

AN EARLY ISLAMIC BRONZE EWER REEXAMINED

Among the collections of Eastern art at the Hermitage in St. Petersburg is a particularly beautiful bronze ewer variously attributed to late Sasanian and early Islamic Iran (fig. 1).¹ Despite the fact that the piece is well known among Islamic art historians and has been widely published, no detailed study has thus far been devoted to its intriguing shape and decoration. This is the more surprising as the ewer is a key piece in an important but still enigmatic group of silver and bronze ewers with horizontal neck spouts of late Sasanian or early Islamic date.² Here the Hermitage ewer will be reintroduced to scholars to initiate thoughts on the typological origin, provenance, date, and function of this important piece.

The Hermitage ewer has a bulbous pear-shaped body, faceted around the lower part. It rests on a low pedestal (replacement) foot with splayed base. Above, a narrow rounded collar introduces a tapering waisted neck, also faceted. The long horizontal spout above is tubular, very narrow, and rectangular in section. The small almond-shaped mouth is covered by a hinged lid. A rounded projecting lip runs around the mouth. The lateral extensions surrounding the outer mouth are lobed to indicate abstract floral motifs. The handle is S-shaped, of angular appearance, and plain. It is held to the back of the neck and the lower body by means of stylized zoomorphic attachments.

The typological origin of this ewer has often been related to late Sasanian prototypes made of silver. Strictly speaking, however, none of the objects presented as comparative material shows any convincingly close resemblance to the piece under discussion, particularly as far as the peculiar shape of the spout is concerned. Undeniably, Sasanian silver ewers do display a very similar profile, comprising an ovoid or pear-shaped body, a pedestal foot, and a long, waisted neck. However, the horizontal spout, which is also a characteristic feature of the Hermitage ewer, is rendered in a very different way. Here, the neck extends into a flat almond-shaped spout with a protruding, angular edge terminating in a pointed tip.³ The tip of the spout is closed, and thus any liquid would be

forced over its upper edge (fig. 2). In the case of the bronze ewer under discussion, on the other hand, the spout consists of a rounded mouth section protruding from the neck, with a small almond-shaped and lid-



Fig. 1. Cast bronze ewer allegedly from Daghestan. H. 20 cm. St. Petersburg, Hermitage Museum, inv. no. KZ5753. (Photo: courtesy Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)



Fig. 2. Drawing of a late Sasanian silver ewer. Bibliothèque nationale, Paris.



Fig. 3. Drawing of late Sasanian silver ewer. Cincinnati Art Museum, acc. no. 1966.1091.

ded aperture above. Towards the front, this section narrows down abruptly and extends into a very narrow and very long angular tube, which is closed from above. With a spout system like this the liquid would flow through the tube rather than over the outer edge.

From these observations it becomes clear that although the Hermitage ewer and its immediate predecessors share a similar profile and the same concept of a horizontal spout, the technical execution of this concept is very different in the two cases, and it can therefore not be readily argued that the spout profile of that piece is directly derived from Sasanian vessels. There is, however, one late Sasanian silver ewer which in its appearance seems to provide a half-way stage between the classical Sasanian ewer shape and the bronze ewer discussed here (fig. 3). This piece, preserved in the Cincinnati Art Museum, shares its overall appearance with the other Sasanian pieces. At the same time, several details in the ewer's execution seem to anticipate the profile of the Hermitage piece: the more bulbous appearance of the body and the clear demarcation of the central body by the neck collar above and the emphatic ridge below, which at the same time serves clearly to set the lower body apart.⁴ Finally, and most interestingly, the rendering of the spout

seems to some extent to anticipate the narrow tubular spout applied to the bronze ewer. The characteristic almond-shaped profile terminating in a closed pointed tip of the more typical Sasanian spouts has been abandoned here and replaced by an open tubular tip of square section, not unlike the tubular (though closed and more pronounced) spout of the Hermitage ewer.

Even in the case of the Cincinnati ewer, however, the similarities with the piece under discussion are not far-reaching enough to argue that it may have derived directly from vessels of probable Sasanian origin. In fact there are indications that its origin may have some connections with pre-Islamic metal objects from countries to the west of the Sasanian Empire, particularly the Roman world. It has often been suggested that the general body profile of early Islamic bronze ewers with horizontal spouts can be traced back to a late Roman ewer shape current in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. (fig. 4).⁵ This type was characterized by a bulbous, inverted, pear-shaped body, which rested on a high pedestal foot with an annular knob in the center. Above the body rose a conical neck interrupted by a collar in its upper section. From the upper neck projected a horizontal spout which was rendered as an open tube

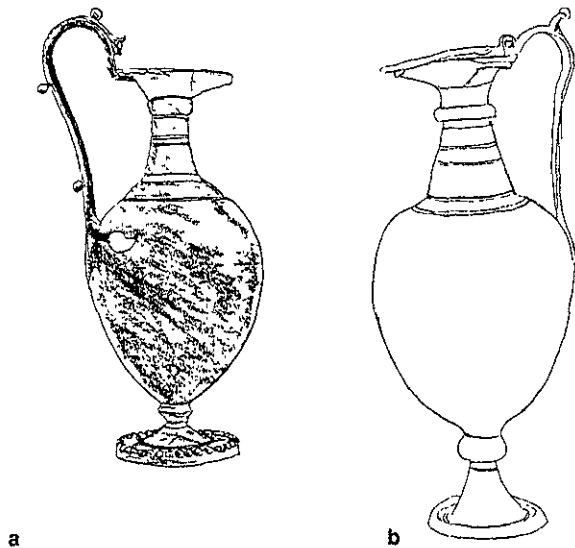


Fig. 4. Drawing of two late (fourth-fifth century) Roman silver ewers: (*left*) Frühchristlich-Byzantinische Sammlung der Staatlichen Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin-Dahlem; (*right*) Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Medailles, Paris.

of semicircular section springing from a horseshoe-shaped mouth (fig. 5).⁶

This Roman shape gradually penetrated Sasanian metalworking traditions and was subsequently modified to suit contemporary Iranian taste.⁷ In the process the body became pear-shaped with a taller pedestal foot. The collar below the spout on the late antique pieces was removed and another one added around the lower neck. The spout also underwent changes in that the distinct open tube springing from a horseshoe-shaped mouth was replaced by an almond-shaped spout with a closed pointed tip, in which mouth and pouring section form a continuous entity surrounded by an angular outer ridge.

This Sasanian modification of the late-antique-vessel shape subsequently became the most popular standard ewer type in Iran for centuries to come, and because of this popularity it even survived the collapse of the Sasanian Empire to continue in use for quite some time. Muslim artists working in this area during the early years of Islamic rule still to a large extent drew their inspiration from Sasanian artifacts, and there can be little doubt that at least one major feature of the bronze ewer — its general body shape — was based on Sasanian silver ewers, which in their turn served as intermediate transmitters of an older late Roman concept. The peculiar spout of the Islamic vessel, on

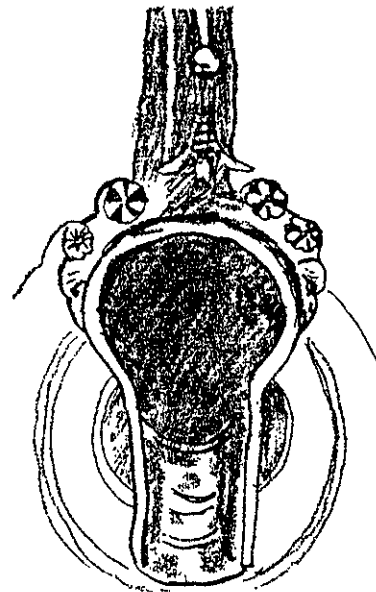


Fig. 5. Drawing of mouth section of late Roman silver ewer. Frühchristlich-Byzantinische Sammlung der Staatlichen Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin-Dahlem.

the other hand, cannot be directly related to those predecessors. It does, however, show a striking resemblance to the horizontal spout of a late Roman silver ewer, which was found as part of the famous Esquiline treasure on the outskirts of Rome and is datable to the late fourth century A.D. (fig. 6).⁸ Following the contemporary fashion in the Roman world for bold, angular geometric shapes and complex polygonal forms, this remarkable vessel consists of a body comprising seventeen facets which break at angles to form the foot and define the shoulder and neck moldings of the vessel.⁹ The neck receives the horizontal spout, which consists of a rounded, faceted mouth section with small aperture and a long and closed pouring tube of triangular section. The mouth opening was originally lidded, as can be concluded from the remaining hinge at the junction of handle and rim.

In considering the design of the spout found on the late Roman silver ewer, the strong similarity with the Hermitage piece becomes obvious and is the more remarkable as several centuries separate the dates of their manufacture. It thus appears that the design of the bronze ewer with tubular horizontal spout discussed here presents a synthesis of two main elements which seemingly derive from two different pre-Islamic metalworking traditions. The body profile recalls Sas-

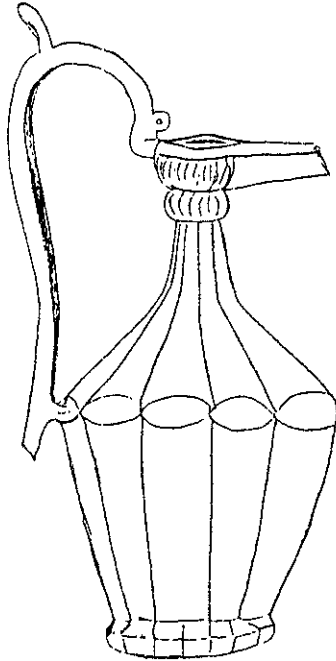


Fig. 6. Drawing of late Roman silver ewer from the Esquiline treasure. Rome [?], late 4th century A.D. British Museum, London.

anian prototypes, while the rendering of the spout hints at direct late Roman inspiration.

In considering the possible date and provenance of the Hermitage piece it is the extensive ornament on its body that provides the most important stylistic pointers. The decoration is executed in relief which is further enhanced by secondary incised motifs and copper inlay. It features a design of two large peacocks picking at the branches of a fantastic palm tree (figs. 1, 7). It was this motif that has led several scholars in the past to attribute the vessel to eighth-/ninth-century Iraq, mainly on the basis of rather generalized comparisons with Abbasid art forms, especially textiles, and the apparent coexistence of strong Sasanian and Byzantine elements.¹⁰ Unfortunately, none of those dealing with this object based their suggestions on a concrete and detailed analysis of the design and its meaning. This task will therefore be undertaken here in an attempt to assess the validity of the attribution generally made.

The composition of the design is unusual for an early Islamic artifact, and in fact it seems to be unique to this particular piece.¹¹ It does not, to my knowledge, appear in Sasanian art either, where, moreover, both the peacock and the palm tree as individual motifs

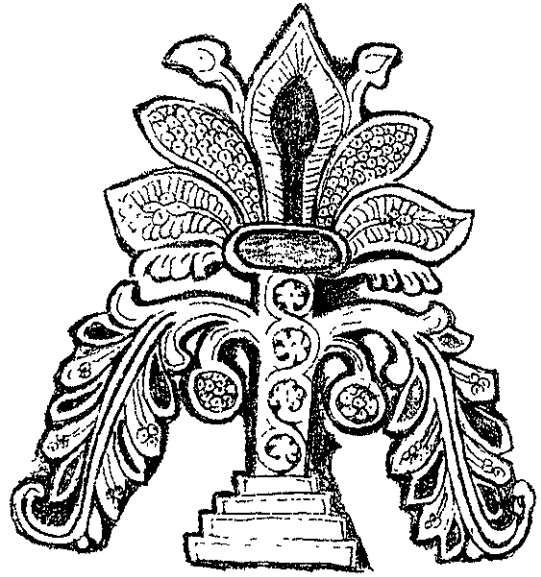


Fig. 7. Detail of Hermitage ewer (fig. 1).

seem never to have played a prominent iconographical role.¹² In the lands of the Eastern Roman Empire, on the other hand, both the use of individual peacocks and palm trees and their heraldic combination had been featured for centuries. In Roman times the peacock had become an attribute of the gods and was held in great veneration as a symbol of apotheosis and eternal life.¹³ In the days of early Christianity the peacock symbolism was perpetuated and incorporated into the new religious beliefs. Its flesh was believed to be incorruptible. Because of this and its traditional qualities, it became inseparably associated with the idea of paradise.

This role of the peacock as a paradisaical bird led to its combination in art with palm trees, which were believed to flank the holy waters of paradise, according to the description by St. Paul in the New Testament.¹⁴ To the Christian believer the date palm also symbolized the Tree of Life which grew near the gates to the Garden of Eden.¹⁵ It stood for resurrection and eternal life and therefore was frequently featured in artistic contexts of a religious nature, especially funerary art, either on its own or flanked by mythical humans or animals, including the peacock.¹⁶ The latter combination appears, for example, on the tombstone of Theodulus from Tunisia, which dates to the late fourth century.¹⁷ Very often this motif can also be found on early Christian artifacts from Italy and particularly from the area around Naples.¹⁸

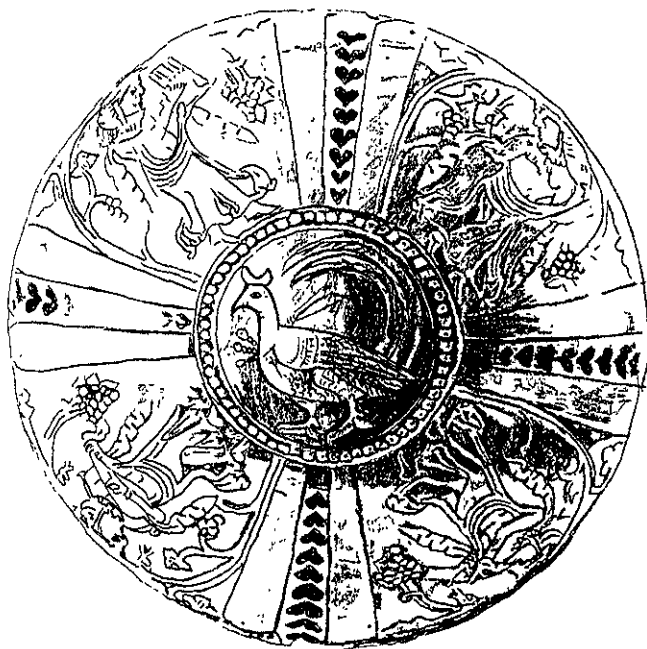


Fig. 8. Silver bowl from Mazanderan. Eighth century. Iran Bastan Museum. Tehran, inv. no. 1333.

The theme remained popular in the Mediterranean lands for centuries and still appears as late as the twelfth century, for example, in the architectural ornament and on artifacts executed in Muslim and Norman Italy. Paired peacocks confronting a palm tree appear frequently on Sicilian ivory caskets and among the mosaics adorning Norman palaces such as the twelfth-century Palazzo Reale in Palermo and the royal palace known as the Ziza, which was built on the outskirts of Palermo around 1170.¹⁹ With these observations in mind the motif of two peacocks flanking a palm tree on the bronze ewer seems to suggest a strong reliance on Byzantine and eastern Mediterranean traditions rather than Sasanian ones.

The peacock is rendered twice in identical fashion on either side of the date palm. At first sight the style of its execution seems to recall Sasanian precedents, especially with regard to its general shape, the compact profile of the tail feathers, and the broad neckband ending in a short flowing extension. Yet a closer examination of all these individual features in the bird's design reveals that any Sasanian details utilized here have been greatly modified and in places enhanced by details stemming from another, more Western artistic background. The bird's body profile



Fig. 9. Early Byzantine eagle figure. Cast bronze, sixth-seventh century. Frühchristlich-Byzantinische Sammlung der Staatlichen Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin-Dahlem, inv. no. 10/77.

is characterized by a striking degree of static stiffness, affecting even the fluency of the neck band. This has little in common with the dignified vitality and fluency of comparable birds appearing on Sasanian artifacts which, though created just before or immediately after the fall of the Sasanian dynasty, still retain the traditional treatment to a large degree.²⁰ Even on an eighth-century silver bowl from Mazanderan (fig. 8) the long-tailed and crested bird depicted on the central medallion of the exterior still shows the mobility and fluency of earlier birds.²¹

The stiffness of the peacock's shape is emphasized by its rigid tail feathers. In Sasanian times the tail feathers of most birds depicted in art were usually composed of long and detached, strongly curving elements, sometimes only two, sometimes four or five.²² In contrast, the peacock on the bronze ewer shows three broad feathers of nearly equal length adjoining each other and bending only slightly towards the bird's head. This static and compact treatment to some extent recalls the rigidly defined curvilinear outline, often filled with small patterns, representing the tail of Sasanian *senmurvs*, as can be found, for example, on the garments of kings depicted on the walls of the iwan at Taq-i Bustan.²³ In addition to these Sasanian traces

in the bird's execution, other details reveal more Western influences. Thus, the bird's facial features, particularly the copper-inlaid round pupil surrounded by two concentric bands and the emphatic eyebrow, show interesting similarities to an early Byzantine eagle figure datable to the sixth or seventh century (fig. 9).²⁴

The rendering of the small feathers covering the body and the wing ultimately also suggests Byzantine influence. The lancet-shaped elements with broad central veins and oblique lateral strokes often appear on early Byzantine bronze birds and can also be found on Byzantine ivory carvings.²⁵ The peacock's tail feathers, despite their general similarity to Sasanian ones as far as their compact profile is concerned, are quite different in detail. While the Sasanian treatment uses a rigidly defined curvilinear outline filled with various abstract and ornamental patterns, the artist of this object rendered three large, adjoining feathers with naturalistic eyes, which can easily be identified as those of a peacock. Virtually identically treated tail feathers appear on a fifth- or sixth-century stone relief from Venice, where two peacocks flank a central pedestal basin, thus again confirming late Roman and early Byzantine contributions in the execution of the ewer's decorative scheme (fig. 10).²⁶ Finally, one minor motif added to the bird's plumage — the peculiar pearl band which divides the wing vertically²⁷ — actually represents an artistic innovation, which begins to occur frequently only on objects made after the Arab conquest.

To sum up, the analysis of the peacock's artistic execution reveals a synthesis of three artistic traditions. Byzantine elements are mixed with distinct Sasanian details, while at the same time the first early Islamic motifs start to assert themselves. The peacocks flank a fantastic tree which, despite its composite and abstract treatment, has been identified as a date palm on the basis of the characteristic palm branches and two large fruit clusters hanging on either side of the stem (fig. 7). The image of the date palm does not feature prominently in Sasanian art, but does frequently appear on the artifacts of the Roman and early Christian period. Its depiction on objects from this area, however, is always purely naturalistic and does not include any fantastic additions like those on the palm tree discussed here. Consequently the iconographical heritage responsible for the tree's heterogeneous appearance must be sought elsewhere.

Throughout history the date palm was of the greatest

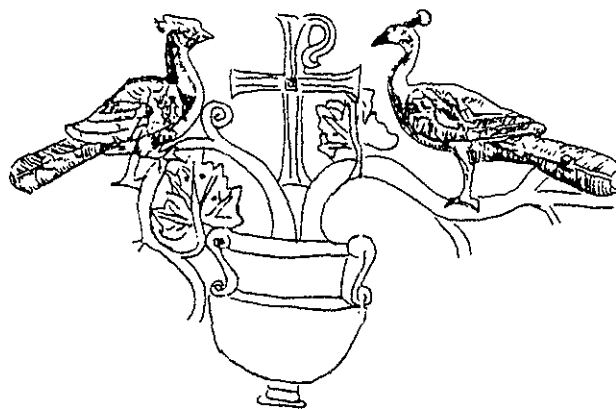


Fig. 10. Fifth-sixth-century stone relief from Venice showing two peacocks flanking a central pedestal basin. (After H. Glück, *Die christliche Kunst des Ostens* [Berlin 1923], pl. 17)



Fig. 11. Palm tree on a cylinder from Khorsabad near Nineveh. First half of first millennium B.C. (After H. Danthine, *Le Palmier-dattier et les arbres sacrés*, vol. 2, fig. 163)

importance to the inhabitants of Mesopotamia, as its many uses guaranteed prosperity for the whole region. Consequently, it is not surprising that this tree should also feature prominently in local art forms, and from as early as Assyrian times it occurs frequently in naturalistic or stylized form on stone reliefs, architectural elements, pottery, ivory carvings and seals. Many of these early artifacts seem to anticipate in their treatment of the date palm several of the elements occurring on the tree under discussion. One of these features is the palm's crown or foliage. On the ewer this crown is formed by a large central, lozenge-shaped blossom, which is flanked by two leaves on long stalks springing from its upper sides, and two large superposed leaves below, the upper one of which is oblong and the lower one pointed. All the palm branches spring from a narrow oblong base, with two half-palmettes protruding horizontally on either side. Apart



Fig. 12. Ancient Mesopotamian palm-tree crowns. (After H. Danthine, *Le Palmier-dattier et les arbres sacrés*, vol. 2, figs 358, 369, 384, 589)

from the latter, all elements are outlined by fairly broad borders.

This treatment of the foliage finds various interesting parallels in ancient Mesopotamian art, not only among numerous palm images, but also among the various abstract palmette designs ultimately derived from them.²⁸ A very simple rendering of a palm tree found on a cylinder from Khorsabad near Nineveh, which is datable to the first half of the first millennium B.C., seems to anticipate the arrangement of the leaves — a central vertical branch not unlike the lozenge-shaped one on the ewer's palm tree — and is flanked by three — in this case detached — sprays (fig. 11). All branches spring from an unnaturalistic, three-tiered base, a feature recurring in modified form on the tree discussed here.²⁹ The peculiar vertical lancet leaf in the center of the palm's crown occurs frequently in ancient Mesopotamian plant and palmette designs, and more often than not the whole ensemble is based on a geometric or oblong base (fig. 12).³⁰ Objects carrying this particular rendering of the palm crown seem to originate mainly in northern Mesopotamia, the ancient Assyria, and appear as early as the beginning of the first millennium B.C.³¹

The next significant features of the ewer's palm tree are its fantastic lateral branches with bunches of fruit attached to their upper part, curling toward the tree's base. These peculiar attachments also find certain analogies in ancient Mesopotamian date-palm depictions. Some of these images show the extended hanging branches with the fruit clusters at the end, a very

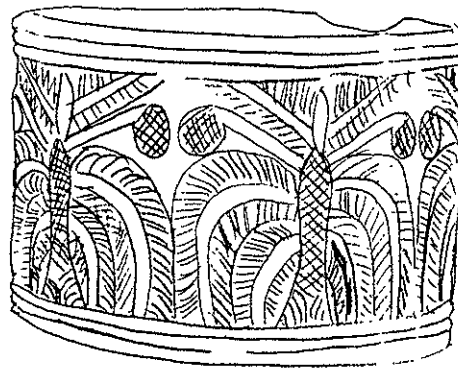


Fig. 13. Date palm on a Mesopotamian stone vessel. Early third millennium B.C. (After H. Danthine, *Le Palmier-dattier et les arbres sacrés*, vol. 2, fig. 35)

naturalistic treatment, while others are rendered in a more fantastic manner. It is the latter treatment that seems to relate directly to the flowing extensions of the ewer's palm tree.³² One such stylized depiction appears, for example, on a stone vessel datable to the early third millennium B.C. (fig. 13). Another palm tree with long and curved lateral branches appears on an Assyrian cylinder from the late second millennium B.C. (fig. 14) and on a pierced bronze plaque from Nimrud, dated to the early first millennium B.C. (fig. 15).³³ It can certainly be argued that all these examples are from a period which is too far removed from the object under discussion to suggest a direct transmission of images from the former to the latter. However, the continuity of ancient Mesopotamian art forms, which bridges centuries if not millennia, has been observed before, as for example in certain types of early Islamic pottery from Mesopotamia, which display iconographical features that link them directly to imagery used on ancient Mesopotamian artifacts of religious and mythical importance.³⁴

As for the curling lateral branches of the ancient palm-tree images, they also seem to remain an integral part of such depictions for a very long time. They appear, in slightly modified form, in conjunction with date palms and more stylized trees among the early Islamic imagery in the Dome of the Rock³⁵ and, more significantly in this context, are found on early Islamic pottery from Mesopotamia. Thus a cobalt-painted white-ware dish dated to the ninth-tenth century (fig. 16) displays a simple palm tree, flanked by two long and leafy branches which this time, however, rise from its base.³⁶ On another dish of Mesopotamian



Fig. 14. Palm tree on an Assyrian cylinder. Late second millennium B.C. (After H. Danthine, *Le Palmier-dattier et les arbres sacrés*, vol. 2, fig. 230)

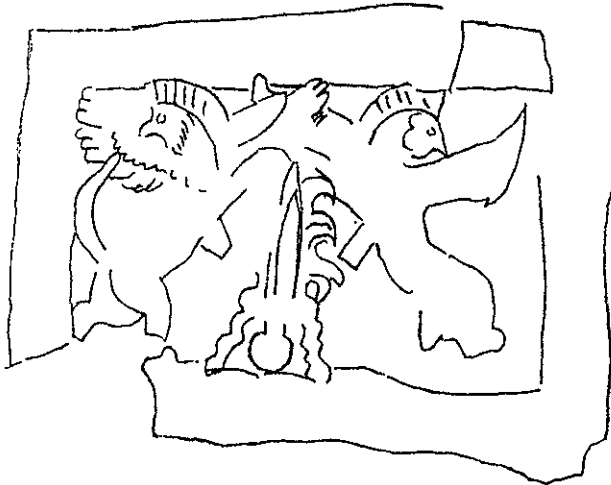


Fig. 15. Palm tree on a pierced bronze plaque from Nimrud. Early first millennium B.C. (After H. Danthine, *Le Palmier-dattier et les arbres sacrés*, vol. 2, fig. 591)

lusterware datable to the ninth century (fig. 17) two long branches rendered in a very similar way rise upwards from the upper stem of a fantastic tree — perhaps a stylized palm tree.³⁷ Sometimes, these peculiar palmette branches also appear detached from a floral context and become enigmatically fused with various animals, as is the case, for example, on a tenth-century luster plate allegedly from Rayy (fig. 18).³⁸ On this piece, which technically and iconographically still relies strongly on slightly earlier Mesopotamian luster plates, two branches of identical appearance spring from a mythical beast's feet and again rise up to enclose the animal. In this instance, in the detailed rendering of these palmette branches the leaves are alternately filled with hatching or with deep luster color. This scheme recalls very strongly the one applied to the branches of the ewer's tree. Here, each

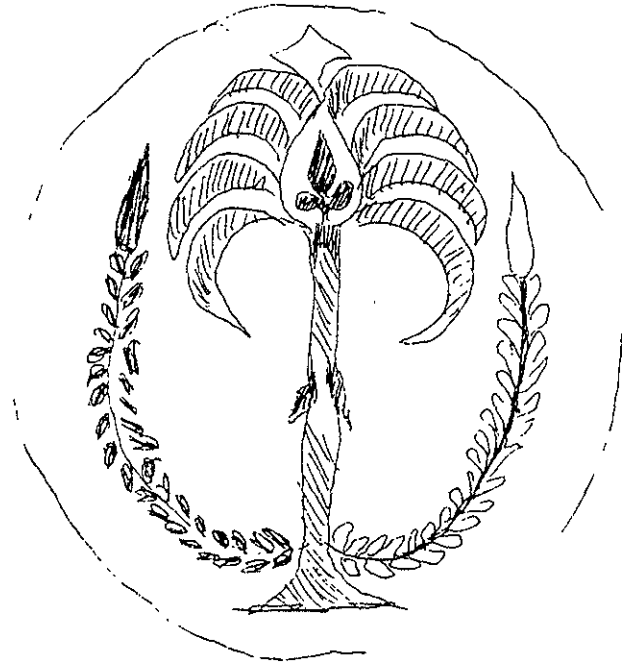


Fig. 16. Cobalt painted white-ware dish. Mesopotamia, ninth-century. Ex-Pope Collection, present whereabouts unknown.

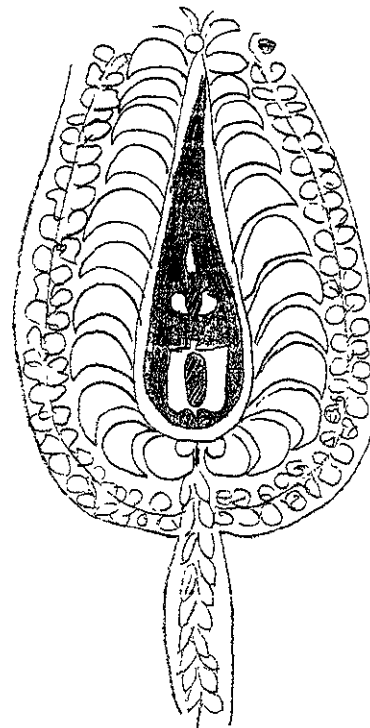


Fig. 17. Early Islamic luster dish (detail). Mesopotamia, ninth century. Ex-Pope collection, present whereabouts unknown.



Fig. 18. Islamic luster plate with fantastic beast, allegedly from Ray. Tenth century. Private collection, Paris.

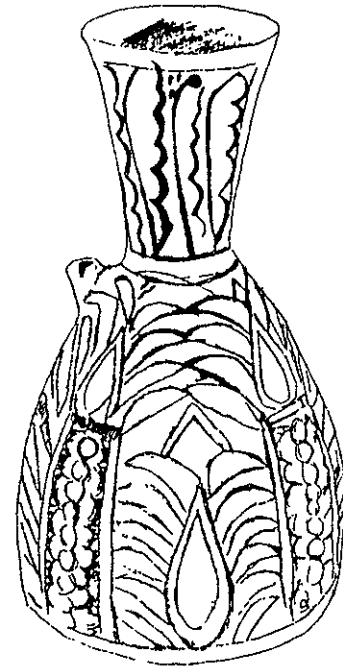


Fig. 20. Early Islamic pottery jug from Susa. Seventh-eighth century. Paris, Louvre, inv. no. MAO 383.

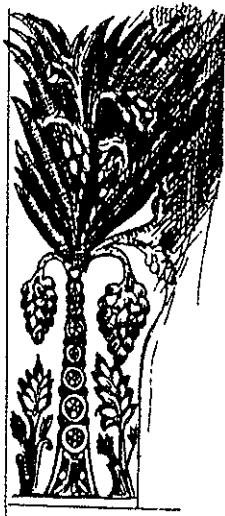


Fig. 19. Palm tree from the inner face of the octagonal arcade in the Dome of the Rock (691)

alternate leaf is engraved or filled with a large plaque of copper inlay.

The last feature of the ewer's palm tree which remains to be discussed combines the stem and base: a column with central scrollwork resting on four steps. The peculiar treatment of the stem is not unusual in early Islamic times. In 691-92 some of the date palms

depicted in the Dome of the Rock display ornamented trunks. In this case, however, they are shown bedecked with precious stones and mother-of-pearl.³⁹ One tree on the inner face of the octagonal arcade comes closest to the ewer's palm tree in its treatment of the stem (fig. 19). The superposed circles with enclosed six-petaled rosettes seem to anticipate the superposed round scrolls enclosing polylobed leaves on the ewer's palm trunk.⁴⁰ On a small jug from Susa dated to the seventh-eighth century (fig. 20), such a decorated trunk may also have been intended, here serving as the base for a stylized palm-like plant, not unlike the ewer's palm tree in its general outlines.⁴¹ The central, superimposed globular elements, although totally abstract, seem strangely related to the simple scrolls on the palm tree under discussion. The stepped base on which the palm's columnar trunk is resting finds immediate predecessors in the Byzantine crosses represented on Byzantine and early Islamic coins, as Allan has pointed out.⁴² However, again, ancient Mesopotamian predecessors may ultimately also have contributed to the inclusion of this minor detail into the composition of the ewer's palm tree. Several ancient Mesopotamian tree representations include pyramidal bases. One example found at Susa

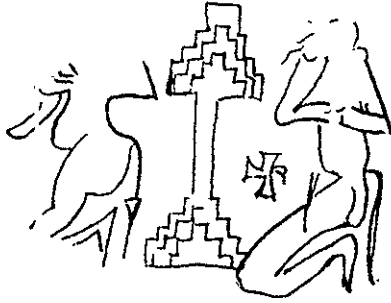


Fig. 21. Ancient tree representation with pyramidal base on an object found at Susa, ca. 3000 B.C. (After H. Danthine, *Le Palmier-dattier et les arbres sacrés*, vol. 2, fig. 683)

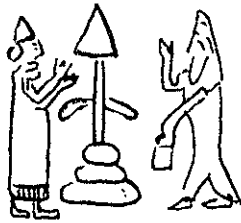


Fig. 22. Tree representation with pyramidal base on an ancient Mesopotamian cylinder. Early first millennium. (After Danthine, *Le Palmier dattier et les arbres sacrés*, vol. 2, fig. 858)

and datable to around 3000 B.C. is made up of four steps and supports a seemingly abstract tree structure (fig. 21).⁴³ On an ancient cylinder from the early first millennium B.C., a base of three steps occurs (fig. 22).⁴⁴

From all these observations, the heterogeneous character of the ewer's iconography becomes obvious. Strong Byzantine elements include the subject matter and details in the bird's execution. Alongside the former appear Sasanian features, apparent in the general bird shape, the profile of its tail feathers and the degenerated neck band. The third influence comes from ancient and early Islamic Mesopotamian art forms, mingling with the first traces of "official" Islamic art, such as associations with early Islamic coinage and the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock. A synthesis of all these influences could most easily have been achieved in the artistic climate of early Islamic Mesopotamia. Because of its geographical proximity to both Byzantium and Iran, this area was constantly exposed to artistic influences from both sides. However, at the same time it always retained its own local traditions to a large degree. Therefore this area may be suggested for the ewer's origin. As for dating the

object, the ninth century seems most acceptable, based as it is on the artistic comparisons made above with contemporary artifacts.

Burrell Collection
Glasgow, Scotland

NOTES

1. St. Petersburg, Hermitage Museum, inv. no. KZ5753; h. 40 cm (39.2 cm). For a comprehensive bibliography relating to this piece, see Ulrike al-Khamis, "Early Islamic Bronze and Brass Ewers from the 7th to the Mid-13th Century," Ph.D. diss., Edinburgh University, 1994, pp. 926 ff. It is at the moment still notoriously difficult to distinguish precisely between objects produced under Sasanian rule and those made after the Islamic conquest, as there seems to have been a nearly uninterrupted and unchanged production of traditional objects in Iran for a considerable period following the establishment of Islamic rule in the country.
2. See al-Khamis, "Early Islamic Ewers," chapter 7, pp. 173-261.
3. For examples, see exhibition catalogue, University of Michigan Museum of Art, *Sasanian Silver: Late Antique and Early Mediaeval Arts of Luxury from Iran*, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1967, no. 19; Edith Porada, *Alt-Iran: Die Kunst in vorislamischer Zeit* (Baden-Baden, 1962), fig. 115; F. Sarre, *Die Kunst des alten Persien* (Berlin, 1922), fig. 128. Some Sasanian vessels seem to have featured a similar spout, but the tips were not pointed, but angular in section; cf. Prudence Harper, *The Royal Hunter: Art of the Sasanian Empire* (New York, 1978), p. 60, no. 18.
4. *Sasanian Silver*, p. 107, no. 19.
5. J. W. Allan, "The Metalworking Industry in Iran in the Early Islamic Period," Ph.D. diss., 2 vols, Oxford University 1976, 1:212; J. P. C. Kent and K. S. Painter, eds., *Wealth of the Roman World A.D. 300-700* (London, 1977), p. 119.
6. R. Zahn, "Spätantike Silbergefäße," *Amtliche Berichte aus den königlichen Kunstsammlungen* 38 (1917), cols. 263-304; D. E. Strong, *Greek and Roman Gold and Silver Plate* (London, 1966), pl. 56A; H. Peirce and R. Tyler, *L'Art byzantin*, 2 vols. (Paris 1932-34), vol. 2, pls. 58-59. The silver ewer of this type in Berlin is hammered from sheet silver. The foot and the upper neck with the spout are worked separately and soldered on, as is the handle. The height of the vessel is 32 cm, 37 cm with handle. It weighs 1863.2 grams.
7. Allan "Metalworking Industry in Iran," 1: 212.
8. K. J. Skelton, *The Esquiline Treasure* (London, 1981), pp. 31, 42, 43, 83, no. 17, pl. 31.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
10. J. Orbeli, "Sasanian and Early Islamic Metalwork," *A Survey of Persian Art*, ed. Arthur Upham Pope, 15 vols. (London and New York, 1964), 2: 716-70; M. S. Dimand, "Some Early Islamic Bronzes from Iran in American Collections," *Akten des vierundzwanzigsten internationalen Orientalisten-Kongresses 1957* (Munich, 1959), p. 347; *Masterpieces of Islamic Art in the Hermitage Museum* (Kuwait: Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyah, 1990), p. 10, no. 2 (English text).
11. Ralph Pinder-Wilson has already pointed out that this motif

- does not seem to appear anywhere in the Islamic world apart from Sicily; cf. R. Pinder-Wilson, "The Reliquary of St. Petroc and the Ivories of Norman Sicily," *Archaeologia* 104 (1973): 292-93.
12. H. P. Schmidt, "The Senmurv: Of Birds and Dogs and Bats," *Persica* 9 (1980): 45; Schmidt's statement is also quoted in A. Daneshvari, *Medieval Tomb Towers of Iran. An Iconographical Study* (Lexington, Ky., 1986), p. 48, n. 105.
 13. E. Kirschbaum et al., eds., *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, vol. 3 (Rome, Freiburg, Basel, Vienna, 1971), p. 410; H. Lothar, *Der Pfau in der altchristlichen Kunst: Eine Studie über das Verhältnis von Ornament und Symbol* (Leipzig, 1929), pp. 23, 28, 44.
 14. Kirschbaum, *Lexikon*, p. 365.
 15. *Ibid.*
 16. *Ibid.*, p. 366; for examples on textiles, see E. Flemming, Introduction to *An Encyclopaedia of Textiles from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the 19th Century* (New York, 1927), pls. 18 and 19.
 17. Kirschbaum, *Lexikon*, p. 410.
 18. Lothar, *Der Pfau in der altchristlichen Kunst*, p. 72.
 19. Pinder-Wilson, "Reliquary of St. Petroc," pp. 261-305; D. Talbot-Rice, *Byzantinische Kunst* (Munich, 1964), p. 216, fig. 193; F. Gabrieli and U. Scerrato, *Gli Arabi in Italia. Cultura, contatti e tradizioni* (Milan, 1979), figs. 6, 7, 27. It seems worth mentioning that the mosaic in the Ziza has a strikingly similar motif in the flanking birds touching the lateral branches of the date palm with their beaks.
 20. As already mentioned, the peacock appeared only very rarely among the birds normally depicted in Sasanian art, and it seems that often birds which do not display the typical features of a peacock, i.e., the characteristic antennae, the pointed straight beak, and the long tail feathers, were still mistaken for that bird, and objects with identifiable peacocks have been wrongly attributed to the sphere of Sasanian art. Thus Orbeli ("Sasanian and Early Islamic Metalwork," fig. 256c) depicts a peacock on a silver cup, which most recently has been attributed by Marshak to the Khazar khaganate of the eighth-ninth century and therefore cannot be counted as a Sasanian artifact; cf. B. I. Marshak, *Silberschätze des Orients. Metallkunst des 3.-13. Jahrhunderts und ihre Kontinuität* (Leipzig, 1986), p. 432, nos. 91, 92. Compare also Harper, *Royal Hunter*, p. 64, fig. 21; p. 65, no. 21; p. 134, no. 58; p. 137, no. 61; *Sasanian Silver*, nos. 27, 32, 35, 39.
 21. Harper, *Royal Hunter*, pp. 77-78, no. 26; *Sasanian Silver*, no. 17.
 22. Harper, *Royal Hunter*, pp. 77-78, no. 26. One identifiable peacock with similarly compact tail feathers can be found among the relief decoration of Taq-i Bustan; cf. S. Fukai and K. Horiuchi, *Taq-i Bustan* (Tokyo, 1984), vol. 4, fig. 60, no. 57; cf. also *ibid.*, pp. 86-87, fig. 36.
 23. Harper, *Royal Hunter*, p. 96, figs. 34a-b; p. 123, fig. M left, p. 121, fig. K; Schmidt has argued that the senmurv's tail was actually adapted from Sasanian peacock images, but as these seem so exceedingly rare and many bird representations have this kind of tail, it cannot definitively be identified as a peacock and this theory might require further investigation; cf. Schmidt, "The Senmurv," pp. 28-29.
 24. Exhibition catalogue, *Bronzen von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. P. Bloch, Westfälisches Landesmuseum, Münster, 1983, p. 41, no. 17.
 25. *Ibid.*; for an example of ivory carving, see R. Loverance, *Byzantium* (London, 1988), p. 24, fig. 28.
 26. H. Glück, *Die christliche Kunst des Ostens* (Berlin, 1923), pl. 17.
 27. Harper, *Royal Hunter*, p. 137.
 28. For a comprehensive study of date-palm representations in antiquity and their stylization or abstraction, see H. Danthine, *Le Palmier-dattier et les arbres sacrés dans l'iconographie de l'Asie occidentale ancienne*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1937).
 29. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, fig. 163, pl. 27; vol. 1, p. 232, no. 163 (text).
 30. Compare images in *ibid.*, vol. 2, fig. 44: stone vase, first half of the first millennium B.C.; fig. 165: cylinder from the same period; fig. 358: textile design from Nimrud, reign of Assurnazirpal (883-859); fig. 363: relief from Nimrud, first half of the first millennium B.C.; figs. 369 and 384: pottery from Assur from the same period; fig. 589: stone vessel, early third millennium B.C.
 31. See n. 30 above.
 32. Cf. Danthine, *Le Palmier-dattier et les arbres sacrés*, vol. 2, figs. 35, 589, 590, 591.
 33. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, figs. 35, 230, 591.
 34. Cf. U. Al-Khamis, "The Iconography of Early Islamic Lustreware from Mesopotamia: New Considerations," *Muqarnas* 7 (1990): 109-18.
 35. K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* (New York, 1979), vol. 1, pt. 1, fig. 210, pl. 14c.
 36. This fact is puzzling, and one wonders whether an old artistic detail had been misunderstood, or whether its position was modified to achieve a design which would be more visually pleasing and harmonious on a round plate; cf. A. U. Pope, ed., *A Survey of Persian Art*, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1938), vol. 5, pl. 574D.
 37. J. Soustiel, *La Céramique islamique* (Fribourg, 1985), p. 39, fig. 20.
 38. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51, fig. 28.
 39. Creswell, *EMA* 1, 1: 263-64, figs. 207-10.
 40. *Ibid.*, pp. 263-64, fig. 208, pl. 12c. The adornment of date palms with jewels may not be merely an artistic fantasy. Tabari, in his history of the Persians and Arabs in Sasanian times, reports a curious custom of the inhabitants of Najran in southern Arabia: "The inhabitants of Najran confessed in those days to the religion of the Arabs, by erecting a tall date palm there and staging an annual feast in its honour. When this feast came, they suspended as much female jewelry and as many beautiful garments on it as they could find. Then they descended again and showed it divine honour the whole day long"; cf. Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden aus der arabischen Chronik des Tabari* (Strassburg, 1879; rpt., Leiden, 1973), p. 181.
 41. Soustiel, *La Céramique islamique*, pp. 30-31, fig. 9.
 42. Allan, *Metalworking Industry in Iran*, 1:214.
 43. Danthine, *Le palmier-dattier et les arbres sacrés*, vol. 2, fig. 683; 1: 247.
 44. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, fig. 858; 1:252.