 x 2.4 cm. The State  
Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.  
Inv. No. IR-1834. Acquired in 1964  
as part of the G. Lemmlein Collection.*

In the centre of the seal is a Persian verse inscription (mojtass metre) and a date. The script is nastaliq, the background composed of undulating tendrils with scrolled shoots and large flowers:

“Although Yusuf and Egypt are for me wonders of the age,  
A slave at the court of Abbas is for me the Shah of Iran ! 1247.”

Though his name is not shown, the owner of the seal was probably a courtier of Abbas-mirza, the eldest son and heir of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar. Hence such humility in the inscription.

By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century noticeable changes had occurred in the execution of backgrounds to inscriptions, by comparison with the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Whereas earlier there was only one scrolled stem with flowers and leaves in the background, during the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century this stem either disintegrated into several separate little spirals or changed into an undulating stem with coiled shoots. By comparison with the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the curves of letters in the nastaliq script became thicker.



**143. Seal, 1275 AH (1858-1859 CE).**

*Carved cornelian, 3.1 x 3.5 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. IR-2233. Transferred in 1932 from the Academy for the History of Material Culture.*

The seal's large size is distinctive. There are two lines around the edge and in the middle is a Persian inscription in large letters (nastaliq script) and a date: "Admiral Konstantin – Grand Prince 1275."

To judge by the inscription, the seal belonged to the Grand Prince Konstantin Nikolayevich (1827-1892). He was Admiral of the Fleet and from 1855 headed the Navy and Military Ministry. It remains unexplained on what occasion this seal was made and how it was delivered to him, for by all indications (language, script, execution of background) the seal is a typical product of Iranian glyptic craftsmanship.





**144. Amulet, 16<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Silver, forged, niello work and engraving,  
diameter: 8.8 cm. The State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg. Inv. No. IR-2016. Purchased in 1970.*

The talisman is made in the form of a disc with a thickened rim and is decorated with inscriptions (in naskhi script) and with ornament on both sides. On one side is an Arabic verse inscription in honour of Ali around the edge and in the central square there are three inscriptions: “Power belongs to Allah the supreme”; part of the 256<sup>th</sup> verse of the 2<sup>nd</sup> sura of the Koran; the name of the owner – “the

owner of this is Fatima-Sultan, daughter of Mansur-khwaja”.

On the other side there are three bands with Arabic inscriptions, which contain the entire 256<sup>th</sup> verse of the 2<sup>nd</sup> sura of the Koran. The small central medallion may contain a date but it is not possible to decipher it with any accuracy.

Bibliography: Ivanov 1982.





**145. Plate, 16<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Faience, with underglaze painting, diameter: 34 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. VG-2660. Acquired in 1974 from M. R. Omarov.*

The painting of this plate is executed in black under a transparent green glaze.

This type of painting was employed in Iranian ceramics from the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

There are few surviving examples of this type of plate, coated in a yellowish-green glaze (sometimes turquoise or light blue) and with

black underglaze. The painting is predominantly decorated with flower motifs and depictions of fish. Scholars relate them to Kubachi ware and suggest a tentative dating in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

This may be the earliest type of Kubachi ceramics, since dated examples are known from the 1460s.



**146. Plate, 17<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Faience, with underglaze painting, diameter: 33.5 cm.*

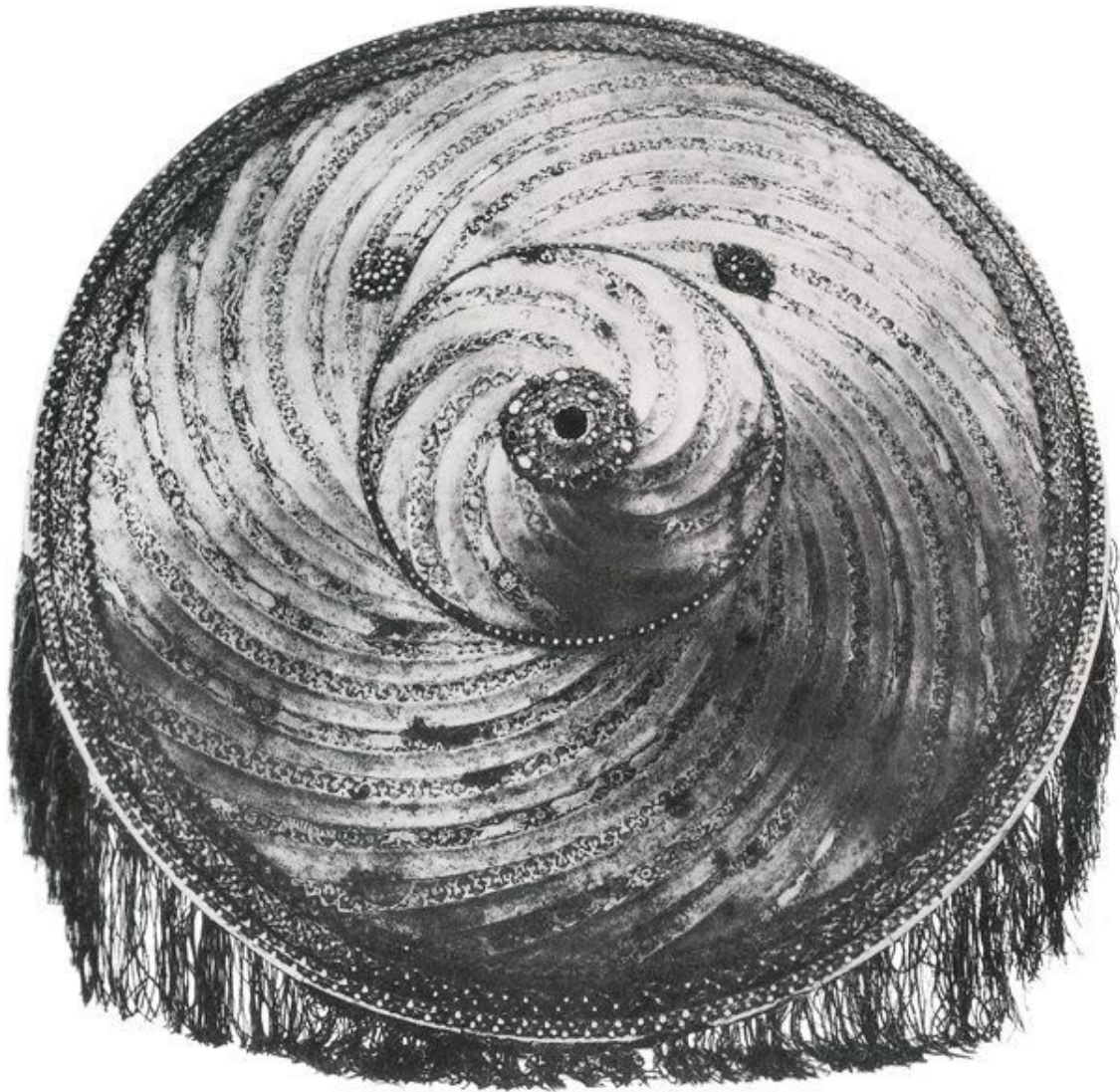
*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. VG-634. Purchased from A. Pashayev (Kubachi).*

The use of a combination of cobalt and olive paint, in which cobalt plays the dominant part, is characteristic of a large number of Kubachi wares of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Even the ornament decorating the sides and rim is often found on ceramics of this type. The same can also be said of the decoration on the bottom of the plate, of birds painted in cobalt amid rocks and flowers.

As in the majority of Kubachi wares of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, radial bands and three circles are drawn in cobalt on the outside of the plate.





**147. Shield, by Muhammad-Mumin Zarnishan,**  
**last quarter of 16<sup>th</sup> century.** *Damask steel, forged, engraved,*  
*inlaid with gold, decorated with filigree, rubies, turquoises and pearls,*  
*diameter: 48.8 cm. The Moscow Kremlin Armoury. Inv. No. OR-176.*

The shield is circular, convex, forged from a single sheet of damask steel and tooled with fluted grooves which divide the external surface into separate bands and create a whirling effect. Each alternate band is inlaid with gold and widens slightly from the centre outwards towards the rim. A particular refinement is achieved through the use of two types of gold in the inlay – bright (pure) gold for the basic designs and greenish gold (an alloy of gold and silver) for the secondary details.

The medieval artist portrayed 89 figures of people and animals on



the shield. On one of the bands a half-bear, half-man is represented with a stone lifted above its head. A figure of a bear appears in another scene at the edge of the shield, where it has a camel on a lead. Beneath the bear is a stamp into which the name of the craftsman is incised – Muhammad-Mumin zarnishan.

A gold boss with gemstones is fixed to the centre of the shield. The edge is decorated with a gilded steel band into which small rubies and turquoises are set amid foliate ornament.

The shield formed part of the “Sovereign’s grand attire” of Tsar Mikhail Fiodorovich (1613-1645). Documents attest that it originally belonged to Prince Fiodor Mstislavsky who served as a commander for Tsars Ivan IV (the Terrible) and Boris Godunov, and who was head of the boyar government of 1610-1611. The shield ended up in the sovereign’s armoury after the death of the prince in 1622.

#### Bibliography:

Mishukov 1954, pp. 122-125; Bretanizki 1988, pl. 69.



**148. Sabre, second half of 16<sup>th</sup> century.**  
*Damask steel, forged and inlaid with gold,  
length of blade: 80 cm. The State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg. Inv. No. OR-2839. Transferred in  
1886 from the Tsarskoye Selo Arsenal.*

The blade of the sabre is widened at the tip. The hilt and sheath are of later workmanship (they may have been made in Moscow during the 19<sup>th</sup> century). The blade is richly ornamented with gold inlay. On the obverse, next to the guard, there is vegetal ornament. Along the blunt edge of the blade are three cartouches with vegetal ornament

separating twin cartouches with three lines of different Persian verses. After the first cartouche the entire width of the blade is occupied by a scalloped medallion containing gold vegetal ornament and four rubies (?). To judge by the ornament in the form of leaves and rosettes around the stones, this addition was made in Turkey.

One can assume that this cartouche once contained the name of the original owner, which was masked with ornaments by the new owner.

On the reverse, next to the blunt edge, there are cartouches with ornament in the form of stylised “Chinese clouds” and two cartouches with a fine verse.

The script of all the inscriptions is nastaliq, stems and leaves from the background of the inscriptions.

The verses on the obverse of the blade are as follows (in order from the hilt to the tip of the blade):

a) ramal metre:

“Bloodthirsty sword, which has made red the face of the earth,  
[And] also from your sword, [concealed] in your brows, blood flows.”

b) metre indeterminable since a variable number of syllables fall in the hemistich, but there is a radif (rhyme):

“A coquettish beauty bared her sabre against me, I said to her: ‘Why do you strike  
[me], coquettish beauty?’”

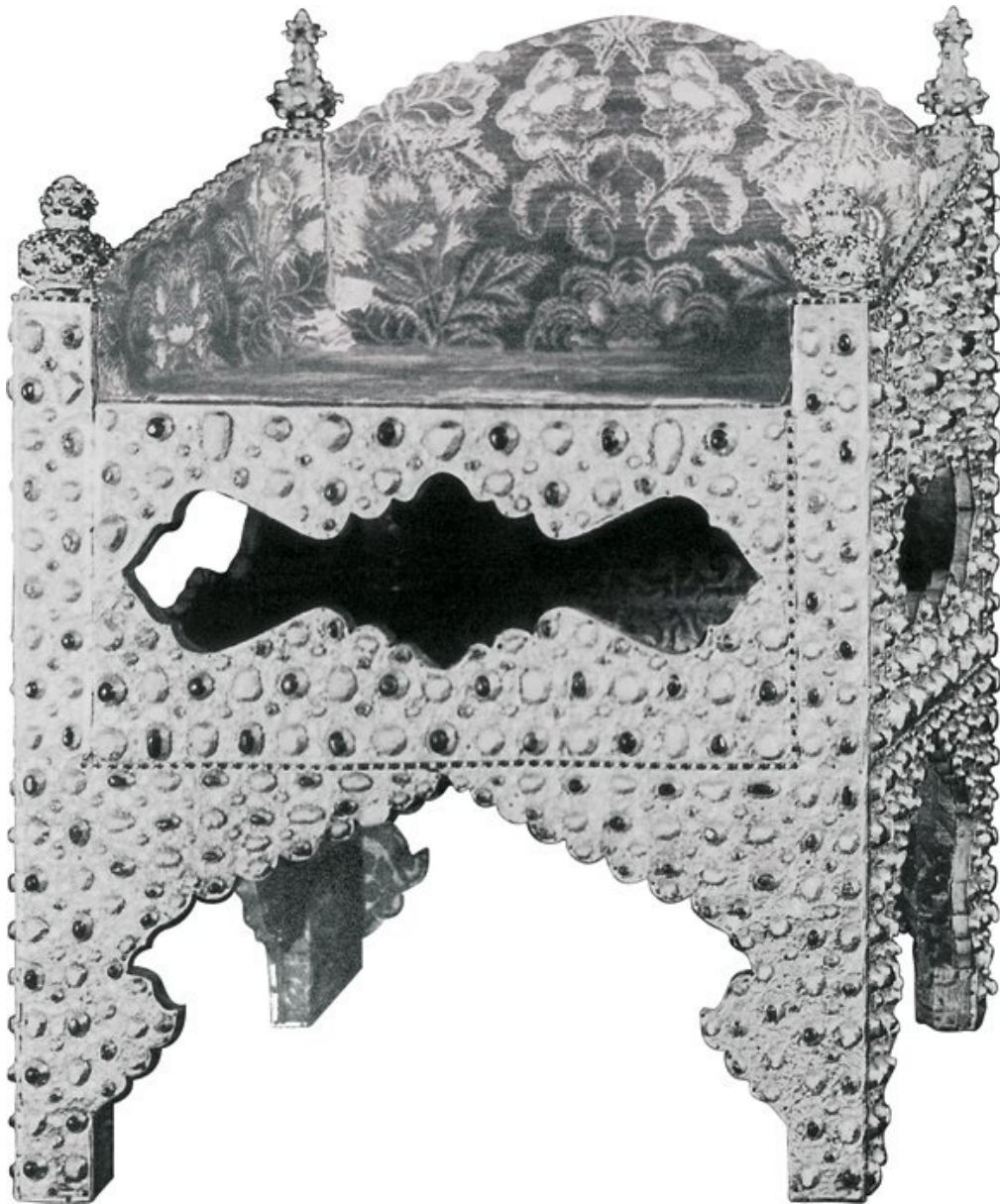
c) ramal metre but not sustained in the first misra’ (hemistich):

“I said: ‘That word of my beloved damascened the sabre, The sword grew a watered  
pattern and an inlay of gold.’”

d) On the obverse there is only one line, in ramal metre:

“I shall not bow my head before my beloved’s sabre,  
[Although] all this will fall on my head together with fate.”

It has not been possible to establish the authors of these lines. By the character of the script (nastaliq) and the appearance of vegetal ornament in the background of these inscriptions, one can assign this blade to the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.



**149. Throne, late 16<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Gold, rubies, tourmalines, turquoises, pearls, velvet,  
wood; stamping, filigree and chasing, 90 x 62.5 x 51.5 cm.  
The Moscow Kremlin Armoury. Inv. No. R-28. Acquired in 1604.*

The outline of the throne is severe, precise and graceful. One detects features characteristic of Iranian furniture of that period in the form of the low back passing into the downward-sloping armrests and in the openwork side-walls that blend into the decoratively-shaped legs.

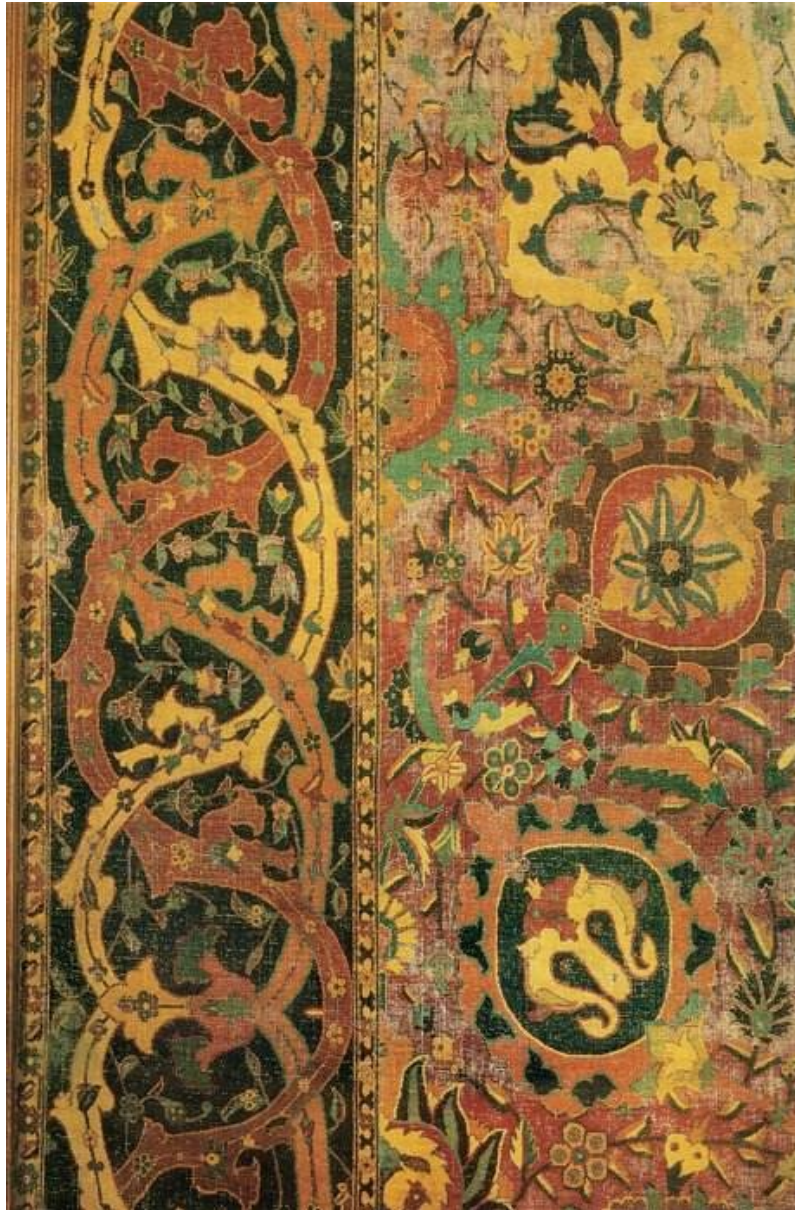
This throne was presented to Tsar Boris Godunov by Shah Abbas in 1604. In preparing the throne for a coronation in 1742 the worn

Iranian velvet on the back, seat and armrests was replaced with French velvet.

Bibliography:

Goncharova 1964, p. 260.





**150. Fragment of a carpet, late 16<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Pile-woven wool, 120 x 295 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. VT-997. Transferred in 1925 from the museum attached to the former Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

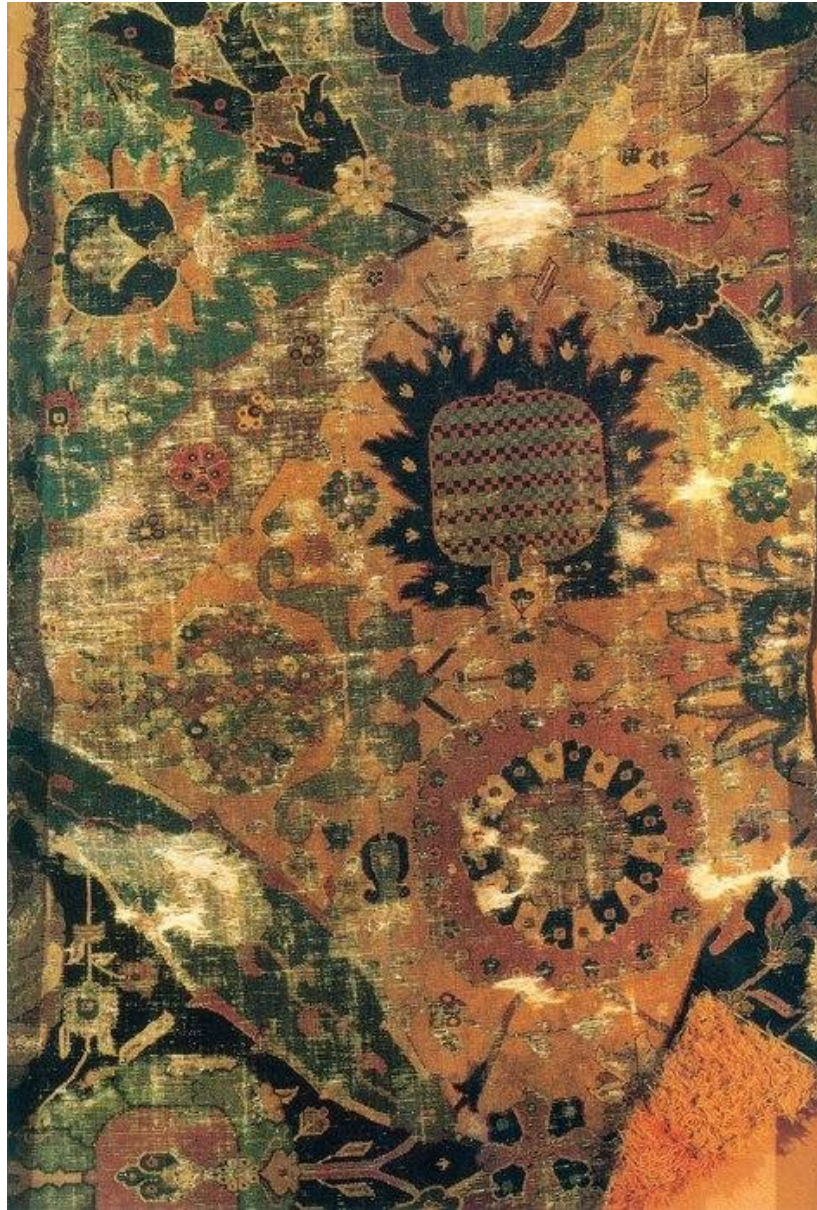
This carpet belongs amongst the so-called vase carpets, which are distinguished by their large size, variety and intensity of colour and large design of stylised flowers and palmettes.

One of the most characteristic designs on vase carpets is the network pattern seen on this carpet. Carpets of this type are thought

to have been produced in the province of Kirman.

**Bibliography:**

Shandrovskaya 1960, p. 155.



**151. Fragment of a carpet, second half of 16<sup>th</sup> century.**  
*Pile-woven wool, 88 x 150 cm. The State Hermitage Museum,  
 St Petersburg. Inv. No. VT-966. Transferred in 1925 from the  
 museum attached to the former Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

This example belongs to one of the types of vase carpet from Kirman, whose characteristic pattern is a network of indented leaves. This piece has supplementary pile on the reverse.





**152. Cloud collar of a robe, mid-to late 16<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Silk, with linen lining, embroidered in gold thread,  
length: 154 cm; width: 93 cm. The Moscow  
Kremlin Armoury. Inv. No. TK 3117.*

The “cloud collar” of the robe has a rounded upper section, two straight bands along the skirts and a hem partly preserved as a small rectangle. The collar has a smooth neckline and four flaps along the outside border at the shoulders, chest and back.

At present the original background of the embroidery, a scarlet satin, can only be discerned through worn patches or at folds, since it is sewn over entirely with green silk thread imitating the texture of serge. In all probability this was done during its restoration in Russia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Definite evidence of this is provided by the use of rough linen as a supplementary lining to the new embroidery: this is a traditionally Russian fabric, widely used in Russian embroidery of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

**Bibliography:**

Treasures of Applied Art 1979, p. 27, No. 32; Timur 1989, Cat. No. 116.





**153. Miniature: The Shah**

**Listens to the Teachings of a Sufi, c. 1570-1580.**

9.3 x 16.3 cm. Manuscript: *Lavaiḥ of Jami*.

Calligrapher: Ahmad al-Husaini al-Mashhadi al-katib.

Date of completion of copy: 978 AH (1570-1571 CE).

The National Library of Russia,

St Petersburg. Inv. No. Dom 256, f. 10b.

This sumptuously decorated example of the *Lavaiḥ* was copied by the famous calligrapher of the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Ahmad Mashhadi, for the ruler of Mazandaran, Murad Khan.

Apparently the artistic merits of this manuscript were so great that

Qazi Ahmad Qumi, the well-known biographer of artists, mentions it in his work, which is an extremely unusual occurrence.

There are three miniatures in the manuscript, and they are clearly painted by a single artist. They are all beautiful examples of the style of miniature painting which was developed at the courts of Qazwin and Mashhad. The artist was obviously trained at these centres, but this manuscript of the Lavaih was apparently illustrated at Mazandaran.

**Bibliography:**

Akimushkin and Ivanov 1968, pp. 23, 24, No. 38.



**154. Miniature: *Youth with a Lute*, by Sharaf al-Husaini al-Yazdi, 1003 AH (1594-1595 CE).**  
 14 x 22.4 cm. The State Hermitage Museum,  
 St Petersburg. Inv. No. VR-701.

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, together with traditional illustrations of literary works, Persian painters began producing miniatures on separate sheets. Unconnected with literary subjects and depicting characters and scenes from real life, these miniatures took on the significance of easel paintings.

It was in Qazwin – from 1548 to 1585 the capital of Iran – that miniatures on separate sheets flourished.

Delicacy of draughtsmanship, the brilliance of pure colours – albeit somewhat muted by comparison with the previous stage, a specific “Qazwinian” treatment of figures involving attenuated proportions, long necks, small, round heads and dynamic curves – these are some of the features of this school which played an important role in the formation of the following century’s style of painting.

The miniature *Youth with a Lute* belongs to the Qazwin school. The figures of the youth and the white horse are set against the clear background of the paper, this being characteristic of Qazwin miniatures on separate sheets.

At the bottom of the miniature is the artist’s not entirely

decipherable inscription:

“Painted by a poor man, who trusts in the mercy of Allah Sharaf al-Husaini al-Yazdi,  
in the year 1003.”

No other work by this artist is known.

Bibliography:

Akimushkin and Ivanov 1968, No. 52.





**155. Miniature: *Portrait of a Girl*, by Riza-i Abbasi, 1011 AH (1602-1603 CE).** Indian ink, paints and gold on paper, 14.8 x 8.4 cm (19.3 x 16.9 cm with borders).  
The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.  
Inv. No. VR-705. Acquired in 1924 from the museum attached to the former Stieglitz School of Technical Design.

In the late 16<sup>th</sup> to early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, new trends appeared in Persian painting, linked above all with the endeavour to convey a visual impression of the surrounding world.

One of the artists who dealt with these problems was Riza-i Abbasi, considered the founder of the so-called Isfahan school of



painting formed in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The artist's full name was Aqa Riza ibn Ali-Asghar Kashani. His date of birth is not known. In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century he adopted the nisba "Abbasi" in honour of Shah Abbas I, under whom he became head of the library-workshop and leading master of the Isfahan school.

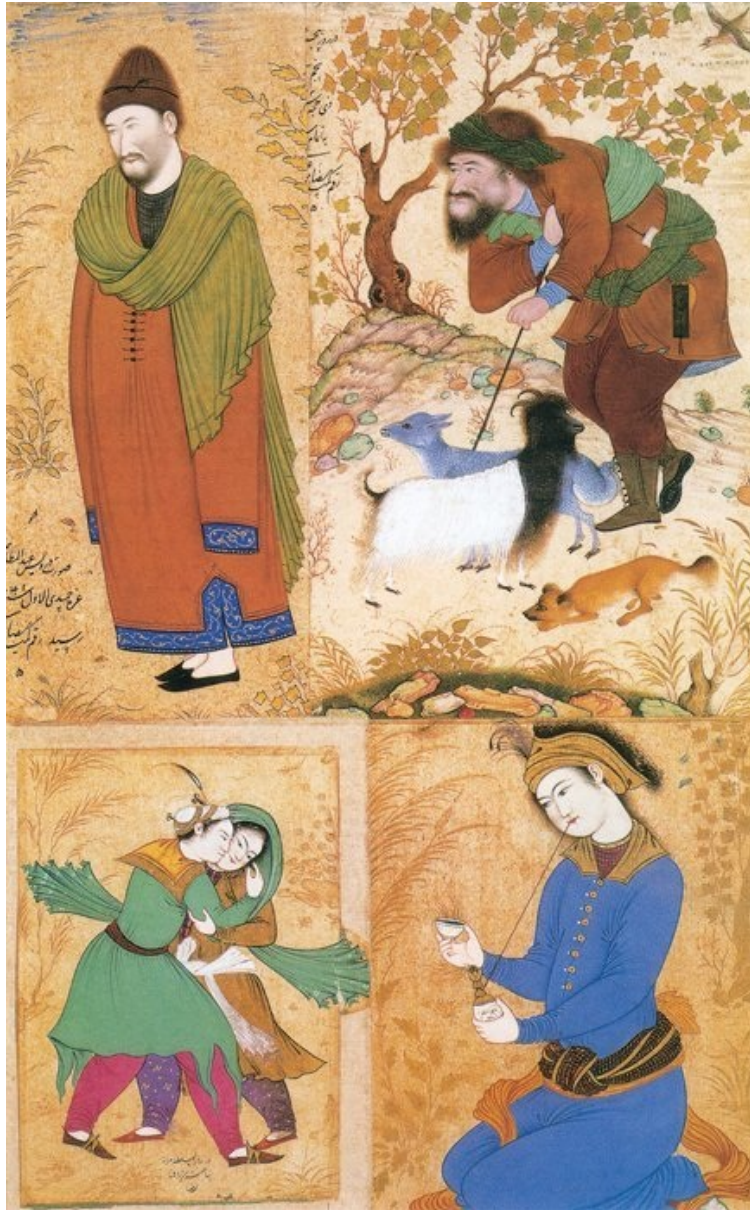
Riza-i Abbasi died in the month of Dhu-l-Qa'da 1044 AH (18 April-17 May 1635 CE).

#### Bibliography:

Akimushkin and Ivanov 1968, No. 61.



**156. Miniature: *Youth Holding a Jug*,  
by Riza-i Abbasi, 1037 AH (1627-1628 CE).  
12.5 x 22.3 cm. Museum of Western and  
Oriental Art, Kiev. Inv. No. 449 GRV.**



157. Four miniatures on one sheet, by Riza-I Abbasi

a. The Dervish Abd al-Mutallib Selmnani (?), 1041 AH (25 November 1631 CE).

7.3 x 16.4 cm.

b. A Shepherd, 1043 AH (22 June 1634 CE).

10.4 x 16.4 cm.

c. Love Scene, c. 1610-1620.

7.4 x 10.4 cm.

*d. Youth with a Hookah, c. 1610-1620.*

*8.8 x 12 cm.*

*The National Library of Russia, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. Dom 489, f. 73b.*





**158. Miniature: *Shah Abbas and Khan Alam*,  
by Riza-i Abbasi, 1042 AH (1633 CE).**

*17.5 x 28.5 cm. The National Library of Russia,  
St Petersburg. Inv. No. Dom 489, f. 74a.*

The art of the last great Iranian miniaturist, Riza-i Abbasi, is fairly well represented in former Soviet collections: thirteen signed works of his are known, of which seven are reproduced in this book.

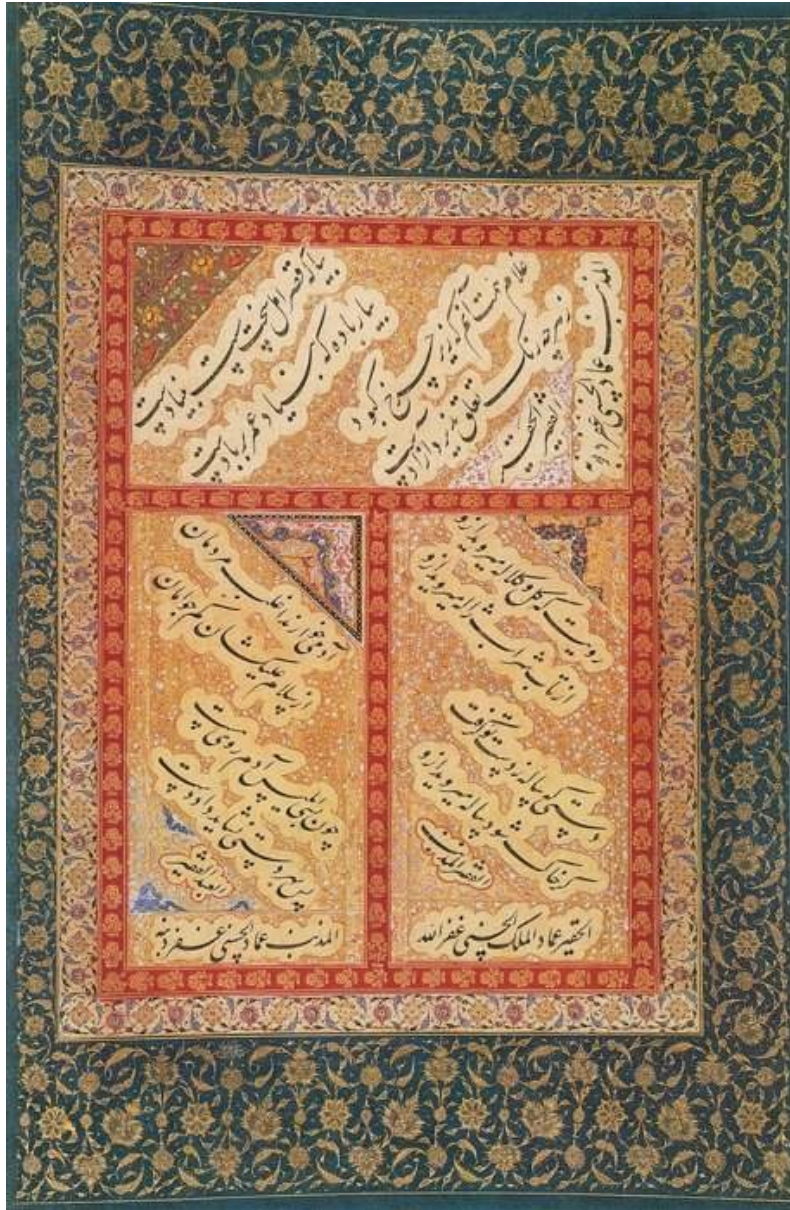
A well-known scholar of the Iranian miniature, I. S. Shchukin, has distinguished three periods in the artist's work. The majority of the miniatures reproduced in this book belong to the last (third) period in



the art of Riza-i Abbasi. The large miniature Shah Abbas and Khan Alam is exceptional among his work; possibly it represents the genre of official ceremonial portraiture.

Bibliography:

Krachkovskaya 1927b, pp. 42, 43; *Mistetstvo* 1930, No. 480; Akimushkin and Ivanov 1968, pp. 26-30, 39 (a reading of the signatures on the miniatures), Nos. 65, 66.



**159. Three samples of calligraphy,**  
**by Mir Imad, before 1615.** *Indian ink on paper,*  
*size of sheet: 45 x 29.5 cm; size of samples: 19.4 x 9.4 cm (upper),*  
*17.5 x 9 cm (left), 17.5 x 9.2 cm (right).* Branch of the Institute  
of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences,  
St Petersburg (album E 14, sheet 95b). Transferred in 1921  
from the Russian Museum, Petrograd.

The outstanding master of artistic calligraphy, Imad al-Mulk Muhammad ibn Husain (or Ibrahim) al-Husaini al-Saifi al-Qazwini (1551-1615), better known as Mir Imad, was a pupil of the famous calligraphers Malik Dailami (died 1562) and Muhammad-Husaini

Tabrizi (died c. 1578). He was the last reformer of the nastaliq script style and was famed for his art in writing samples of large and medium nastaliq. He worked for many years at the court of Shah Abbas I (1587-1629). The album contains 188 samples of Mir Imad's artistic writing and 26 exercises.

**Bibliography:**

Akimushkin 1962; Murakka 1994, p. 85.



**160. Miniature: Girshasp Kills Afriqi  
in the Battle Against the Kirvan Padishah,  
by Afzal al-Husaini, 1055 AH (1645-1646 CE).**  
31 x 22.5 cm. Manuscript: *Shahnama of Firdawsi*.  
Calligrapher: Muhammad-Shafi' ibn Abd al-Jabbar,  
1052-1061 AH (1642-1651 CE). The National Library  
of Russia, St Petersburg. Inv. No. Dom 333, f. 77.

An enormous copy of the *Shahnama* was prepared as a gift to Shah Abbas II: it was illuminated with 192 miniatures. A group of artists worked on the illustrations of this copy, although not all of them left their signatures. Afzal al-Husaini was one of them and signed 55

miniatures (some of the unsigned works may also be attributed to him). A muted grey-blue palette and a somewhat grotesque treatment of human figures are the characteristics of his style.

Bibliography:

Gyuzalyan and Dyakonov 1934, No. 18 (description of the manuscript).





**161. Miniature: *Rustam Battles with the Monster*, by Riza-i Musawwir, c. 1640-1650.**

25 x 39 cm. Manuscript: *Shahnama of Firdawsi*.

Calligrapher: Muhammad-Shafi' ibn Abd al-Jabbar, 1052-1061 AH (1642-1651 CE). The National Library of Russia, St Petersburg. Inv. No. Dom 333, f. 217a.

Riza-i musawwir was another of the artists who worked on the miniatures for the copy of the *Shahnama* made for Abbas II. Although this miniature bears no signature, all the characteristics of the artist's style are present here – the use of light colours and the treatment of the sky in the form of blue-white patches – and this

allows one to attribute the work to him (there are miniatures with the artist's signature in another copy of the *Shahnama* from the same library, PNS 381).



**162. Blade of a sabre, by Rajab-Ali Isfahani,  
first half of 17<sup>th</sup> century. Damask steel,  
forged and inlaid with gold, length: 99.6 cm.  
The Moscow Kremlin Armoury. Inv. No. OR-1413.  
*Presented to Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich  
by an Iranian merchant in 1664.***

The sabre blade is of damask steel, slightly curved, with a two-edged tip. Downwards from the handle, a wide channel has been hollowed out. Along the blunt edge on both sides there are cavities for pearls (the presence of pearls is attested by the Armoury Inventories before 1776). The heel of the blade is flat and decorated with gold inlay in

three bands of different widths, forming an undulating design with a rhythmical interface of decoratively-shaped medallions. On the right side of the blade, at the heel, the mark of the craftsman is damascened in gold. The tang is slightly curved in towards the cutting edge of the blade; it is wide, flat and straight with two holes for mounting the hilt. There are two rectangular marks stamped on the tang, bearing the Arabic inscription "Made by Rajab-Ali Isfahani", plus the circular stamp of the Great Royal Treasury, with a double-headed eagle.

**Bibliography:**

Treasures of Applied Art 1979, p. 22, No. 13.



**163. Cup, 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Gold, cast, turned and polished, decorated with rubies, emeralds, garnets, turquoises and glass, diameter: 12 cm; height: 3.5 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. VZ-722.*

This small cup is richly decorated on the outside surface only, with 510 rubies, 114 emeralds, 6 garnets, and turquoise and glass mounted in low settings. On the inside of the foot two incomprehensible inscriptions are engraved in Arabic script: “forty two” (?) and a word possibly signifying the weight of the cup, written in siyaqat script.

It is important to note the tooling of the background between the stone settings: it is like fine granulation. This technique has parallels with both Iranian articles in the Armoury and on Iranian weapons, although their background tends to be tooled with various punches. This observation is of importance in identifying Iranian jewellery of the 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, which are very little known and of which, apparently, very few survive.

It is possible that a characteristic of Iranian gold jewellery with gems is that the stones are mounted in low settings, in contrast to the high settings with a rosette seen on Turkish articles and the setting of stones in deep recesses (flush with the object’s surface) in Indian articles of the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Bibliography:**

Oriental Jewellery 1984, No. 51.





**164. Candlestick, first half of 17<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Bronze (brass), cast, forged and engraved, height: 26.5 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. IR-2270. Acquired from the Stroganov Collection.*

Candlesticks of similar form (nine other examples are known) present art historians with several hitherto unresolved problems, of which the main one is to determine the date of manufacture of such objects.

All ten candlesticks have identical sockets for the candles, in the form of dragons' heads, and identical scaly ornament on the body.

The shape of the base on one of the candlesticks dates back to

14<sup>th</sup>-century examples. The lower part of this base has exactly the same scaly ornament. It could be suggested that this is a 15<sup>th</sup>-century candlestick preserved intact (see Allan 1982b, p. 39).

The bases of the remaining nine candlesticks are distinguished by their ornament (three of them are without any decoration). The shape of all the bases is virtually identical and goes back to 15<sup>th</sup>- century examples. The oldest of them (in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, see Ivanov 1969a, No. 2; SPA 1938-1939, vol. VI, p. 1377a; Grube 1974, fig. 99) undoubtedly dates from the last quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It was made in the workshop of Shir-Ali ibn Muhammad Dimashqi in Khurasan. G. Wiet has pointed out that the socket of this candlestick is a later addition (see Wiet 1935, p. 17). Another similar candlestick is in the Pars Museum in Shiraz. Along the rim of the shoulders is an openwork ornament of palmettes (absent from the other bases). Melikian-Chirvani attributes it to the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (see Melikian-Chirvani 1975, p. 155, fig. 6).

In the collection of F.R. Martin, there were once two such candlesticks (see Martin 1902, p. 40). The base of one of them was decorated with corrugated ornament only on the upper side facet of the shoulders, whilst the other, distinguished from similar ones by its wide, low edge, was richly decorated with engraved vegetal ornament, which enables one to date it no earlier than the last quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The candlestick reproduced here is distinguished from others by a lower rim to the base, in the form of large palmettes.

The base is richly decorated with figures of people and beasts, and vegetal ornament, which makes it possible to date it to the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. There is another candlestick in the Hermitage, two in the Museum of Art and Culture in Samarkand and one in the mausoleum of khwaja Ahmad Yasawi in the town of Turkestan, none of which have any ornament on their bases (the Hermitage one has pierced applied plaques of uncertain date). On all four objects the socket and base are made of the same metal (bronze or brass) and they do not create the impression of being articles composed of variously dated parts.

It is essential to point out that there is one other type of candlestick with sockets in the form of two dragons, but the heads are treated differently from those of the objects described above, and the bases are of a different shape, characteristic of a number of 17<sup>th</sup>-

century candlesticks (see *Bulletin des Musées de France*, 8<sup>th</sup> year, No. 4, Paris, 1936, p. 63). This type can be dated to the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Thus it is possible that in this group one candlestick has survived intact, the base of another is from the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, whilst two other bases can be assigned to the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> to the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The dating of the remaining bases is uncertain. Candle sockets can be assigned to the end of the Timurid era due to the depiction of dragons, and these are widely represented amongst various types of objects from the Khurasan of the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> to the early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries (see Grube 1974, figs. 38, 39, 80, 81, 103-108, 140, 145). Whether the treatment of the dragon heads on all the mentioned objects is close or not remains difficult to decide.

At the same time it is hard to imagine that the tradition of making candle sockets in the form of two dragon heads should have been preserved virtually unaltered for about two hundred years. Yet it is possible to believe that such sockets were being produced in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as well. There is a strange object in the ethnographical section of the Janashia Museum of Georgia. It consists of a large brass torch of the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century with a socket for candles attached to it, in the form of three intertwined dragon heads made of brass.

Therefore one would suppose that the Hermitage candlestick was also made in its entirety during the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

#### Bibliography:

SPA 1938-1939, vol. VI, pl. 1377b; Grube 1974, fig. 100; E Grube, "Notes on the Decorative Arts of the Timurid Period, II", in: *Islamic Arts*, III, Genoa-New York, 1989, fig. 7; *Masterpieces* 1990, No. 108.



**165. Casket, by Sadiq, 17<sup>th</sup> century.**  
*Copper, forged and engraved, 27 x 19.8 cm.*  
*The Russian Museum of Ethnology, St Petersburg.*  
*Inv. No. 31-156. Acquired in 1902.*

This casket is apparently the sole surviving object in such a form. Its decoration is typical of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the background is tooled with diagonal hatching characteristic of Iranian copperware of that century.

A verse inscription (ramal metre, nastaliq script) is engraved on the casket. It is interesting in that it includes the craftsman's name, which is a very rare occurrence:

“In a transient world may the work remain of Sadiq – an eternal master !”

Another work of his – also a casket, but of a different shape – is now in a private collection in Geneva.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the side walls were engraved with figures of people, birds and beasts; at the same time a false date was added: 872 AH (1467-1468 CE).



**166. Dagger and sheath, by Muhammad Lari.**

*Blade and hilt: Iran, 17<sup>th</sup> century. Sheath: Turkey, 18<sup>th</sup> century. Damask steel, gold, wood; forged and decorated with gemstones and enamel, length: 38.4 cm.*

*The Moscow Kremlin Armoury. Inv. No. OR-3877.*

*Transferred in 1810 from the Rüstkammer.*

The two-edged blade of the dagger is of damask steel. The inscription “Muhammad Lari” is engraved on both sides of the heel.

The hilt is gold, richly ornamented with enamel and gemstones. The sheath is coated in gold leaf with a densely patterned vegetal



ornament.

Bibliography: Treasures of Applied Art 1979, p. 24, No. 24.



**167. Bowl, by Muhammad-Zaman  
naqqash-i Shirazi, 1052 AH (1642 CE).**

*Bronze (brass), cast and engraved, diameter: 18.2 cm.  
The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. IR-2264.*

This bowl on a low foot-ring has sides which widen upwards to an extroverted rim and a small hemispherical protuberance in the centre of the base. This form of bowl emerged in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and continued to exist, with few changes, until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Bowls of this form are usually entirely covered with inscriptions from the Koran and were used either in folk medicine or for fortune-telling. The Hermitage bowl also has inscriptions from the Koran engraved inside it, and next to the protuberance there are Arabic verses in praise of Ali, but with the name of Muhammad added.

On the outside surface there are quotations from various suras of the Koran (not even always entire verses). There is also an inscription with benedictions of the Shi'ite imams, and in another band the signs of the zodiac.

The protuberance bears verses from the Gulistan of Sa'di (motaqareb metre, thuluth script) and the craftsman's signature:

"The aim of life is to leave behind a memory of oneself,  
For I do not see eternity in being.  
Perhaps occasionally some wise man will mercifully  
Utter a prayer in memory of this poor man."

"This was written by a slave who has sinned through remission, Muhammad-Zaman  
naqqash-i Shirazi, the month of Rajab 1052."

The Hermitage collection includes a second bowl by the same

craftsman, completed in 1037 AH (1627-1628 CE). Here he indicates his other professional title – kenderkar (engraver). On the bowl reproduced here his title is naqqash, which is usually translated as “artist” (in the wider sense of the word), but the first meaning of this Arabic root is still “to engrave”.

It is possible that this craftsman was one of the Shiraz coppersmiths who, according to the traveller John Fryar, were the best in Iran during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The craftsman’s nisba “Shirazi” points to such a possibility, though no other Shiraz works have yet been discovered.



**168. Bowl, 1113 AH (1701-1702 CE).**

*Copper, forged and engraved, height: 15.5 cm;  
diameter: 31.5 cm. The State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg. Inv. No. IR-2158.*

*Purchased in 1980 from S. Khanukayev.*

Such bowls as this, on a fairly high foot, appear in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Only the outside of the bowl is decorated. The inscription, in nastaliq script but with widely-spaced letters, is particularly striking. The background consists of scrolled stems with flowers and trefoils. The content of the inscription is a blessing upon the Shi'ite imams. Similar inscriptions often appear on objects of applied art in Iran from the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the Shi'ite interpretation of Islam became an official religion. During the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the curves and spacing of lettering became very wide. This exaggerated decorativeness became especially highly developed in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.



**169. Horn, first half of 17<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Buffalo horn in a gold mount, cast, chased, matt-tooled, enamelled and decorated with turquoises, rubies, tourmalines, spinel and glass, length: 41 cm; diameter: 8.4 cm. The Moscow Kremlin Armoury. Inv. No. DK-264. Presented to Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich by the Dutch Embassy in 1665.*

The mount is made of a fine sheet of gold chased in imitation of granulation. It consists of a terminal, one wide hoop at the rim and two narrow ones in the middle with supporting plaques fitted to them. The rims of the terminal and of the wide hoop are openwork tracery in the form of stylised lotus flowers. The mount is decorated with a great number of cabochon gems.

Stored in the Royal Treasury and known from ancient records, the horn has attracted the attention of scholars for a long time. It was first published in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was considered to have been made in Constantinople during the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. I. Vishnevskaya has established the horn to be of Iranian manufacture of the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Bibliography:**

Treasures of Applied Art 1979, p. 32, No. 55.





**170. Bottle, late 16<sup>th</sup> to first half of 17<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Faïence, with underglaze painting, height: 36.3 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. VG-290.*

*Acquired from the State Museum Reserve.*

This bottle is made of white faïence, decorated with relief designs and painted with vivid blue cobalt point under a colourless glaze. The cobalt serves as a background for motifs which stand out against it “in reserve” – a technique rarely encountered amongst examples of blue-and-white ceramics. Individual elements of the design executed in relief are outlined in black and the details are marked with black

lines.

In contrast to the majority of cobalt wares with chiefly Chinese motifs, the themes here are purely Iranian. One side of the bottle presents a heron and a hunter shooting a gun at a fleeing animal, whilst the other shows a standing man in European dress with the slain animal thrown over his shoulder, and a woman with a bowl in her hand, kneeling in front of an unidentified object. Both scenes are united by a landscape with shrubs and trees with birds perched on the branches. Four flying birds are also represented on the pear-shaped section at the tip of the neck.

These same decorations, with insignificant alterations, occur on three other bottles in the Hermitage collection, on a bottle in the Czartoryski collection in Krakow and on a bottle in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Although several of this group of bottles are plainly based on a single model, their painting varies in the level of artistic execution. Apparently the bottles were made at various times, which enables one to trace the evolution both of the themes themselves and of various details in terms of their simplification and degeneration. Lane (see Lane 1957, p. 99) has ascribed the bottle in London to Mashhad, one of the largest centres for the production of cobalt ceramics in 16<sup>th</sup>- and 17<sup>th</sup>-century Iran. This localisation can presumably be accepted for this particular bottle too, if we take into account the proximity of many of its features to those of ceramics attributed to Mashhad – a white paste, the use of black outlines, the manner of rendering plants with large leaves and flying birds “in reserve” on a cobalt background and outlined in black.

#### Bibliography:

Rapoport 1975; Masterpieces 1990, No. 100.



**171. Flask, 17<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Faience, with moulded decoration, height: 18 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. VG-2354. Transferred in 1925 from  
the museum attached to the former  
Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

The flask is decorated with a relief design and covered with a light green glaze. On one of the sides there is a half-length portrait of the Madonna and Child, on the other a dragon against a background of a landscape. Relief vegetal ornament around the ribbing of the flask serves as a frame to these scenes.

The flask is one of a small number of surviving examples of Safavid faience, which are notable for the originality of their technique (the paste is pressed into moulds), for their colour and their decoration. As a rule the wide sides of the flasks, mugs and bottles bear images on a variety of themes. The characteristic blend of Iranian, European and Chinese themes on ceramics of this type has already been noted in the literature, as has the close link of the

images with those of the Isfahan school of miniatures. The European motif of the Madonna and Child could have been borrowed from European etchings which were widely circulated in Iran during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. But taking into account the fact that the Madonna's face reflects a canonical type from Isfahan miniatures, one can assume that this portrayal has as its basis some Persian miniature or other on a European theme. The same may be said of the Chinese motif on the other side of the flask: the Chinese dragon is portrayed against a landscape characteristic of 17<sup>th</sup> -century Isfahan miniatures.

Bibliography:

Rapoport 1972, fig. 2.



**172. Spittoon, late 17<sup>th</sup> to early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Faience, painted in lustre; double firing, height: 13 cm.  
The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. VG-62.  
Transferred in 1925 from the museum attached to the  
former Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

This light and very thin-walled vessel was made from a dense, white, porcelain-like paste, painted in lustre and covered with a transparent, colourless glaze.

Iranian craftsmen of the Safavid age revived the art of lustre painting, which had been highly developed in the 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries.



This is the only type of Iranian Safavid ceramics virtually untouched by Chinese influences.

However, the decoration on lustreware of this time (primarily small bowls, vases and high-necked bottles) does not repeat old traditional Iranian motifs either: they reflect the tastes of the Safavid period and stylistically owe much to designs on textiles and other products of Iranian applied art.

More often than not plants are depicted, as on this spittoon, and sometimes birds and beasts portrayed, unlike an old lustreware, in silhouette and not “in reserve”.

The majority of Safavid lustre faience articles are assigned to the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> to the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, on the basis of their shape and of the only dated example, with an indecipherably inscribed date which A. Lane has read as 1084 AH (1673-1674 CE; Lane 1957, p. 118, No. 53).

It has not yet proved possible to determine the exact origin of this group of Iranian ceramics.



**173. Bowl of a hookah, 17<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Faience, with slip decoration and underglaze painting, height: 27.2 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. VG-291. Transferred in 1925 from the museum attached to the former Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

This hookah is decorated with painted designs in white and yellow slip on a blue background, under a colourless, transparent glaze. At the side, the vessel has an opening with a spout in the form of a flower, to which the tube for the mouthpiece was attached. The hookah's shape echoes that of Chinese porcelain wine vessels.

However, the painting is based on a symmetrical composition, widespread in Iranian ceramics, and characteristic Iranian motifs serve as ornament – scalloped medallions filled with arabesque-islami, clusters of long narrow leaves, carnation stalks and flowers.

Faience wares with polychrome painting on a white or coloured background are tentatively ascribed to Kirman – one of the most important centres of ceramics production of Safavid times. In the Victoria and Albert Museum in London there is a vessel analogous in shape to that in the Hermitage, also painted in white and yellow slip on a blue background, and this is dated 1049 AH (1658-1659 CE; see Lane 1957, pl. 88b).

Bibliography:

Masterpieces 1990, No. 105.



**174. Bottle, 17<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Faïence, with slip decoration and underglaze painting, height: 26.4 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. VG-345. Transferred in 1925 from the museum attached to the former Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

This type of polychrome painting is found on wares from Kirman. Numerous shards have been discovered in Kirman itself and its surroundings, fragments of ceramic wares with painting in cobalt blue, red slip and sometimes green point. Dated examples of this type of ceramics are also known from the 1670s, allowing one to

determine the period when it was produced (see Lane 1957, p. 83).

Bibliography:

Kverfeldt 1947, p. 107, pl. XXI.





**175. Plate, 17<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Faience, with slip decoration and underglaze painting,  
diameter: 33 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.  
Inv. No. VG-527. Purchased from S. Magomedov (Kubachi).*

The plate has been painted with wide, relief brushstrokes in red and yellow slip, and also with cobalt blue, green and brown point, all under a transparent, colourless glaze.

This plate belongs to the so-called Kubachi group. In its range of colour this piece is reminiscent of Turkish faience; however, the decoration of human and animal figures, the flower and landscape motifs, all reflect features of the predominating style of 17<sup>th</sup>-century Iranian art.

As has already been pointed out, it is nowadays accepted that the so-called Kubachi ceramics were made at some centre or other in north-western Iran. This type of ware is usually assigned to the late 16<sup>th</sup> to the early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Bibliography:

Great Art Treasures 1994, No. 414.



**176. Miniature: *European Landscape*,  
by Ali-Quli ibn Muhammad, 1059 AH (1649 CE). 9 x 12 cm.  
The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. VR-950.**

The miniature depicts a provincial locality with a river crossed by a bridge in the foreground, a watermill and houses. At the bottom of the miniature is the artist's signature: "A painting by the most humble Ali-Quli son of Muhammad 1059."

European works were copied regularly in Iran from the 1670s on, but during the first half and middle of the century only isolated cases of Persian artists turning to European examples are known, one of them being this particular miniature.

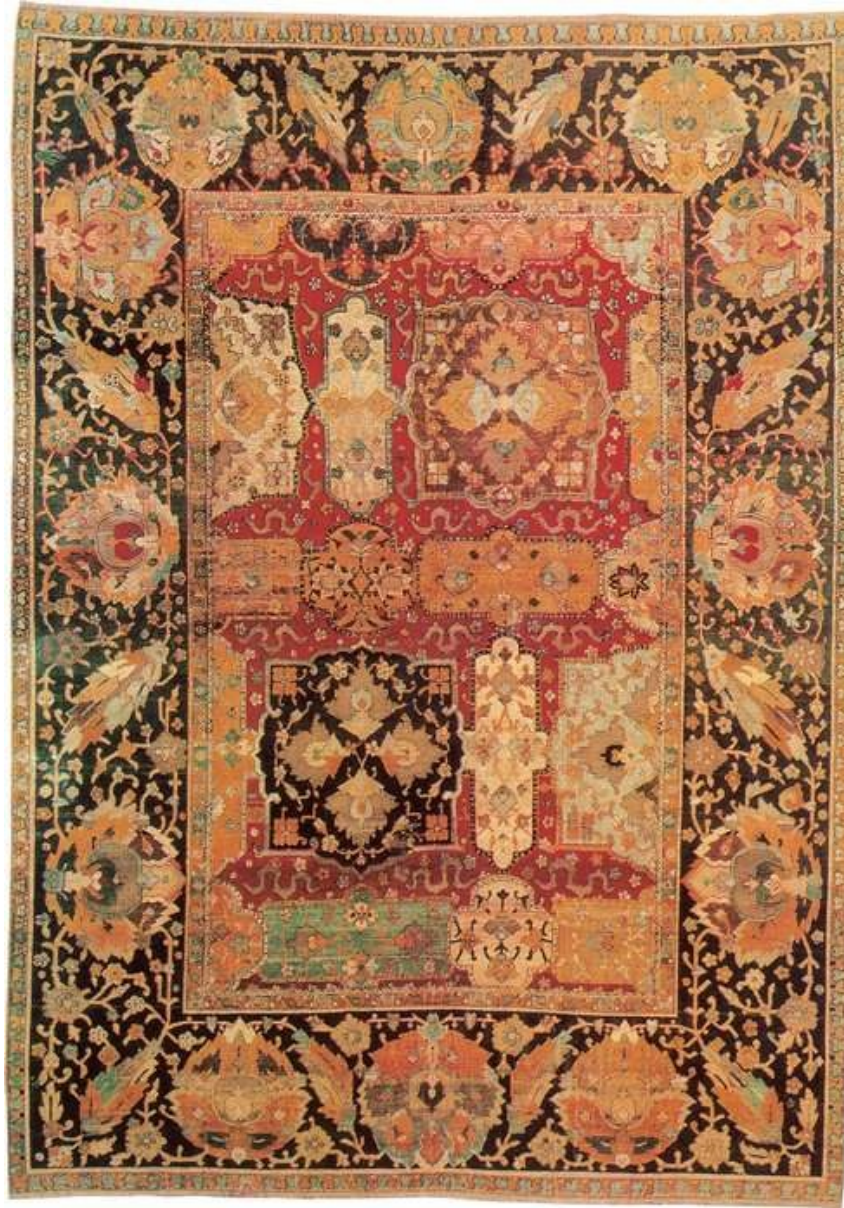
It has been established by L. Gyuzalyan that this miniature was copied from an engraving published by the Dutch engravers, Marco and Aegidius Sadeler. The engraving in turn was based on a canvas by the 17<sup>th</sup>-century landscape and animal painter Roelandt Savery. The miniature is distinguished neither by artistry of execution nor by care and precision in copying the illustration.

The miniaturist has distorted the perspective of the buildings, renounced the play of light and shade and reinforced the harshness

of line. Not only were the techniques of western painting new to the miniaturist, but also the motif itself. It is well known that “pure landscape” was never an independent genre in Persian painting, which is probably why the miniaturist supplemented the landscape with figures absent in the original.

Bibliography: Gyuzalyan 1972.





**177. Carpet, second half of 17<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Pile-woven silk, enriched with silver thread, 167 x 231 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. VT-1045.*

*Transferred in 1925 from the museum attached to  
the former Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

Similar carpets are customarily termed “Polonaise”, since it was originally supposed that they were of Polish origin, an identification which was in no small measure due to the range of colours and the nature of the ornament. In Iran silk carpets were produced in Isfahan and Kashan. A significant number of them were intended for export.



The “Polonaise” carpets subdivide into several groups according to pattern and design. This example belongs to one of the varieties of medallion design.

Bibliography:

Masterpieces 1990, No. 92; Treasures 1994, No. 27.



**178. Carpet, first half of 17<sup>th</sup> century.**  
*Pile-woven silk, enriched with silver thread,  
141 x 203 cm. The State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg. Inv. No. VT-1547. Acquired in 1933.*

This “Polonaise” carpet forms part of a group with a well-delineated central composition of arabesques, palmettes and flower scrolls. The carpet is executed in a characteristic colour scheme of yellow and green tones, with extensive use of metal threads.



**179. Miniature: Portrait of Imam-Quli Khan,**  
**by Muhammad Musawwir, 1052 AH (1642-1643 CE).**  
 12.7 x 16.3 cm. Museum of Oriental Art, Moscow. Inv. No. 1973-II.  
 Acquired in 1954 from the Board of Art Exhibitions and Panoramas.

This portrait of the ruler of Bukhara, Imam-Quli Khan, is the only surviving picture of him. It was painted a year before his death: he died in Medina in 1053 AH (1643-1644 CE). Imam-Quli set out on the hajj (pilgrimage to the holy places of Mecca and Medina) in November 1641 CE, having abdicated the throne. He travelled through Iran where he was ceremoniously received by Shah Abbas

## II.

It was during his stay in Iran that this portrait was painted – a typical example of the Isfahan school of 17<sup>th</sup>-century miniature painting, as can be clearly seen in the treatment of the vegetation and clouds and the figure of the Khan himself.

### Bibliography:

Ivanov 1968; Maslenitsyna 1975, No. 120.





**180. Miniature: *Shah and Courtiers*, by Ali-Quli**

**beg Jabbadar, second half of 17<sup>th</sup> century.**

*42.1 x 28.2 cm. Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg. Album E 14, f. 98.*

*Transferred in 1921 from the Russian Museum, Petrograd.*

The personality of the artist, Ali-Quli beg Jabbadar, remains something of a mystery. Nothing is known of his biography from contemporary sources (however, the same could be said of all the other artists who were his contemporaries). A short and very curious reference to him occurs in the poetry anthology *Atashkade* compiled in the third quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Lutf-Ali beg Isfahani.

The author of the anthology writes of the artist Muhammad-Ali beg that his grandfather is “Ali-Quli beg Farangi, and in painting he is a second Mani”. It follows from this text that Ali-Quli beg was a European (farangi means “European”), who had adopted Islam in Iran; this is Ali-Quli beg Jabbadar.

Whether he was a professional artist remains uncertain. The quality of his work shows that he was no novice at painting, although some details do not indicate professional status. His nickname Jabbadar (literally “possessing armour”) hints at a connection with armoury and it is not impossible that he could have been a European armourer. However, during the second half of the



17<sup>th</sup> century the supervision of works of art was part of the business of the jabbakhana (arsenal). Possibly this fact explains the artist's nickname.

His only accurately dated miniature, *Two Ladies and a Page* (in the same album as that which contains five signed works by Ali-Quli and another two which can with certainty be attributed to him), was painted at Qazwin in 1085 AH (1674 CE). All these miniatures have a common style.

Four of his miniatures portray Shah Suleiman (ruled 1666-1694).

This allows one to say that Ali-Quli was close to the shah and was apparently an outstanding artist of the court workshop (amongst the works of his colleague and contemporary, Muhammad-Zaman, there are no portraits of Shah Suleiman).

The miniature *Shah and Courtiers* bears the signature:

“He [i.e. Allah] ! Son of an ancient slave Ali-Quli Jabbadar.”

Although the term ghulam-zade signifies “son of a slave born in the master's house”, it hardly follows that one should understand it literally in this instance. It is most probably simply a humbling formula. Above the two figures, to the left, are two Georgian inscriptions, but greatly distorted.

Although the draughtsmanship of the miniature is Iranian, it shows evidence of Ali-Quli's close acquaintance with the techniques of European painting. But there are disruptions of perspective and of composition: the figure of a European to the left of the shah is floating in mid-air.

#### Bibliography:

Ivanov 1962, pp. 55-58, pl. 99; De Bagdad à Ispahan 1994, p. 255; Murakka 1994, p. 29.



**181. Miniature: *Venus and Cupid*,  
by Muhammad-Zaman, 1096 AH (1684-1685 CE).**  
17.9 x 24 cm. Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the  
Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg. Album E 14, f. 89.  
Transferred in 1921 from the Russian Museum, Petrograd.

The life and work of the artist Muhammad-Zaman, son of hajji Yusuf Qumi, have engaged the interest of scholars of Persian miniatures for a number of years. But although the first attempt to write his biography was undertaken in 1925, we still know next to nothing about him; the signatures on his miniatures are the only

source of information.

Because the influence of European painting is very noticeable in his work and several miniatures are painted on Christian themes, for a long time it was considered that Muhammad-Zaman was sent to study painting in Rome, where he adopted the Christian faith, returned to Iran, fled to India because of his devotion to Christianity, then returned once more to Iran and worked in Isfahan during the last quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

However, a careful study of all these facts has shown that most of them concern a different person – a certain Muhammad-Zaman “Farangikhwan” (i.e. “who reads European”), who did in fact adopt the Christian faith, but in Iran, and who went to India and lived there for some time.

The trouble is that the name Muhammad-Zaman is not unusual and at present no fewer than twenty people bearing this name are known in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Iran. However, amongst them there is no Muhammad-Zaman, son of hajji Yusuf Qumi.

The reliable information about Muhammad-Zaman can be reduced to the following few facts. His place and date of birth are unknown, he died before 1112 AH (1700-1701 CE), most probably in Isfahan.

In 1086 AH (1675-1676 CE), he was working at the shah’s residence at Ashraf in the province of Mazandaran, and later in Isfahan, the capital of the Safavid state. At that time he was employed in the preparation of manuscripts at the court library workshop.

Miniatures with Christian subjects – Mary and Elizabeth, Abraham’s Sacrifice, The Return from Egypt – were painted for the shah and are copies of Flemish prints (the authors of the last two are known). The earliest of his surviving miniatures are dated 1086 AH (1675-1676 CE) and the latest 1100 AH (1688-1689 CE). The miniature Venus and Cupid has two inscriptions. The first includes the artist’s signature:

“Picture completed by the most worthless of slaves Muhammad-Zaman. The year 1087 [AH; 1676-1677 CE]”.

The second inscription is written in small nastaliq :

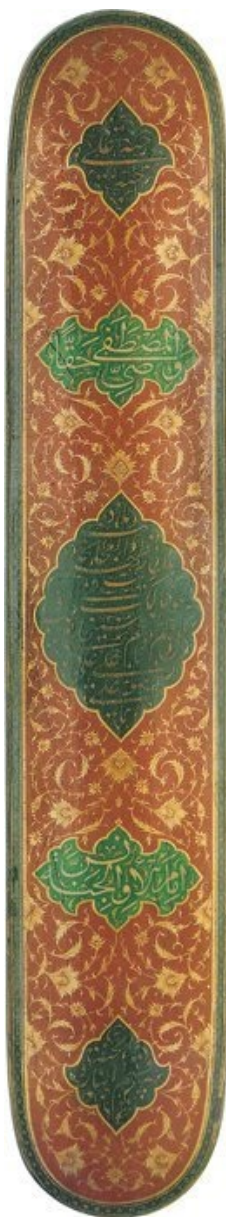
“He [i.e. Allah] ! At the command of he who achieves his desires, the most noble, most sacred, supreme sovereign”.

This phrase in its entirety forms the standard appellation of the Shah.

The subject is borrowed from an engraving by R. Sadeler (Hollstein 1980, XXI, p. 248, No. 174). A comparison of the miniature and the print shows that Muhammad-Zaman did not slavishly copy the subject, but only transferred to the miniature the figures of Venus and Cupid, meanwhile completely altering the background, and he left out the figure of a satyr, without which the posture of Cupid remains inexplicable. Meanwhile the painting technique remains purely Iranian.

**Bibliography:**

Ivanov 1962, p. 44, 45, ill. 83; Ivanov 1979b; Arts of Persia 1989, p. 220, pl. 38; De Bagdad à Ispahan 1994, p. 253; Murakka 1994, p. 69.



**182. Qalamdan (pen-case), by Muhammad-Ibrahim ibn hajji Yusuf Qumi, Isfahan, 1092 AH (1681 CE).**  
*Papier-mâché, painted and lacquered, 24.5 x 4.5 x 3.6 cm.*  
*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*  
*Inv. No. VR-17. Transferred in 1924 from the museum attached to the former Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

This qalamdan is one of the few surviving items of 17<sup>th</sup>-century lacquerware. Its decoration involves a combination of foliate ornament and calligraphic inscriptions.

The main role is played by the Arabic inscriptions in the five cartouches on the lid, their severity of line being dictated by their



content: the central, largest, cartouche bears a prayer extremely popular among all Shi'ites, directed at the Imam Ali; in the four others there are verses in praise of Ali:

“Cry out to Ali, the performer of miracles,  
You will find in him a support to bear griefs.  
All cares and woes will vanish  
Under your protection, o Ali, o Ali, o Ali!”  
Ali ! The shield is the object of his affection.  
He allots the Flame and the Garden [i.e. hell and heaven].  
In truth he fulfils the will of the Chosen One [i.e. Muhammad],  
He represents the line of men and the line of spirits.”

Inscribed in yellow on a dark blue background or in white on a bright green background, these inscriptions not only convey a specific text but blend organically into the decoration on the case, forming part of a single ornamental composition together with the fine gold vegetal pattern filling the spaces between cartouches. Four large cartouches on the sides bear Persian verses by Mir Abd al-Ghani Tafrishi:

“In that your brush performs miracles of writing,  
It may be that the words might reveal a playful meaning.  
Compared to any curve inscribed by you, the sky is only a slave with a ring in his ear,  
For each line you extend the reward will be long days of existence.”

In the four small medallions situated between the cartouches the following information is communicated: “Completed in the revered month of Rajab of the year 1092 in the capital city of Isfahan by the brush of this most humble slave protected by the heavenly angels of the Threshold ibn hajji Yusuf Muhammad-Ibrahim Qumi”.

Muhammad-Ibrahim, who painted the qalamdan, was apparently the brother of one of the most famous Persian painters of the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Muhammad-Zaman.

#### Bibliography:

Ivanov 1970b (the article includes the Arabic and Persian texts of the inscriptions); Adle 1980, pp. 37-42, figs. 19-23.



**183. Box with hinged lid, by Muhammad-Ali  
ibn Muhammad-Zaman, 1112 AH (1700-1701 CE).**

*Papier-mâché, painted and lacquered, 26.9 x 6 x 4.8 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. VR-126.*

*Transferred in 1924 from the museum attached to the  
former Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

The landscape on the lid is painted in the European manner, using techniques of linear and aerial perspective. Behind the figures is a river, with trees and various buildings beyond it, and further still, light blue mountains.

On the side walls flowers are painted on a black background. Chiaroscuro is rendered with exceptional delicacy, sometimes by means of fine hatching, sometimes through a very delicate pointillist technique.

The painter of this work, Muhammad-Ali, was the son of Muhammad-Zaman. Like his father he painted miniatures on paper as well as on lacquerware. The box is one of the best and the earliest known of his works. On the lid of a qalamdan dated 1119 AH (1708 CE; in the National Museum, Stockholm), Muhammad-Ali copied a miniature from a qalamdan apparently painted by his father, Muhammad-Zaman, in 1109 AH (1697-1698 CE; see Wiet 1935, p. 72, ill. 57). A love scene is depicted against the background of a landscape which seems to be a continuation of the landscape on the Hermitage box. On yet another of Muhammad-Ali's qalamdans, dated 1133 AH (1720-1721 CE), a pair of lovers appear against the background of mountain scenery.

There are other qalamdans too, painted in the course of the first two decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century by various artists, depicting variations on one and the same theme upon their lids. Adle, describing one of these qalamdans, links the theme of the miniature to the ideas of Persian mystics and especially to Sufi poetry (see Adle 1980, pp. 9-20, figs. 1-7). Muhammad-Ali's box is of interest

in that it has enabled us to determine the approximate date of Muhammad-Zaman's death. On the lid is written: "The work of Muhammad-Ali's on the fate of Muhammad-Zaman. 1112."

The word "fate" in the artist's inscription, which does not appear in inscriptions on his subsequent works, shows that Muhammad-Zaman died no later than 1112 AH, and possibly in that very year, as was pointed out by Ivanov.

Bibliography: Ivanov 1960a.



**184. Carpet, 18<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Pile-woven wool, 152 x 216 cm.*

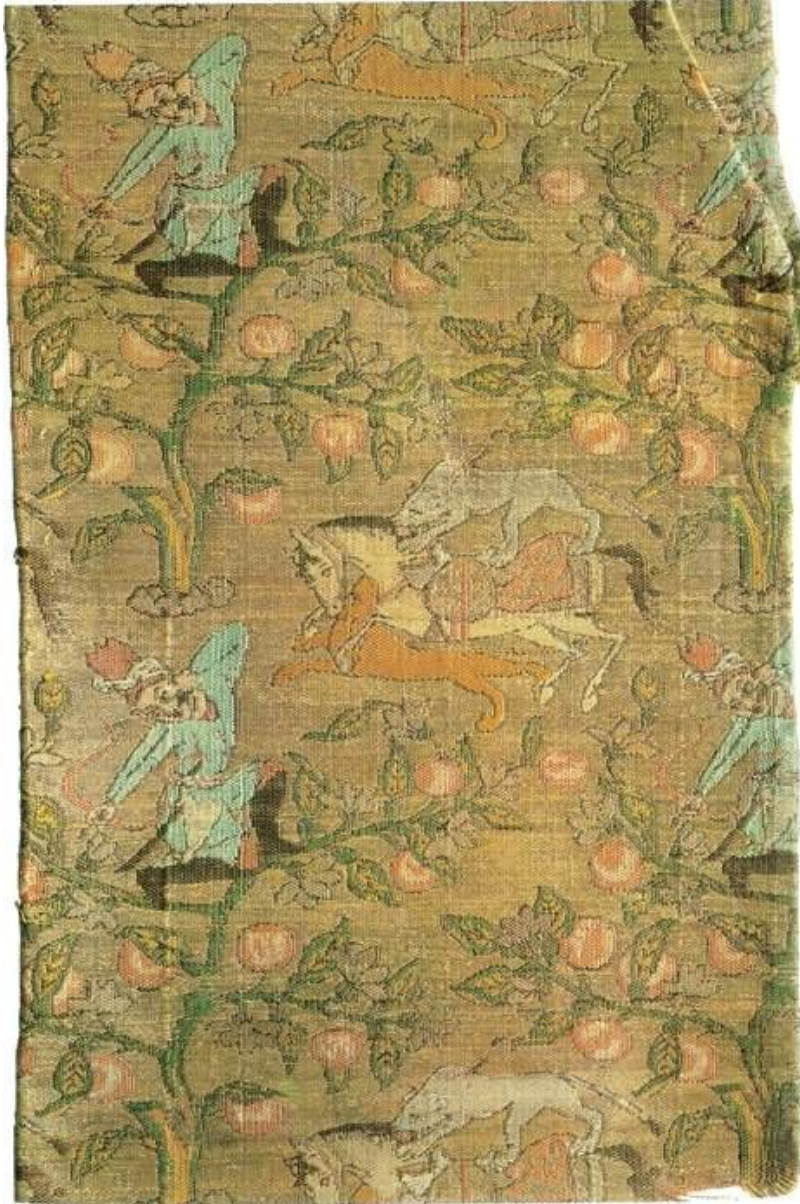
*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. VT-1009. Transferred from the  
Armenian Church, St Petersburg.*

This type of carpet, decorated with rows of trees or bushes, is usually termed a “carpet with trees”. Some scholars assign this group to the north-western region of Iran, but others are of the opinion that it originated in Jushagan. The structure of the pattern on such carpets is well known in other branches of art as well.

Bibliography:  
Kverfeldt 1940, pl. V.





**185. Fragment of textile (stitched from two pieces), second quarter of 18<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Silk, enriched with silver thread, size of largest piece: 44.5 x 13.5 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. VT-1007. Transferred in 1925 from the museum attached to the former Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

The production of textiles with figure subjects continued in Iran during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The basic index for dating textiles of this period is the headgear *taj-i tahmazi* (a hat with four corners). The depiction of this headgear on textiles from various collections, along with a number of other points, assists in distinguishing a group of

textiles bearing similar hunting and garden scenes. They should be assigned to the second quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Bibliography:

Kverfeldt 1940, fig. I (2); Pirverdian 1975.



**186. Belt, early to mid-17<sup>th</sup> century.**  
*Silk, enriched with gold thread, 470 x 60 cm.*  
*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*  
*Inv. No. VG-1092. Purchased in 1926 from*  
*S Magomedov (Kubachi).*

At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century wide woven belts like scarves came into fashion in Iran. The traditional design decorating such belts consisted of a central section containing diagonal stripes with flower patterns and two wide ends decorated with several large flowering bushes. At two corners of this belt there is a Persian inscription

freely arranged in the floral border of the side fringe and forming a part of the general pattern. The beautiful quality of the craftsmanship, the graceful design, both naturalistic and decorative at the same time in accordance with the style of the period, all allow for the inclusion of the belt amongst classic works of the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

There is an identical belt in The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, which corroborates the opinion of scholars that paired items were produced in Iran.



**187. Axe, c. 1730-1740.**

*Steel, forged, engraved and inlaid with gold,  
axe-head: 14.2 x 9.2 cm; length of shaft: 52.5 cm. The State  
Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. OR-1265.  
Transferred in 1886 from the Tsarskoye Selo Arsenal.*

A hunting scene is shown on the sides of the axe-head; the background is covered with gold leaf. The ornament on the sides and butt is inlaid with gold. On the top of the butt there is a medallion containing a word written in naskhi script (tufan – “storm” or “mist”, for tuman possibly a proper name). On both sides of the butt the



word “Allah” is also written in naskhi script.

The craftsman who made this masterpiece did not leave his signature. The hunting scene reveals the scope of his talent; one would be justified in considering it a miniature on metal (an axe very close to it in style is reproduced in SPA 1938-1939, vol. VI, pl. 143 ID).

The matt-tooling of the background, the treatment of the foliage, and the elements of vegetal ornament have direct analogies amongst the signed works of the armourer Lutf-Ali, who was active around c. 1730-1740 (see Melikian-Chirvani 1979).

One could hardly claim that this axe is a product of his workshop, but it belongs to the same period, that is, to c. 1730-1740.



**188. Dagger and sheath, late 17<sup>th</sup> to early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Damask steel, gold (hilt and sheath); forged, engraved and painted in enamels, length of sheath: 41 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. V3-727. Transferred in 1886 from the Tsarskoye Selo Arsenal.*

The straight, two-edged blade is not decorated, but the hilt and sheath are richly decorated with painted enamel. At the ends of the hilt are flowers and peacocks in groups of four.

This dagger was already in Peter's Kunstkammer by the 1730s, although it is impossible to trace its route to Russia.

One can suggest a dating of the late 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The enamel painting shows signs of the new trend in Iranian painting at that time – chiaroscuro modelling – which reflected the influence of European painting.

The enamel painting on the dagger prompts one to look at the fate of this technique in Iran, since this particular dagger is one of the earliest surviving examples (in the Hermitage there are two other daggers of the late 17<sup>th</sup> to the early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the hilts of which are partly decorated with enamel).

The French jeweller, Jean Chardin, who lived for many years in Iran during the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and wrote many volumes describing his journeys, noted that the Persians “do not know enamel at all and [know] even less about enamel painting”. Perhaps this judgement is too harsh.

Although the known examples of Iranian enamel painting on metal date from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, the quality of their execution is high. The sources of this technique in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Iran remain unclear.

#### Bibliography:

Meisterwerke 1912, vol. III, pl. 240; SPA 1938-1939, vol. VI, pl. 1426; Oriental Jewellery 1984, No. 55.



**189. Dagger and sheath, second quarter of 18<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Damask steel, ivory, wood; forged, engraved, inlaid with gold and painted in enamels, length of sheath: 41.2 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. OR-194.*

*Transferred in 1886 from the Tsarskoye Selo Arsenal.*

The blade is decorated with gold vegetal ornament near the hilt, which is composed of two ivory plaques. A steel openwork medallion with the inscription “O Ali!” is fixed to the pommel. The sheath is covered with polychrome painted enamel in low relief.

The dagger is among those rare objects whose date can be fixed to

within an accuracy of 25 years by the form of the headgear worn by the youth depicted in the upper part of the sheath. This headgear – a round felt hat with four vertical peaks (three of them can be seen in the illustration) – was introduced into the Iranian army by Nadir-Quli (the future Nadir-Shah) when he was commander-in-chief under Shah Tahmasp II. It was called the taj-i tahmazi (Tahmasp's crown).

Various characters are portrayed with such hats in miniatures and paintings of c. 1730-1740, above all Nadir-Shah himself. After his murder in 1747 the headgear fell fairly rapidly into disuse.

#### Bibliography:

Tushingham 1972, p. 220, pl. IX; Oriental Jewellery 1984, No. 58; Masterpieces 1990, No. 117.





**190. Mirror-case, by Muhammad-Baqir, 1177 AH (1763-1764 CE).** *Papier-mâché, painted and lacquered, 17.5 x 12.2 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. VR-27. Transferred in 1924 from the museum attached to the former Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

This mirror-case, decorated by Muhammad-Baqir, is among the best examples of Persian lacquer painting in the Hermitage. A branch of a blossoming fruit tree is depicted on the outside of the lid.

Muhammad-Baqir tried to convey every natural feature by pictorial means: flowers are shown at all stages of development,

from barely open buds to blossoms with half-scattered petals.

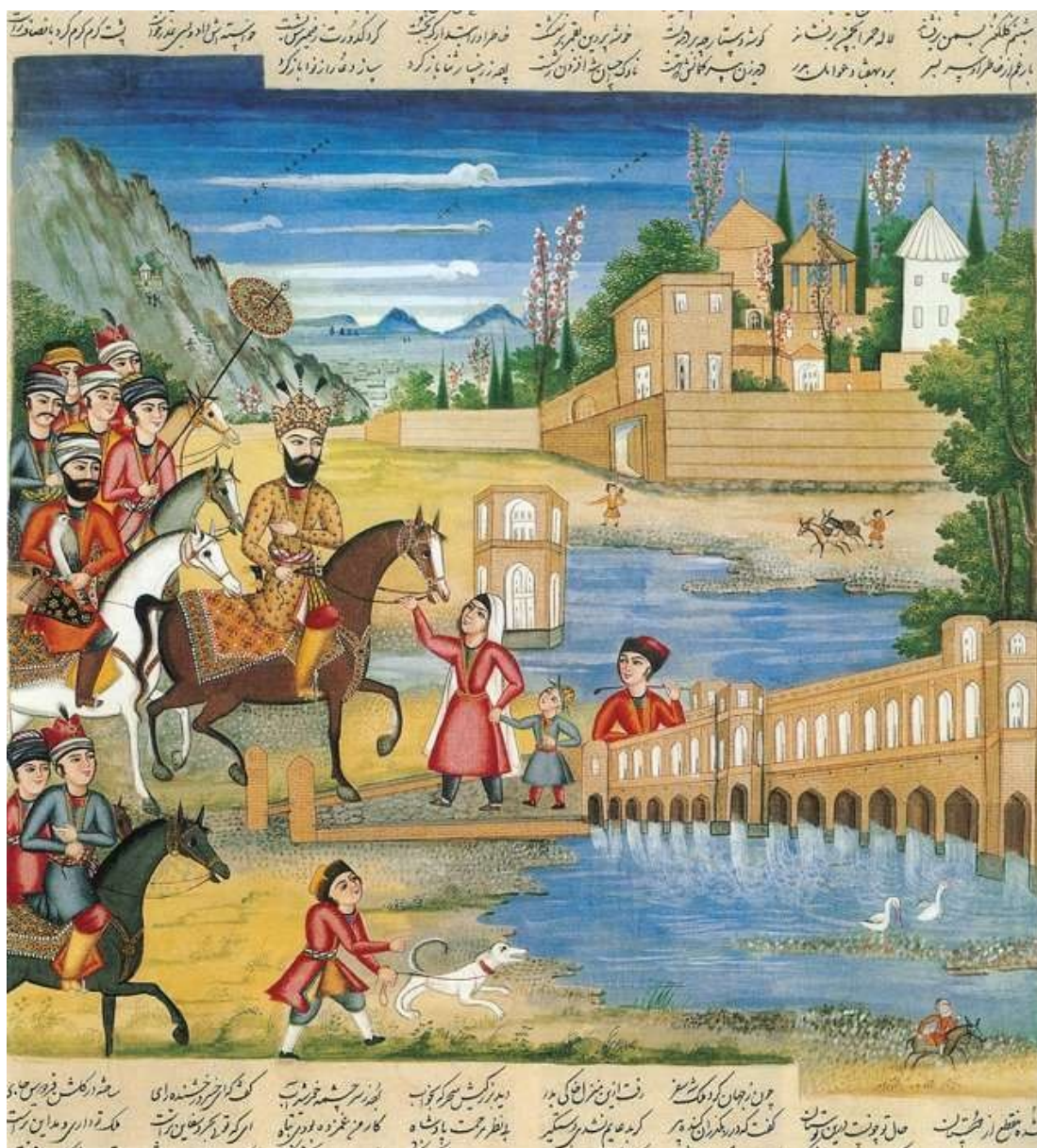
On the reverse of the case a branch of a hazlnut-tree is painted against the same background.

On the inside of the lid are the Madonna and St John, undoubtedly copied from the work of a European artist, and not apparently painted by Muhammad-Baqir, but by another, less skilful, painter.

Very little is known of Muhammad-Baqir, although, to judge by his work, he must have been one of the most important painters of the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century he collaborated in designing an album of miniatures and examples of calligraphy. Apparently he worked in Shiraz at the court workshop of Karim-Khan Zand. This is attested by a miniature portrait of this ruler, with the inscription: "A drawing by the most humble slave of the court Muhammad-Baqir". Miniatures on paper predominate amongst the known works of Muhammad-Baqir.

The inscription on the Hermitage mirror is written in gold and located on the outside of the lid at the top:

"the most humble Muhammad-Baqir. 1177."



**191. Miniature: Old Woman and Malik-Shah,**

**Isfahan school, last quarter of 18<sup>th</sup> century.**

36.5 x 35.5 cm. Branch of the Institute of Oriental

Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg

(manuscript copied 1777-1785). Inv. No. E 12, f. 286a.

Acquired in 1919 from the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs.

The miniature illustrates an episode from the poem *Rawdat al-Anwar* (*Meadows of Light*) written in 1342 by Kamal al-Din Khwaju Kirmani (1281-1352): the great Seljuk Malik-Shah, accompanied by his retinue, sets out from his residence at Isfahan to go hunting; on the way he is stopped by an old woman who complains that his



hunting pleasures are inflicting irreparable damage on the fields of his subjects. This incident was a favourite theme of medieval Iranian poets and artists.

The miniature can be assumed to be the work of an Isfahan artist of c. 1770-1780. There is a strong sense of European influence in the artist's style. It is quite possible that he chose as a model for his work a miniature of the early 18<sup>th</sup>-century Isfahan school (it can be seen in the outlining of the leaves and trees, the landscape with buildings in the distance and the palette); however, the central scene is executed in a manner characteristic of miniatures of the second half of the century (the figures' disproportionately large faces, their clothing, and headgear).

The artist has unwittingly introduced an anachronism, for Malik-Shah converses with the woman in front of the entrance to a bridge in Isfahan built much later by an associate of Abbas I (1587-1629), Allahverdi-Khan. The miniature is from the anthology of Persian poetry and prose, *Gulshan* (Flower Garden).

The compiler of the *Gulshan* anthology, its copier and the author of seven of the poems, was Muhammad-Kazim ibn Muhammad-Riza Hamadani, whose poetical *nom de plume* was Mahjur. He worked on the anthology, with interruptions, over the course of eight years and dedicated it to a certain Nawwab-Khan, to whose retinue he apparently belonged. Apart from its unique size amongst manuscripts of a secular nature (68 x 48.5 cm), the anthology is distinguished by its variety of works in different genres and forms, written by poets from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

It is a complete library in one binding. The manuscript was copied bit by bit and only bound when the compiler considered that the task he had set himself had been completed. The anthology includes 103 poems and prose works of various genres and varying length by 47 writers, ghazals by 58 writers, qasidas by 20 writers, qit'as by 22 writers and ruba'is by 116 writers.

The fundamental value of the *Gulshan* consists in its allotting considerable space (almost half) to the works of 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century poets writing in Iran and India, and amongst them, to short mathnawi poems written in the wake of actual events.



**192. Rosewater sprinkler, 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Blown glass, height: 33 cm. The State  
Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.  
Inv. No. VG-2263. Transferred in 1924  
from the museum attached to the former  
Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

It is hard to say exactly when this form of vessel emerged – the spherical body on a low foot-ring and the very long, curved (sometimes twisted) neck culminating in a bell-mouth flattened at the sides and with a pointed protuberance at the top. It was still very popular in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and gradually acquired ever more



complicated features. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century rosewater sprinklers came into fashion and were much in demand in Europe.



**193. Ewer, 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Blown glass, height: 26.3 cm. The State  
Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. VG-2267.  
Purchased in 1926 from Pashayev (Kubachi).*

This ewer has a tall body narrowing downwards, a high, narrow neck, a flattened, curved spout and curved handle. Its type of decoration was already generally current in the Seljuk age.



**194. Sabre and scabbard, early 19<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Damask steel, forged, decorated with gold, gemstones and painted in enamels, length of sabre: 92.7 cm; length of scabbard: 85.7 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. OR-46. Transferred in 1886 from the Tsarskoye Selo Arsenal (presented to Alexander II by Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar in 1880).*

The sabre is a typical example of the work of court jewellers. Judging by the inscription on the blade, it was made for Fath-Ali Shah Qajar (1797-1834). The hilt and obverse of the scabbard are studded with gems. There are 2,421 diamonds on the sabre, 143

brilliants, 503 emeralds, 20 rubies and 3 spinels. The reverse of the scabbard is covered with enamel. On the reverse of the hilt is the portrait, painted in enamels, of a youth in a high hat with an aigrette.

Bibliography:

Oriental Jewellery 1984, No. 64.



**195. Dagger and sheath,  
late 18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.**  
*Steel, forged, inlaid with gold and painted  
 in enamels, length of sheath: 59.2 cm.  
 The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.  
 Inv. No. OR-274. Transferred in 1886  
 from the Tsarskoye Selo Arsenal.*

The blade is decorated with gold foliage. The hilt is in the form of a bird's head. The slight relief of the enamelwork allows one to link this object with 18<sup>th</sup>-century ware and to date it to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup>



or beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Bibliography:

Oriental Jewellery 1984, No. 61.



**196. Bowl of a hookah, early 19<sup>th</sup> century.**  
*Copper, forged, covered with gold leaf and  
painted in enamels, height: 20.2 cm. The State  
Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. VZ-296.  
Acquired in 1927 from the State Museum Reserve.*

The bowl of the hookah is in the form of a bottle, which is covered with gold leaf and decorated with floral ornament and eight scalloped medallions containing enamel portraits.

This object can be considered a typical example of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Qajar court style.

Bibliography:  
Oriental Jewellery 1984, No. 69.



**197. Tray, first third of 19<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Gold, forged and painted in enamels, diameter: 45.5 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. VZ-751. Transferred in 1934 from the Catherine Palace Museum in the town of Pushkin.*

This massive gold tray with a scalloped edge is richly decorated with polychrome enamel. On the reverse, two short inscriptions are engraved in Arabic script which have not yet been deciphered.

This is a typical example of the Qajar court style during the time of Fath-Ali Shah (1797-1834).

Bibliography:  
Oriental Jewellery 1984, No. 72.





**198. Vase, late 19<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Bronze (brass), cast, turned, engraved and inlaid with silver, height: 13.5 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. VS-999. Purchased in 1937.*

The vase is a typical example of those objects whose motifs and decorative style evoke the Persepolis reliefs. The reversion to ancient Iranian imagery was one of the characteristic trends in Iranian art during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; the reasons for this revival are not yet entirely clear.

Around the neck and foot there are Arabic inscriptions which have not been deciphered. The vase is decorated with silver inlay; there were attempts during the 19<sup>th</sup> century to revive this defunct technique, but apparently it did not become widespread.



**199. Tray, by Abd al-Mutallib Isfahani, late 19<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Bronze (brass), forged and engraved, 57.5 x 38.5 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. IR-2165. Purchased in 1981.*

Rectangular trays with rounded corners are often found in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century metalwork. The rim of the tray is richly decorated with vegetal ornament. Three ghazals of Hafiz, excluding some baits, are engraved in 24 cartouches separated by four-lobed medallions. These verses clash with the pictures in the centre of the tray (one would rather have expected verses from the *Shahnama*): there the Sasanid shahanshahs are represented in 30 medallions, and also Umar ibn al-Khattab, under whom the conquest of Iran by the Arabs began.

In the third medallion from the left on the lower row is the craftsman's inscription:

"Made by Abd al-Mutallib Isfahani."

Another tray by this craftsman is in the History Museum, Moscow.

The portraits of the Sasanid shahanshahs on this tray are of interest (the name of the shah is written in each medallion). Undoubtedly the craftsman had before him some European

publication on the history of the Sassanids, in which Sassanian coins were reproduced. In particular, this publication reproduced a rare type of coin of Ardashir I (in a kulah with a star on it), but did not reproduce rare coins of the later Sasanid shahanshahs. Obviously, Abd al-Mutallib Isfahani engraved their portraits, depicting such crowns as his own imagination dictated. Insofar as Sassanian coins show only the bust of the shahanshah, the craftsman “dressed them up” in the fashion of his own times, whilst for the portraits of the two queens – Puran (in the inscription – “Purandukht”) and Azarmedukht – he simply presented the portraits of two late 19<sup>th</sup>-century noblewomen. (Genuine Sassanian coins of Puran are extraordinarily rare; coins of Azarmedukht have only been discovered in the last century.)

Since the book which the artist was using reproduced a rare type of coin of Ardashir I, there is the possibility of identifying the publication and determining the exact date of the tray’s manufacture.



**200. Table, by Abu-al-Qasim  
al-Husaini al-Isfahani, 1301 AH (1883-1884 CE).**

*Wood, painted and lacquered, height: 77 cm;  
diameter of top: 52.5 cm. The State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg. Inv. No. VR-1281. Purchased in 1977 from M. V. Itin.*

In four cartouches on the top of the table there are quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyam (from the reading by L. Gyuzalyan):

“I know not whether he who made me was a denizen of blessed paradise or cursed hell.

But one thing [I know] full well: I have a birthmark [on a beauty’s cheek], [her] lips and a lute in [my] hands, and you [my maker] have only paradise, and that is a



pledge.”

In a wide band around the edge of the table, in small cartouches, there is an excerpt in hemistichs from a ghazal of Hafiz (from the reading by L Gyuzalyan):

“A nightingale held a beautiful rose petal in its beak and poured harmonious and grievous moans into this petal.

I asked him: whence these complaints and pleas for salvation, since you are at one [with the rose]? He said: the passion of a lover has brought me to this.

If the beloved had not sat down with us, there would be nothing of which to speak. You were a queen who did not condescend to the beggarly rabble. Arise and let us lay our souls before the brush of this artist who has drawn all these amazing designs with the aid of compasses’ turning.”

In the central circle, above the heads of the birds, is the craftsman’s inscription:

“Made by Abu-al-Qasim al-Husaini al-Isfahani, 1301.”

In the Hermitage there is a box with pictures of flowers and birds and numerous inscriptions, dated 1319 AH (1901-1902 CE), and also a picture frame decorated with architectural and landscape motifs and verses from Hafiz’s ghazal, dated the same year. Both bear the signature of Abu-I-Qasim. In Tbilisi, there are two decorative panels in the Art Museum of Georgia, executed on cardboard and covered with lacquer. These works are also signed by Abu-I-Qasim al-Isfahani and dated 1313 AH (1895-1896 CE) and 1319 AH (1901-1902 CE). Lacquerware by this artist usually features large flowers and leaves, composed either into “bouquets” or groups. Their characteristic feature is a vigorous chiaroscuro stressing mass and volume, and vivid, contrasting colour combinations.





**201. Table, 19<sup>th</sup> century.**

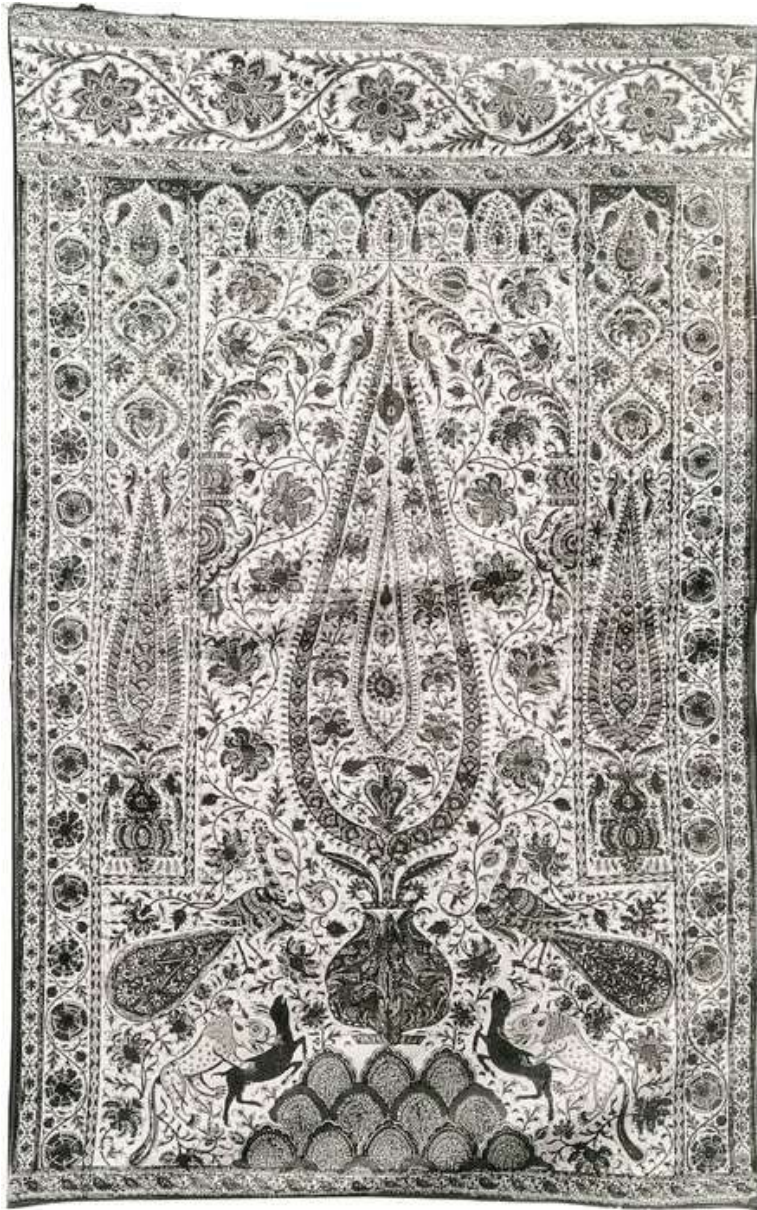
*Wood and faience, painted and fired, height: 61.5 cm;  
diameter: 57.5 cm. The State Hermitage Museum,  
St Petersburg. Inv. No. VG-2651. Acquired in 1927  
from the State Museum Reserve.*

A circular tile is fixed to the table-top: it is painted in cobalt, manganese, olive and turquoise paints under a transparent, colourless glaze. It depicts the heroes of Firdawsi's poem *Shahnama*. In the centre, King Kay-Khusrau sits on a throne, holding a sceptre; on either side of him are Zal, Rustam, Godarz and Giv (their names

are written in cartouches). Dancing boys are portrayed below; above is an architectural background. Black outlines are drawn round the figures, traces of gilding are visible on the surface of the tile.

The tile belongs to the Qajar period. The choice of subject reflects the efforts of the Qajar shahs to revive the artistic traditions and themes of former times. According to the testimony of Europeans who visited Iran in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the walls of the Qajar shahs' palaces were decorated with similar court reception scenes showing the ancient kings of Iran.

The buildings in the upper part of the composition are painted in spatial recession. At the same time the figures are placed on an even cobalt background with the space between them evenly filled with flowers and vessels.



**202. Curtain, 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

*Printed cotton, 170 x 100 cm. The State  
Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. VT-597.  
Transferred in 1925 from the museum attached to  
the former Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

Printed textiles were very popular in Iran. Usually they were decorated with illustrations, often of a gaudy nature reminiscent of popular prints. A similar type of curtain was common in India as well, but a number of the ornamental motifs have close parallels in Iranian decoration – in particular the figures of the peacocks, the

foliage and the hill made of stones.





**203. Cover, 19<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Wool, silk; appliqué, embroidery, 186 x 115 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. VT-496. Acquired in 1925 from the museum  
attached to the former Stieglitz School of Technical Design.*

The composition of the pattern reveals a similarity to the bindings of manuscripts. Embroidered articles of a similar kind were widely used in everyday life – as prayer rugs, saddle-cloths, curtains and table-cloths. The town of Rasht is considered to have been their centre of production.





**204. Carpet, 1311 AH (1893-1894 CE).**

*Pile-woven wool, 125 x 198 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. VT-1643. Purchased in 1970*

In the centre is the Achaemenid king, Artaxerxes I, seated on a throne beneath a canopy; behind, a servant holds a fan, whilst above is the symbol of the supreme god, Ahura Mazda. Below, the king's throne is supported by subjects arranged in three tiers. On the border in a rectangular frame is the Persian inscription: "The order of the commander-in-chief of the sovereign Abd al-Husaini Mirza"; and

the date: “1311”. At the bottom there is an inscription in French: *Personnages anciens à Persepolis*. Several carpets are known which show analogous scenes and have two inscriptions with dates. Evidently the carpets were made from a single drawing, reproducing scenes from the reliefs decorating the south gate to the Hundred Column Hall in the palace at Persepolis.



**205. Plate, 19<sup>th</sup> century.**

*Faience, with underglaze painting, diameter: 21.4 cm.*

*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.*

*Inv. No. VG-2199. Purchased in 1938 from  
A. Shavanova (Kubachi).*

The plate is painted in dark blue, brown (two shades) and black. There are a number of similarly painted articles in the Hermitage collection. They are covered with a thick layer of transparent glaze of a greenish tinge.

More often than not, these are small bowls and plates and their

entire surface is filled with gaudy illustrations resembling popular prints. Round the rim of the plate there is a narrow band of floral and foliate patterns and inscriptions.

The picture on the plate represents an elephant driver (an Indian mahout); above there is a young warrior with a sword in his hand and a shield behind his back; to the left there is a griffin (?).

The subject was possibly borrowed from folk tales; however, it is more likely that we are faced here with imagery that has undergone changes over the years and is presented in a distorted form on the plate: the prince wearing the crown who should be mounted on the elephant turns up hanging in mid-air or flying like a genie through the clouds, whilst the mahout has taken his place on the elephant.

Images of a young prince riding an elephant, with a driver on the elephant's neck, framed by Arabic or Persian blessings, are often found on 12<sup>th</sup>- and 13<sup>th</sup>-century faience.

The inscriptions are located in four cartouches in a band round the rim of the plate.

Three cartouches repeat one and the same benedictory formula:

“O, lord of mercy, [accept] a grateful desire for health.”

In the fourth cartouche:

“You, most holy provider of the dervish order”.





**206. Bowl, by Muhammad-Ali, 1233 AH (1817-1818 CE).**  
*Faience, with underglaze painting, height: 8 cm; diameter: 19 cm.*  
*The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. No. VG-145.*  
*Purchased in 1925 from R. Magomedov (Kubachi).*

The internal and external surfaces of the bowl are totally filled with ornament, executed in cobalt beneath a transparent, colourless glaze. The dark shade of cobalt has flowed under the glaze, forming indistinct outlines and giving the white background a tinge of light blue.

A worsening in the quality of cobalt, which loses its softness of tone and flows under the glaze, can already be observed in late 17<sup>th</sup>-century wares and becomes more pronounced in 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century ceramics.

The Hermitage bowl is of interest as a rare example of one bearing the craftsman's name, the date and the owner's name. Written in blue paint on the outside of the base is:

“Made by Muhammad-Ali. 1233. Owner Zain al-Abidin.”

There is a plate by this craftsman, also painted in cobalt and decorated with flower motifs, in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The craftsman also put his name and the date (1232 AH; 1816-1817 CE) on this one, as well as the name of the owner (Ahmad).



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EV – *Epigrafika Vostoka*.

KSIIMK – *Kratkiye soobshcheniya instituta istorii InateriaInoy kultury AN SSSR*.

SGE – *Soobshcheniya Gosudarstvennogo Ennitazha*.

TGE – *Trudy Gosudarstvenno go Ennitazha*.

TOVGE – *Trudy otdela Vostoka Gosudarstvennogo Ennitazha*.

L – *Leningrad* (now St Petersburg).

M – *Moscow*.

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# Notes

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- [1] In western Iran, apart from the Assyrians and Babylonians who spoke the Akkadian and Elamite languages, there were numerous tribes and small organised states with dynasties of Hurrian or Qutian-Kassite origins.
- [2] Dyson 1969, pp. 12-14.
- [3] There may be material from several burial sites of various periods at Marlik, the dates of these sites differing from each other by up to 1,500 years. See Negahban 1964; Negahban 1972, pp. 142-152; Negahban 1977; Hakemi 1973; Moghaddam 1972, pp. 133-136, figs. 1-3.
- [4] The vessel is a tall stemless vase or goblet (of the same form as almost all the gold vessels from Marlik, Hasanlu and finds from other sites). The technique of all these vessels is also standard – embossing with subsequent engraving.
- [5] Wilkinson 1975, p. 7.
- [6] It is true that there is another point of view which holds that the art of the Scythians was non-representational before their arrival in the Near-East (see Rayevsky 1984).
- [7] The panther twisted into a ring from the Arzhan barrow (8<sup>th</sup> or early 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE) is a completely different motif: amongst the objects from Ziwiye there is an attempt to do something similar (on the gold pommel of the spear), but it is clear that the craftsmen of Ziwiye were ill-acquainted with such stylisation (for further details see Sorokin 1972).
- [8] The finds from Ziwiye are assigned to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE only in accordance with a historical interpretation, or because some of the motifs are close to those of Kelermes. But the only items in the hoard open to more or less precise dating are the fragments of a bronze sarcophagus (Assyria: late 8<sup>th</sup> to the early 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE), carved ivory articles and the Assyrian pottery (8<sup>th</sup> to the early 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE). The Kelermes objects are variously dated. In the catalogue *From the Land of the Scythians* (New York, 1978) the date suggested for them is late 7<sup>th</sup> to the early 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.
- [9] This is not just the case with imagery – for example, on the beautiful 6<sup>th</sup>-century silver-gilt dish exactly the same stylised palmettes are depicted on the bodies of the goats as are also found on the goats of the Ziwiye pectoral. For further details on the Ziwiye style in Achaemenid art see Lukonin 1977b, pp. 33-36.
- [10] In Achaemenid times – as traditional motifs, no longer meaningful and very deformed – they only survive on the chape of scabbards (see Cullican 1965).
- [11] On the architecture of the Median temple, ruler's residence, and fortifications discovered by archaeologists in the 1960s, see Stronach 1973.
- [12] Hundreds of works have been devoted to the campaigns of Alexander the Great, to the Seleucid monarchy founded after him, and also to the culture and art of the Hellenistic period.
- [13] Boyce 1957, pp. 10-45.
- [14] Bartold 1969–1977, vol. VI, p. 121.
- [15] Bolshakov 1969, pp. 148, 149.
- [16] Ibid., p. 150.
- [17] Bartold 1969-1977, vol. VI, p. 216.
- [18] Frye 1972, p. 344.

- [19] According to one theory (Tavastia 1952, p. 384), the term “Tajik” is the Sogdian form of the Persian word *tazi* – “Arab” or “Muslim”. Initially the inhabitants of Central Asia called the Arabs and Persians, who converted to Islam, “Tajiks”.
- [20] Boyce 1957, pp. 17, 18. For further details on the poetry of the “Persian Renaissance” see Bertels 1960.
- [21] Grabar 1968a, p. 359.
- [22] Grube 1966, p. 42, fig. 19 (the dish is assigned to the 11<sup>th</sup> century); see Fehérvári 1973 (dated 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century). Pottery of the *Garrus* type was found in layers from the Seljuk period during excavations at Kangavar, see Fehérvári 1973. Despite its indisputable interest both from a technical point of view and because of its designs (usually human figures), this pottery remains insufficiently researched. Almost all the motifs on the published vessels are somehow linked to the epics (the king enthroned and two dragons, a dancer with a mask in her hand and dragons, etc.).
- [23] Bahrami 1937, p. 31.
- [24] In Sassanian times depictions (for example, on reliefs) were called *ptkry*. In Zoroastrian texts there is no reference to the terms “artist” or “graphic artist”, but in Manichaean texts (in the Parthian and Middle Persian languages) there are, of course, a number of such references (see, for example, “artist” – *nigargar*, Parthian *zxrwb*, and even “artist-illustrator of manuscripts” – *nibegan-nigar*; see Tafazzoli 1974, p. 195). These references are connected to Mani’s aim of illustrating the manuscripts of his works, an aim that was seen as heretical from the Zoroastrian priests’ and rulers’ point of view. The polemics against Manichaeism – “let him bring his picture to life!” – are referred to in New Persian literature too (before the 12<sup>th</sup> century?). No illustrated manuscripts from Mani’s lifetime have survived, but judging from the Turfan Manichaean manuscripts, in this case too it was probably only a question of portrait painting. Middle Persian terms for the professions of sculptor, metalworker, ceramics artist are entirely different from those in Manichaean texts, for example, *asem-paykar* – “one who adorns silver vessels with depictions”.
- [25] Shefer 1982, p. 353.
- [26] Or early Islamic? The book which Mas’udi saw at Istakhr was an early 10<sup>th</sup>-century copy, made from the Sassanian original. However, the existence of official miniature portraiture – for example, sketches for coin dies – is perfectly feasible during the early Sassanian period too.
- [27] Vorozheikina 1984, p. 173.
- [28] Gyuzalyan and Dyakonov 1934, p. XIV.
- [29] Grabar 1968a, p. 628.
- [30] Bertels 1962, pp. 409-411.
- [31] On dishes with underglaze painting of the “Sultanabad group”, for example, on a dish from the Leman collection (New York). For a good colour reproduction see Grube 1966, pl. 40 – the image was executed by the same miniaturists as those who illustrated the *Collection of Chronicles* by Rashid al-Din.
- [32] The formation of a new miniature style took place in the middle of the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, as has become clear since the publication of essential works on the history of the Iranian miniature by I S Stchoukine and B W Robinson (see Stchoukine 1954 and Robinson 1958).
- [33] Grabar and Blair 1980, pp. 23, 24.
- [34] Quoted from Akimushkin and Ivanov 1968, p. 9.
- [35] Ivanov 1971a, pp. 15-18 and also Ivanov 1961; Ivanov 1969b, pp. 32, 33.

- [36] Grube 1970, pp. 13, 14.
- [37] Marshak 1976, p. 166.
- [38] Four of them bear the signatures of the craftsmen – Bu Nasr al-naqqash, Abu Nasr Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Sijzi, Muhammad ibn Ahmad and Bu (?) Ja'far al-naqqash. The names of the craftsmen on three of the bowls (in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, in the H. Kevorkian Collection and in a private collection, Daghestan) are very close and it is tempting to think that we are dealing with one and the same person. However, at the present stage of research this would be difficult to prove, since we hardly know any series of works by a single coppersmith, in order to be able to judge an individual style.
- [39] The ewer in the Herat Museum bears a small silver-inlaid inscription which R. Ettinghausen has dated to the late 9<sup>th</sup> to the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, and has assumed that it refers to the ruler of Karaj in Kurdistan who died in 285 AH (898 CE; Ettinghausen 1957, p. 333). If this is correct, then this silver inlay was also fashioned in western Iran and not in the east. Ettinghausen considered that the name on the ewer was that of the owner and that it was added later. Melikian-Chirvani considers that this is the name of the craftsman, although the inscription gives no indication of this; in that case the inscription is contemporaneous with the ewer (see Melikian-Chirvani 1972b, p. 139, No. 2).
- [40] At a colloquium in Oxford in 1969, which examined problems of the history of the Islamic world from 950 to 1150 CE, two reports (M Rogers and J Sourdell-Thomine) were devoted to the questions of architecture and the evolution of architectural decoration (see *Islamic Civilisation: 950-1150*, Oxford, 1973).
- [41] In the works of Turkish authors, the changes in the art of Iran during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries are ascribed to the appearance of large numbers of Turkic nomads in this area (see Erginsoy 1978, p. 552).
- [42] Of course, the Mongols' annihilation of the cities of Khurasan and northern Iran led to the extinction of craftwork production in these areas, if only for a certain period, but during that time the manufacture of various types of applied art developed in other centres.
- [43] Bretanitsky 1964, p. 138; Bretanitsky 1966, p. 511.
- [44] Lane 1957, pp. XIV, 71, 74.
- [45] Reitlinger 1961, p. 400.
- [46] The development of Iranian ceramics is examined by Maslénitsyna, who has also come to the conclusion that "we cannot speak of any fundamental changes taking place earlier than the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century". Maslénitsyna 1976, p. 179.
- [47] In the catalogue of seals and talismans in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, published by L. Kalus, the 14<sup>th</sup> century is also distinguished as the beginning of the "postclassical period" in the history of seals (see Z. Kalus, *Catalogue des cachets, bulles et talismans islamiques*, Paris, 1981, pp. 32-34).
- [48] Selective analyses have shown that amongst early objects one comes across alloys of copper and zinc, *i.e.* brass. Pending analysis, therefore, the dual description – bronze (brass) – has been preserved.
- [49] Ivanov 1971a, pp. 4, 5.
- [50] From the preceding phase we know only of a copper plate of the late 15<sup>th</sup> or early 16<sup>th</sup> century, with a design of peacocks (see Melikian-Chirvani 1976d, fig. 64) and a copper kashkul (begging bowl) with a design of peacocks and fish of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, from a private collection in Geneva.
- [51] Stchoukine 1964, pp. 222-224; Ettinghausen 1964, p. 45.
- [52] See Bretanitsky 1964, p. 133; Bretanitsky 1966, pp. 510, 514.