



DAWĀT

DAWĀT (inkwell), a utilitarian receptacle that also served as a symbol or metaphor for the instrument of state, with a long history in Islamic Persia (see DAWĀ(T)DĀR). As a container for ink the *dawāt* could be attached to, or set within, a pincase (*qalamdān*); free standing; or carried suspended from a belt. Practical considerations dictated that the container be cylindrical, in order to prevent the accumulation of dried ink and other matter in the corners. Inkwells from early Islamic Persia have been preserved in glass, pottery, and bronze or brass (Allan, 1982b, p. 44). The metal versions, of which the earliest extant examples are dated to the 10th or 11th century, are by far the most numerous (Allan, 1982a, p. 32; idem, 1982b, pp. 44-45; Melikian-Chirvani, 1986, pp. 73-74); the vast majority of those surviving belong to the 12th-16th centuries. Because the cylindrical boxes usually have domical lids they resemble miniature architectural monuments.

The cylindrical containers from 12th- and early 13th-century Persia, which perhaps most closely resemble contemporary tomb towers, have flat shoulders on which the “drums” of the lobed domical lids rest; the latter are surmounted by knobbed finials ([Plate VIII](#)). Some well-preserved inkwells of this type have three trilobed loops attached about halfway up the wall of the container and three corresponding horizontal loops on the vertical rim of the lid; cords strung vertically through these loops made it possible for the inkwell to be suspended. This arrangement differed from that prevailing in the earlier 10th- or 11th-century versions, which were equipped with internal vertical channels, from base to lid, for suspension (Allan, 1982a, p. 32; Melikian-

Chirvani, 1986, fig. 2).

The 12th- and early 13th-century inkwells are generally inlaid with figural, abstract, and epigraphic ornament in silver and copper. Most of them have been attributed to Khorasan or Transoxania, on the basis of both the ornament and the content and style of the inscriptions (see, e.g., Allan, 1982a, pp. 32 ff.; Melikian-Chirvani, 1986, pp. 75-78). Characteristic decorative features include friezes of figures or medallions enclosing astrological symbols, with pacing animals (real or fantastic) or rows of birds as subsidiary motifs. The abstract ornament includes knots and arabesques. The heads of dragons, hares, or even bovines are frequently inserted among figures and within abstract ornament. Animated inscriptions in Arabic are also characteristic of metalwork from this region; they are usually invocations with a standardized vocabulary and word order (Melikian-Chirvani, 1982, p. 117).

Inkwells were characterized in Persian poetry and historical works from the 10th century on as symbols of royal and by extension ministerial office, a notion perhaps dating back to Sasanian Persia. For example, the early 12th-century Persian poet from Khorasan Adīb Šāber Termeḏī referred to the inkwell as an instrument of government (*dawāt . . . ālat-e dawlat ast*), punning on the dual meaning of the word *dawlat* as “good fortune” and “government” (Melikian-Chirvani, 1986, pp. 70-71). It has been proposed that certain extant inkwells of the 12th and 13th centuries, expressing celestial and royal symbolism through both their decoration and Arabic inscriptions, may in fact represent the so-called “state inkwell” (*dawāt-e dawlat*). Such identifications should be regarded as tentative, however, as very similar inscriptions are found on a variety of contemporary and later objects without clear royal contexts (e.g., Komaroff, 1992, pp. 63, 76 n. 108, 147, 166-67). Furthermore, the depiction of such scenes of “royal” entertainment as wine drinking and musicians are also found on other kinds of contemporary objects, most notably the so-called “Bobrinsky bucket” of 559/1163, now in the Hermitage, St. Petersburg; it was probably made for a religious dignitary (for the latest reading of the inscriptions, see Melikian-Chirvani, 1982, pp. 71, 82-83 nn. 61-62). Not all such objects were produced for patrons of royal or ministerial rank, as is clear from one late 12th- or early 13th-century example decorated with three figural cartouches, in one of which a seated figure is shown in the act of writing; it is accompanied by the Persian inscription “for the teacher” (*mo’allem-rā*; Melikian-Chirvani, 1982, p. 124).

This general type of inkwell, with some variations, seems to have been



produced into the 14th century. Some of the later versions are not clearly of Persian provenience, however, and may represent Meso-potamian, Syrian, or Egyptian workmanship (see, e.g., Melikian-Chirvani, 1986, figs. 14-16).

Several smaller cylindrical inkwells with bulbous, dome-shaped covers ([Plate IX](#)) survive from the 16th and 17th centuries (Komaroff, 1992, pp. 255-56, 260-61, figs. 35, 51, 54-56); two of them, one of brass inlaid with silver and gold and the other of silver inlaid with semiprecious stones, are still attached to tubular pencases (*Survey of Persian Art*, pl. 1387A; Rogers, no. 110). This type of combined inkwell and pencase was also known in the 15th century and is depicted in Timurid manuscript illustrations (Komaroff, pp. 124, 131 n. 29). The identical Persian poetic inscriptions on three extant inkwells of this type (see, e.g., Plate IX, above), all signed by the same craftsman, Mīrak Ḥosayn Yazdī, suggest that they may well have been intended as “state inkwells.” One poem includes the phrase *dawāt-e dawlat* and an indication that it is through the inkwell that the affairs of the world may be resolved. According to a second, the inkwell is used for the sultan’s signature, suggesting that these three inkwells were perhaps commissioned by, or for, the first Safavid ruler, Shah Esmā’īl I (907-30/1501-24; Melikian-Chirvani, 1986, pp. 81-83).

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