



HERMITAGE MUSEUM I. COLLECTION OF THE PRE- ISLAMIC PERIOD

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Among the most ancient objects of Iranian art in the Hermitage collection are 55 Elamite painted vessels of the late 4th-3rd millennium B.C.E. donated by the French Archaeological Mission in Persia at the beginning of the 20th century. Antiquities from Luristan (13th-8th century B.C.E.), among them bracelets, pins, bronze figurines and pottery, make a comparatively small collection. The Iron Age is represented also by several earthenware vessels of the Hasanlu type (10th-9th century B.C.E.) and by a varnished red-slip vessel from the area of Amlash donated to the Hermitage by Arthur Pope.

Among the objects of the Achaemenid period (6th-4th century B.C.E.) there is a fragment of one of the Persepolis reliefs—the head of one of the “immortals” of the royal guard (donated by the government of Iran in 1935 on the occasion of the international exhibition of Iranian art held in the Museum), a profiled golden bowl with lion-shaped handles (found in the 18th century near Astrakhan), several pieces of jewelry: gold torques with semi-precious stones, a plaque with the image of a winged man (called by some the Ahuramazdā



symbol), and animal figurines. Most of these objects come from the Siberian collection of Tsar Peter I. A small collection of Achaemenid seals include a cylinder seal of the late 5th century B.C.E. representing the triumph of a Persian king over Egypt, several chalcedony and carnelian stamp-seals of the Greco-Persian style, among them a remarkable seal with a combat between a horseman and a foot-soldier.

The Parthian period is represented mainly by finds from the site of Old Nisa (Turkmenistan), from the excavations of one of the first palaces of Parthian kings carried in 1947-63. Most of the objects coming from the excavations are now in the Museum of History in Ashkhabad (Hellenistic marble sculpture, clay bullae, ivory rhyta, silver and bronze figurines). The government of Turkmenistan donated to the Hermitage four ivory rhyta (2nd century B.C.E.) and several terracotta plaques once decorating the Parthian palace. The Nisa ostraca, over 2600 documents from the archives of the royal wine-cellars (last quarter of the 2nd–middle of the 1st century B.C.E.) are also in the Hermitage. Ivory rhyta from Nisa, strictly speaking, cannot be regarded as pieces of Iranian art. They were produced by Greco-Bactrian craftsmen and came to the treasury of the Parthian kings as spoils of war ca. 150 B.C.E. The Nisa ostraca, most valuable documents on Parthian economics and history, are now published in *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum* (Part II, Vol. II). Recently, in 1996, the Hermitage acquired a rare piece of Parthian metalwork, a silver gilded lobed plate decorated with a figurine of an ibex, presumably of the 1st-2nd century C.E., with a long Parthian inscription. The inscription records that in the middle of the 3rd century C.E. it belonged to the Sasanian viceroy of the Transcaucasian region (bidaxš), Narseh, son of Ardašir.

The Hermitage has the largest collection of silver vessels manufactured in Iran and Central Asia in the 3d-9th centuries. Pre-Islamic traditions in silverwork continued to the 9th century; therefore it is more convenient to consider the whole collection in the article dedicated to the pre-Islamic period. Most of these vessels come from chance finds and hoards discovered in the Kama and Ob' basins from the 1780s; some Hellenistic Iranian and Bactrian gold and silver vessels had been in the Siberian collection of Peter I. Oriental silverware were brought to the Kama and Ob' area mostly by Central Asian merchants in exchange for furs starting from the 6th century C.E. When Sasanian treasuries were looted by Bahrām Čōbin (in 589) and then by the Arabs in the 7th century, merchants obtained earlier vessels (3rd-5th century). There are finds of even earlier dates, e.g., a medallion representing one of the 1st century C.E.



Parthian kings from the Ob' region. The Kama and Siberian finds were transferred to the Hermitage mainly through the Imperial Archaeological Commission (from the 1860s). After the revolution of 1917 a large collection of the Stroganoff family came to the museum (1925), as did several other silver vessels from private collections. Between 1920 and 1940 the Hermitage received several finds and hoards from different parts of Russia. Several vessels came from finds in the Ukraine, North Caucasus, the Don region and from Georgia. Of the Ukrainian finds the most famous is the Perestchepino hoard, from the burial of some 7th-century nomadic chieftain found in the Poltava district in 1912. It contained several unique Sasanian gold vessels.

Figure 1. Bronze finial for a votive standard, Luristan, 8th-7th centuries B.C.E.

The whole collection was formed when Oriental silverware in Russia was of no particular commercial value, so it is free of fakes. The only fake is the plate representing Bahrām V (421-39) hunting lions (Orbeli and Trever, 1935, pl. 10) bought in Rawalpindi, where by the end of the 19th century there was already a well-developed antiquarian market. In all, the Hermitage has three gold and thirty-five (or thirty-six) silver Sasanian vessels, of which the most noteworthy are eleven plates with scenes of royal hunts (Trever and Lukonin, 1987). It is difficult to trace the exact limit between Sasanian and post-Sasanian periods; still three or four vessels can possibly be attributed to the second half of the 7th century or to the 8th century.

The collection of Sasanian seals numbers over 1200 items. Many of them come from famous European collections, such as the collection of the Duke d'Orleans purchased at the end of the 18th century for Catherine II, from Russian collections (Kastalsky, Kibalchich, Petrovski, Lemmlein) or from documented finds in the Caucasus and Central Asia. The most famous gems are the amethyst seal of Queen Dēnak (see DENAG), wife of Ardašir I (first half of the 3rd century), seal of a treasurer (*mardbed*) named Agnvist inscribed in Parthian, a chalcedony seal of the 6th century dignitary Māhān with the longest inscription in Middle Persian known in glyptic context. The collection of Parthian coins numbers over 3,000 pieces; it is one of the world's exceptional collections. Among rare coins there are drachms of the early years of Mithradates II minted in Margiana, coins of Sinatruces countermarked by the junior branch of the Arsacid family reigning in Sistān. There is a fine collection of minor South Iranian states: Persis, Characene, Elymais.

Figure 2. Detail, gold griffin with inlay, 4th century B.C.E.



The Sasanian collection is the richest in the world, and numbers over 6,000 coins, among them coins from celebrated old collections (Bartholomaei, Dorn) and from finds in Central Asia (collected by General Komarov). The rare coins include a double denar of Hormozd II, denars of Kōsrow I and II, a fine selection of Sasanian coins countermarked by rulers of Central Asian states (Soğd, Čāč), and local imitations of Sasanian coins. As for cultures of Iranian peoples beyond the present historical borders of Iran, different regions of Central Asia are well represented: five so-called Bactrian bowls were manufactured in Tokārestān in the 4th-7th centuries; five bowls of the same period come from Choresm (K^wār-azm); thirty-six vessels dating from the 6th-early 9th centuries are from Sogdiana or from different lands inhabited by Sogdians; two vessels are from Semirechye. From three to five vessels possibly were made in Merv at the time when it was the capital of the viceroys of the eastern part of the caliphate (8th-early 9th centuries). One bowl was most probably made in the realm of the Kābolšāhs in the 8th-9th centuries. The attribution of several remaining vessels remains problematic.

Figure 3. Ceramic vase with green glaze, Susa, 2nd-3rd centuries C.E.

The classification of Oriental silver is built mainly upon the Hermitage materials by reason of their wide scope, abundance, and authenticity (Marschak, 1986). Several post-Sasanian and Islamic bronze vessels acquired in the Caucasus should also be mentioned (Orbeli and Trever, 1935, pls. 71, 79, 80, 83; Trever and Lukonin, 1987, pls. 121-24). The other important parts of the Hermitage collection are archeological finds from Central Asia. Among them are objects collected by N. Veselovsky, B. Kastalsky, S. Dudin, V. Vyatkin before the revolution of 1917. Of greatest interest are terracotta figurines from Samarkand (1st-8th centuries, Trever, 1934) and ossuaries from Biya-Naiman and Samarkand (7th-8th centuries) with Zoroastrian images. Important archeological collections came in the decades of 1930-50: materials from Tali-Barzu and Kafyr-qala near Samarkand excavated by G. Grigor'ev (in 1938-40), including terracotta figurines and decorated pottery (2nd-8th centuries) and from excavations of V. Gaidukevich at Munchak-tepe (in 1943-44) and Shirinsai in Ustrushana. The Kushan antiquities of Bactria (Tokārestān) are represented by the Airtam relief (1st-2nd centuries) from the Termez region donated by the government of Uzbekistan. From 1960 the Kushan collection was expanded by pottery, inscribed vessels, and architectural ornamentation from the Buddhist site of Kara-tepe near Termez (excavated by B. Staviskiĭ).

The K^wārazmian expedition directed by S. P. Tolstov contributed several 1st-



century C.E. terracottas and a sculptured ossuary from Koj-krylgan-qala, fragments of (3rd century C.E.?) clay reliefs and wall-paintings from the Toprak-qala palace, and some other items. The Hermitage received also two alabaster ossuaries with paintings from Tok-qala (excavated by A. Gudkova). Sogdian art is represented in the Hermitage better than anywhere else. A shield with a painted figure of a horseman, textiles, objects of wood, metal, etc., also one document on leather used to cover a dagger sheath, were found in 1933-34 on Mount Mugh (the upper Zerafshan) in the 8th century fortress belonging to Dēwāštič (q.v.), the ruler of Panjikent. From 1948 the Hermitage received wall-paintings, clay and (carbonized) wooden sculpture, and some other objects from excavations in Panjikent (5th-8th centuries), in which the museum took and is still taking active part. The conservation of these objects was done by the Hermitage staff after the method developed by P. Kostrov. Among the most interesting objects are a 6th-century clay frieze representing fantastic sea creatures, wooden statues, paintings from the so-called “Hall of Rustam” (ca. 740 C.E.) illustrating the exploits of the hero, wall-paintings with scenes from the *Pañcatantra* and *Mahābhārata*. Many paintings and pieces of sculpture have been returned after their restoration and conservation to the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnology of the Tadjik Academy in Dushanbe and to the Museum of Rudaki in Panjikent. The Hermitage temporarily keeps some other fragments of paintings which are being restored: from Panjikent, Šahrestān (Ustrushana), and from the Buddhist monastery of Adzhina-tepe (the Vaxš valley). P. Kostrov and his team also conserved wall-paintings of the “Red hall” of Varakša near Bukhara (7th-8th centuries) excavated by V. Shishkin. Of these, one part is exhibited in the Hermitage, the other in the Museum of Art in Tashkent.

Figure 4. Carnelian stamp seal of “Xusraw the mage,” 4th century C.E.

Figure 5. Gilded silver dish, 6th century C.E.

Figure 6. Drawing of the Pazykyk Carpet;



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