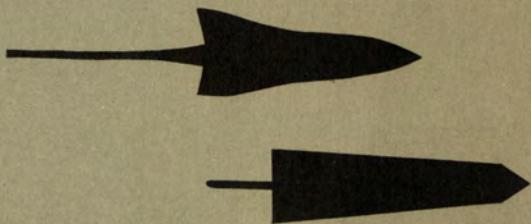
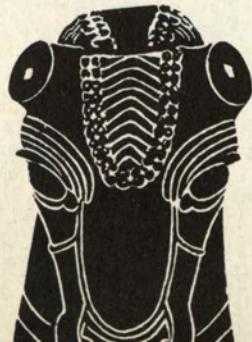


IRANIAN ART AT THE
ORIENTAL INSTITUTE MUSEUM
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



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DESIGNS BY SUE RICHERT • TEXT BY CARL H. KRAELING AND STAFF • CHICAGO • 1951

IRANIAN ART

The Iranian Hall of the Oriental Institute Museum and its blue-tinted vestibule present in beautiful setting the outstanding collection of objects of ancient Iranian art and craftsmanship in America. It contains many pieces of major importance, particularly monumental sculptures and choice examples of the potter's craft that come directly from Institute excavations. To these a gold treasure and a fine group of bronzes has been added by purchase. As a whole the collection gives to the visitor a broad survey of a phase of man's cultural development that is intrinsically of great importance but difficult for most museums to document. The civilization it represents developed on the western edges of the Asiatic plateau and covers a period of some four thousand years ending with the overthrow of the Achaemenid monarchy by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C.





Dominating the Hall and dominant in the whole repertoire of Iranian art as its greatest monumental expression are the sculptures that come from the royal residences of Darius, Xerxes, and their successors at Persepolis.

These kings and their immediate predecessors ruled what had originally been a nomadic tribal group. Supported by that group, once it had found a home in the southwestern section of the Iranian plateau (ancient Parsa, modern Fars), the Achaemenid kings unified the Iranian peoples round about and went on to create a world empire that embraced all the ancient centers of civilization in the Near East, ultimately extending from India to Europe and from inner Asia to Africa.* These developments belong to the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.

* The Greeks called them Persians, from the name of the region (Parsa) they held as their crown land, thus bringing into vogue a nomenclature subsequently abandoned. They are properly called Iranians and their early kings Achaemenids, because they claimed a certain Achaemenes as their ultimate ancestor.

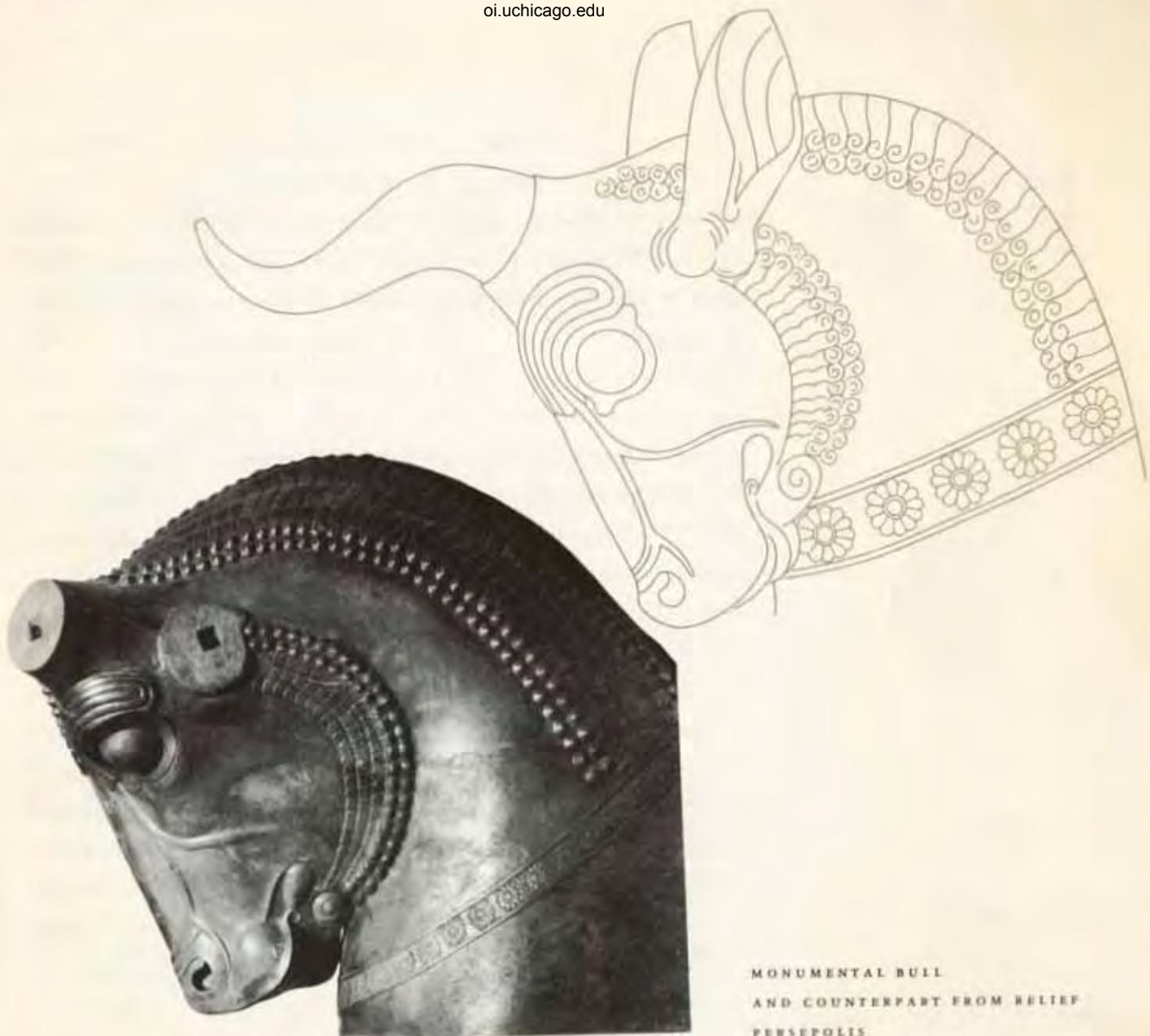
ACHAEMENID SCULPTURES

Persepolis ("city of Parsa") was one of the capitals of the Achaemenid Empire, favored residence of Darius and Xerxes and the site therefore of one of its greatest palaces. The palace was destroyed by Alexander's army and for many centuries lay ruined and unattended until revealed again by Oriental Institute excavations. It was an enormous complex of structures, set on a great fortified terrace or platform and comprised residential palaces, an audience hall, a throne hall, administrative buildings, and garrison quarters. Here the myriad threads of world empire came together, and, to symbolize the strength and glory of that empire, the residence was built with all the magnificence the royal wealth afforded. For its construction and embellishment the Achaemenids, lacking experience in monumental art, recruited craftsmen and artisans from all parts of their empire. It thus combines in remarkable fashion what they learned from the cultural tradition of their vassal peoples (Assyrians, Egyptians, and Anatolians) with what was peculiarly their own.*

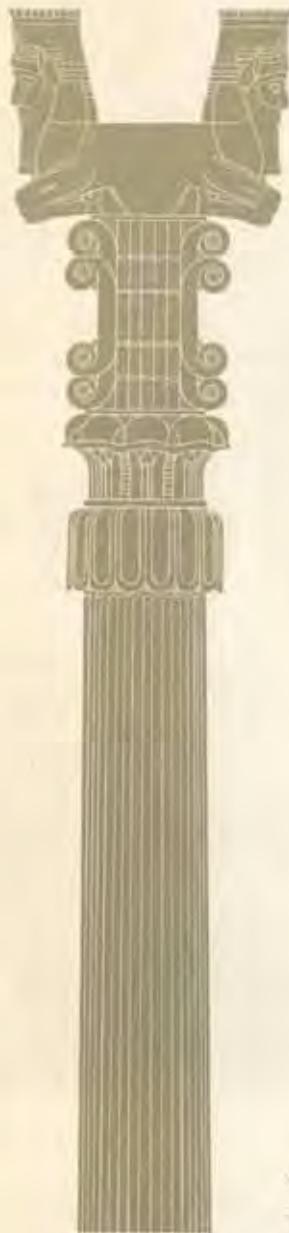
The colossal bull's head confronting the visitor as he enters our Iranian Hall, and now lacking its ears and the horns that may originally have been made of wood covered with gold, was one of two identical sculptures set at either end of the entrance portico to the throne hall of the palace. The creatures represent powerful demons guarding the

* The accounts of treasury officials discovered in the palace list craftsmen of various nationalities at work in the construction, including Greeks from Anatolia. The work was begun by Darius (522-486 B.C.) and continued intermittently to the late fourth century B.C.





MONUMENTAL BULL
AND COUNTERPART FROM RELIEF
PERSEPOLIS



approach to the king, as in the palaces of Assyria. At the right of the Hall where two parts of a column are shown mounted on a replica of a shaft, the same motif of the guarding demon appears again in the ingeniously fashioned composite capital. One part represents the fronds of a palm tree; the other, a crowning member, portrays the foreparts of two addorsed bulls that carried the rafters on their backs. Against the left wall of the Hall is set one half of a capital from a similar column, larger in size. Here the bulls have human heads in the traditional Assyrian manner. Fragments of other sculptures displayed in the cases about the floor show both a careful attention to detail and the excellence of the finish imparted to the magnificent black marble. To them the visitor must add the lion frieze, the cast of the Syrian tribute group from the stairway to the audience hall of the residence, and the blocks decorated with rosettes, if he would see more fully the wealth of decorative material used in embellishing the buildings. It is important in this connection to realize that,



MAN-BULL FROM CAPITAL • PERSEPOLIS



ORNAMENTED DOORSOCKET
PERSEPOLIS

so far as our present knowledge goes, sculpture in Achaemenid times produced few free-standing monuments, being a form of art used largely in the service of architecture.

It would be a mistake to suppose that in plan, in the organization and allocation of its sculptured materials, in the representation of demonic guardians, and in the reappearance of glazed-tile revetments (see the entrance wall of the Hall), the Achaemenid residence at Persepolis merely continued age-old traditions. Every element that is traditional is modified in some way and endowed with a new beauty all its own. The change is most noticeable in the treatment of the animal forms and will be evident to anyone comparing our Achaemenid sculptures with the lions in the Babylonian Hall and the human-headed bull from the Palace of Sargon at the end of the Egyptian Hall. Gone is the ferocity and the ruthlessness visible in the earlier parallels. Instead the subjects are endowed with a gentle grace, with a subtlety and flow of line, that gives the product a polish comparable to that of the stone itself. At the same time there is increased attention to ornamental effects, achieved by the stylized rendering of detail, as, for instance, in the veins of the bull's head and in the modeling of its underlip and its nostrils.

It took a high degree of sensitivity to impart feeling through such mass and to execute detail in objects of such size. One wonders to what extent the changes in effect were intentional and, if so, what the transition from ferocity in animal forms to dignity and benevolence really

means. Lacking its horns, the great Achaemenid bull seems almost passive. Yet, when seen from an angle, with the proud curve of the neck and the forward thrust of the head in clear view, the head gives the impression of immense power, but power restrained and as completely under control as were the far-flung provinces of the vast empire that the Achaemenids ruled.



LIONS IN RELIEF AND IN THE ROUND • PERSEPOLIS



ACHAEMENID GOLD

The vestibule of the Iranian Hall presents in special cases set into the wall, Chicago's justly famous Achaemenid Gold Treasure. It is a noteworthy collection of more than fifty separate pieces of gold ornament, most of them representing animals skilfully fashioned out of heavy sheets of the precious metal. Though the same design recurs more than once, each piece is a work of art, the large roundel with the winged lion in the center of the case and the necklace about it forming the choicest items.

Save for the necklace and the miniature representation of the god Ahuramazda, all the several pieces originally adorned either the state costume of a high Achaemenid dignitary or the hanging of a royal chamber. They were applied to the fabric with needle and thread by means of "eyes" cold-soldered to the ornament, itself no mean achievement of technical craftsmanship. Arranged in stately files, the golden animals must have imparted to the cloth a regal splendor.

The ornaments themselves, using motifs traditional in the Achaemenid repertory of design, exhibit not only the goldsmith's technical skill but also a high degree of artistry both in composition and in style. Note the balance and symmetry of design in the small roundels containing pairs of addorsed, rampant lions. Note particularly how brilliantly the artist has solved the problem of setting a single winged lion into the large roundel in such a way as to produce a pleasing effect and yet not to do violence to the elements of the figure. With the fine sense of pose, proportion, and of distribution of mass exhibited in these pieces goes also a clear grasp of that clarity and simplicity of line that characterizes the style of the massive sculptures exhibited in the Iranian Hall itself. To illustrate the relationship, there has been placed in the case at the left of the Gold Treasure the marble head of a lion from Persepolis that shows in stone the same stylistic features as the head of the winged lion in the large gold roundel. It is truly remarkable how closely the work in the different media is related.





The basic unity of artistic style and production in the Achaemenid period permits us to obtain from the work of the goldsmith hints for the interpretation of the sculptor's products. If the visitor will examine again the frieze from a Persepolis balustrade in the far left corner of the Iranian Hall, he will find that its lions are set out in relief against a surface that ends at the bottom in a row of tassels and is revealed by this fact to represent a cloth hanging. Conceivably the sculptor was reproducing in stone not a piece of embroidery but precisely such a hanging, studded with gold ornament, as that to which our Gold Treasure may once have belonged.

The case at the right of the Gold Treasure presents a "trial piece"—that is, supposedly, a block upon which a sculptor executed single examples of the basic elements of his repertoire of design, to serve as models for his apprentices. The apprentices copied the artist's models on the same stone, as part of their training for work in his atelier. The first figure in the upper row of designs, done by the master himself, is just such a winged lion as appears in the large gold roundel. Of particular interest, however, is the fact that this "trial piece" comes from Egypt—being one of the few examples of Achaemenid sculpture from that country—and that the style and the designs of the artist's repertoire are identical with those of his fellow-artists in far-off Persia. Clearly the art of Achaemenid Persia was an imperial art, carried by its representatives wherever they went, and normally preserving its character without change in the midst

of different local art traditions. His art, then, represents the Persian at home and abroad, and the presence of Persians in so many parts of the Near East is the measure of the influence which their art had upon the cultural development of the later Orient.



GOLD BOUNDLE WITH WINGED LION • ACHAEMENID TREASURE
COUNTERPART FROM LIMESTONE 'TRIAL PIECE' • ACHAEMENID EGYPT

PREHISTORIC POTTERY

The Achaemenid period marks the latest phase in the development of Iranian art illustrated by the objects in our Hall. The earliest phase is represented by a unique collection of decorated pottery displayed in the glass case at the left. To be seen only at Chicago and at Teheran, this pottery takes us back almost to the dawn of creative effort on the Iranian plateau and chronologically to about the year 4000 b.c. The objects come from an excavation conducted by the Oriental Institute at Tall-i-Bakun and for all their remove in time from the days of imperial Persia reveal a measure of craftsmanship, an aesthetic sensitivity, and a love of the ornamental no whit inferior to that of the later period.

The vessels exhibit a variety of shapes, with bowls, pots, jars, and beakers predominating. They were found in the houses of a small village of farmers and shepherds within easy walking distance of the later palace at Persepolis. We know nothing about the people themselves, where they came from, or how long they lived there, but with the circumstances of their daily life we are familiar from the contents of their long-buried dwellings. They still used many stone tools, possessed a few copper instruments, and produced only simple types of figurines, but had already a well-developed conception of property, as the stamp seals displayed in the wall case with other lesser objects of domestic use indicate. The vessels we now prize were apparently among their choice possessions also, for some of them had at one time been mended by their owners.

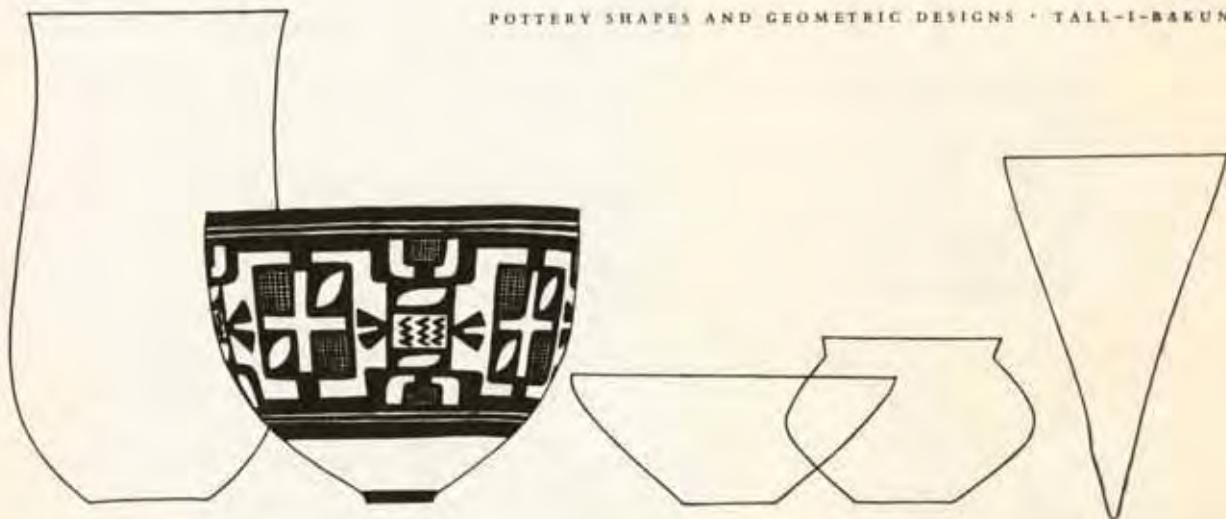


BIRD MOTIF • TALL-I-BAKUN

Yet they were regular household equipment throughout the town and not the property or the products of a chosen few.

Among the unusual features of the Tall-i-Bakun pottery are the predominance of the open conical vessels and the thinness of the ware. What really strikes the eye, however, and lends the vessels such distinction is the quality and variety of their decorations. The designs employed are usually quite simple. Many are geometrical, like the checkerboard square and diamond, the cross and swastika, the zigzag and the wavy line. Others are combinations of abstract elements arranged to form pleasing and sometimes complex, continuous patterns. There are

POTTERY SHAPES AND GEOMETRIC DESIGNS • TALL-I-BAKUN





simple plant designs and occasional animals, including the ibex, the mountain sheep, the leopard and the lion, and even representations of schematized human beings. The subject matter of the decorations, therefore, reflects only the patterns that might have appeared upon the woven materials of the common household and the animate life of the artists' environment. But the effects achieved with these materials are truly amazing, for actually these prehistoric vessels would be a compliment to the most successful among modern workers in creative art and design.

The reasons why we today find these vessels so attractive and so suggestive of the contemporary manner are not hard to understand. We note first and foremost the artists' devotion to the abstract, and their ability to communicate aesthetic apperception through the medium of design. The absence of any naturalistic tendencies in their work makes us wonder whether they lacked or abjured the feeling that human beings, animals, or objects were beautiful in themselves and worthy of representation for what they were? Next is the confidence with which the artists selected in the limited range of the objects known to them the features of greatest potential significance for purposes of design and the way in which the renderings bring out the dynamic symmetry of the features chosen. This can be seen in the gentle simplicity of their plant design and especially in the swirling horns of their mountain sheep which they seize upon as the aesthetically meaningful part of the animal, magnifying them in sweeping curves out of all proportion to the meager

bodies. Next is the artists' creative treatment of geometric patterns, which they never reduce to a monotonous level and often combine in so fresh a manner as to produce a definite sense of motion about or within the vessel. Finally, there is the artists' complete success in adapting their designs to the shape of their vessels and in producing objects that are harmonious and unified in the impression they make. The extent to which they are able to achieve these effects, not only by painting their designs in black upon a buff ware, but also by creating a black background to render the design in the natural color of the vessel, is a final indication of the sophistication of their artistry.

Interesting but not unique are the products of the potter's craft exhibited in the other cases of the Iranian Hall. These belong to the third and second millenniums B.C. and are of types that have come to light in many parts of the country. They represent, therefore, a succession of

STYLIZED IBEXES • TALL-I-BAKUN



well-intrenched, dominant cultures. Typical of the earliest of these cultures are the large jars with decorations on their broad shoulders; characteristic of the later cultures are the vessels with three feet and those of a cylindrical shape. Among all of them the red and gray imitations of boldly spouted bronze vessels are clearly the most striking. Where ornament occurs, it combines geometric designs that still exhibit some freedom of movement with animal figures. In contrast to the Tall-i-Bakun artists, those of the later periods really endeavored to draw figures in proper proportion, their naturalism bringing to expression important differences in the point of view of those who helped mold the decorative tradition of Iran.



SPOUTED CLAY VESSELS • NORTHERN IRAN

The cases along the right wall of the Iranian Hall exhibit the Institute's collection of Luristan bronzes. It numbers more than a hundred pieces and includes several types of weapons—especially daggers and battle-axes—harness elements and trappings, "standards," personal ornaments, pins with large and small ornamental heads, and various types of vessels. The Luristan bronzes come from a limited region—the area south and east of Kirmanshah—and have found their way into Western museums largely as the result of native tomb exploration. The only scientific excavation ever undertaken in the region was that conducted by the Persepolis Expedition in the small temple at Sarkh-i-Dom, where at least a few of these important objects were seen for the first time in a definite cultural context. They belong apparently to the first half of the first millennium B.C.

The bronzes are the work of a highly interesting tribal group. That they were especially competent in metal work is indicated by the fine patina of their products—showing good resistance to oxidation—and the variety and high quality of their design. Yet the group was apparently a mounted warrior clan, like those who in the later centuries provided the dreaded cavalry masses of the Parthian armies and the Cossacks of Imperial Russia. This seems to follow from the predominance of weapons and horse and chariot trappings among the finds and from the fact that the animals which the trappings adorned were often found buried with their master in the same tomb. It is natural therefore to think of the

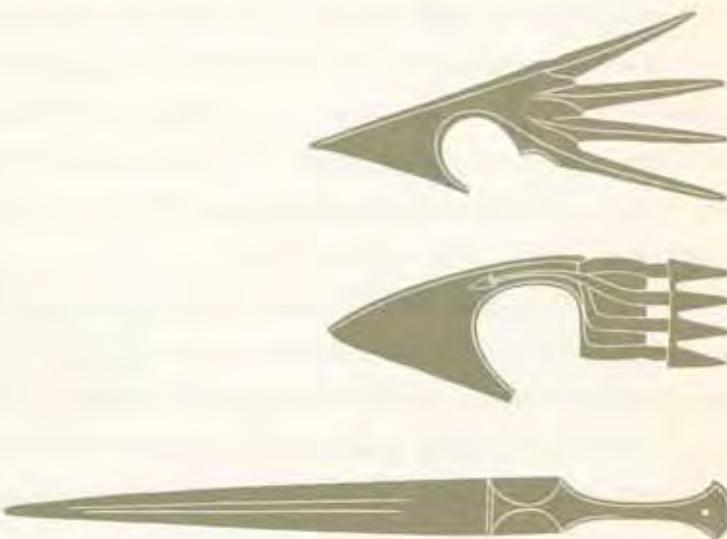
LURISTAN BRONZES





group as one with a nomadic background, and for this background we should probably look to the remote steppes of Inner Asia.

The Institute's holdings give a good cross-section through the entire range of the Luristan material and show how a culture otherwise undistinguished over many centuries in the artistic quality of its artifacts may nonetheless suddenly reveal unusual creative abilities in the work of a single medium, here that of bronze. Notable for the bold sweep of their simple lines and the balance of line and mass are the battle-axes, many enlivened by prongs projecting at the top, some adorned by sockets cast



ORNAMENTED BRONZE PICK, AXES, AND DAGGER • LURISTAN

to represent lions, boars' heads, or birds. Of no small interest, certainly, are the various types of snaffle and bar bits whose elaborate cheek-pieces represent strongly schematized but effective horses, winged ibexes, and the heads of horned animals. With them go the harness and chariot ornaments that combine animal shapes in designs of striking symmetry. Most fascinating of all are the mysterious "standards," obscure as to function, but structurally a simple combination of central pole and attached animal ornament. Where the pole is a plain shaft, pairs of attenuated lions or stylized ibexes mount it from opposite sides. Occasionally, however, the pole is rendered as a schematized human being, sometimes with duplicate heads and necks, in which case the attached animal elements are reduced to branchlike projections with recurrent heads of lions, ibexes, and griffins. The element of distortion and abstraction visible in these "standards" and the bold fusion of human and animal forms make them unusually significant witnesses to the artistic competence of the Luristan people.

In the execution of some of the animal forms and particularly in the ornament of the large pins and the cups and beakers, strong influences from late Assyrian art are noticeable. Whatever their origin, the people of the Luristan region learned quickly and well from the experienced craftsmen of the older culture in the fertile crescent. With the craftsmen of Mesopotamia, too, they share much of the delight in animals as material for decoration. But the extreme devotion to the animal motif, and



"STANDARD" AND BASE • LURISTAN

to animal form as in itself a sufficient medium for decorative purposes, suggests for this type of ornament still another, more distinctly native source. This source may well lie back in the regions of Inner Asia, where, as on the "standards," men and animals lived as one, and where there developed the "animal style" that eventually spread to southern Russia and the Caucasus.



TORQUE, BRACELET, AND WHETSTONE-HOLDER
LURISTAN



The Oriental Institute is proud to make accessible to the people of Chicago and to scholars and visitors from other parts of the nation and the world the magnificent objects displayed in the Iranian Hall of its Museum. To see them in their relation to the exhibits of the Egyptian, Babylonian, Assyrian, and Palestinian Halls is to find their importance clarified and enhanced. It is thoroughly evident from this relationship how fundamental is man's desire to express his sense of value and beauty and how successful his effort to share what was noblest in the work of others across the barriers of mountain, desert, and political frontier. Artists and craftsmen have ever been those who served and accomplished these ends most effectively, amply justifying our efforts to collect and enshrine the works of their skill and inspiration.

Seen in their relation to the other monuments from the ancient Near East, those of our Iranian Hall exhibit also their own individuality. They have been endowed by their creators with a bold rhythmic quality more continuously sustained and more subtly expressed than in the artistic products of any comparable Near Eastern culture. It is as though the Iranian artists had some basic sense of harmony as an essential ingredient of beauty and tended inevitably to manifest this in their creations. Hence the decorative character of their artistry, achieved by the introduction of ornamental detail oft-repeated in proper measure and proportion. Hence too the aura of nobility and of disciplined strength visible in both the

gigantic sculptured masses and in the smallest products of the goldsmith's work.

But though elevated above the crass and the commonplace by this rhythmic quality, ancient Iranian art never lost its connection with living reality, whether in choosing its elements of design from the normal environment of the people or in perpetuating that intimate association of men, plants, and animals that was apparently so common a feature in the life of the peoples of the Eurasian highlands.

There are many phases of ancient Iranian art and craftsmanship which our collection is unable to illustrate for lack of representative material. The Oriental Institute would welcome on the part of those who share its devotion to the best in man's cultural heritage the assistance it needs to support an Iranian program and to excavate, publish, and exhibit here at Chicago more that exemplifies Iran's role in the history of human civilization. For this no time could be more appropriate than the present.



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MUSEUM STAFF • P. DELOUGAZ *Curator* • W. BOYES *Secretary*

DESIGNS ON FRONT COVER • *Pottery Shapes TALL-I-BAKUN* • *Arrowheads LURISTAN*

Winged Bull ACHAEMENID EGYPT • *Bull's Head PERSEPOLIS*