The Hasanlu Bowl

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ONE glance at the gold bowl from Hasanlu with its varied scenes of gods, heroes, monsters, and men suffices to show that it ranks with the most significant works of ancient Near Eastern art now known. Its interest lies both in its rich iconography and in its lively, linear style, which makes full use of the metal worker's varied devices. The figures are in hammered relief; separate parts such as hair, limbs, garments, are bounded by lines; surfaces are differentiated by chased linear or dotted patterns. The execution of the designs shows such assurance and uniformity that the bowl must be the work of an experienced artist who belonged in the main-stream of a metal-working tradition. The problem which presents itself is the definition of that tradition in time and space. In other words, was the bowl made in a workshop at Hasanlu (or rather, in the unknown ancient town now being discovered by Mr. Dyson), or was it imported from elsewhere? Was it made shortly before it was buried, in the 9th century B.C., or was it an heirloom from an earlier century? Another problem arises in connection with the scenes represented on the bowl: are they motifs chosen at random from various sources for purposes of decoration, or is there a meaningful connection between them? Only a thorough analysis of the bowl's style and iconography can provide us with answers to these questions.

It is eight inches high with a diameter at the top of eight inches, and at the base also of eight inches. The thickness of the walls is greater than the photographs seem to show, namely three-sixteenths of an inch at the rim which is slightly tabbed at the top. Below is a double twist or guilloche seven-eighths of an inch wide, formed of triple strands with a dotted circle in each loop. A narrow groove separates the guilloche from the representations which decorate the body of the vessel. They are arranged in two registers which are merely divided by the imaginary ground line of the figures in the upper register. These figures represent three deities, each in a chariot of which the first two are each drawn by a mule, the third by a bull. Approaching the latter is a long-robed person, presumably a priest, holding a vase. He is followed by two men leading sacrificial animals.

All three deities appear to wear the same type of short-sleeved shirt over which a fringed shawl is wrapped. In the shirt of the second and third deity the round neck-line is indicated. All figures except the priest have long hair, marked by parallel gently curving lines converging in the back. Joints are indicated by double lines, only the elbows are marked by concentric curves, the ankles by circles. Foreheads are low, noses given varied shapes, occasionally jutting out prominently; lips are only a slight incision in the lower half of the face which is covered by a short beard. Again the priest differs from the other figures by having his hair brushed up in a forelock and shaved in the back where the stubby skin is shown, as it is also on the shaved cheeks and chin. In all figures the eye is enclosed by two curving lines, the upper one rising more steeply with the apex usually but not always off center and closer to the nose, thereby approximating a profile rendering.

The chariots are light vehicles with six-spoked wheels and with a box open in the back and provided with a handle which the charioteer could grasp when mounting. The scene seems to represent the worship of and sacrifice to these three chariot-borne gods of whom the first may be a weather god because of his association with a bull which is the usual mount and adjunct of that deity in Asia Minor, Syria, and Mesopotamia from about 2000 B.C. onwards. The god

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is further distinguished by a fillet and by rays or flames emanating from his shoulders which recall representations of the Mesopotamian Sun-god Shamash pictured with such shoulder rays in the 23d century B.C. during the rule of the powerful Akkad dynasty. It is the second deity of the bowl, however, who is more likely to represent a sun-god because he wears a disk flanked by rays or flames on his head. The third deity has a headgear of crescent-shaped horns which may have been meant to render the horned crown of the Mesopotamian gods.

In the lower register, we find not one connected scene but several single motifs of which some fill the entire field while others are placed one above the other. The ground line of the lowest figures is a guilloche formed of a single strand. Below the first god is an archer who rests his large bow on his instep. He has an arrow-filled quiver slung over his shoulder and wears a kilt patterned in herringbone chevrons indicated here and elsewhere on the bowl by minute rows of dots. From the border at the bottom of the kilt hang numerous long-fringed tassels. He has long hair and his head is circled by a snake whose head projects forward in the direction of an eagle who carries a woman aloft. The motif immediately suggests the representation of the Mesopotamian Shepherd king Etana who flew to heaven on the back of an eagle and who can be found on seal designs of the Akkad dynasty, in the 23d century B.C., like the sun-god with rays mentioned above. Not only does the eagle carry a human figure (though here it is a woman, not a man), but the manner in which the snake on the archer's head points toward the eagle recalls the widespread motif of the enmity of eagle and serpent which is woven into the preamble of the Etana story.

Proceeding from left to right, the next motif is a goddess riding a lion. With one hand she holds the lion's rein and a mirror, in the other hand she carries a wand or spindle which has a bulbous top. A thin wedge-shaped design on each shoulder may indicate that she is shown wearing large pins. The fact that she is enthroned on a lion and holds a mirror associates her with the type of Western Asiatic goddess represented by Kubaba, the protecting goddess of Carchemish who is pictured on a relief of that North Syrian town, dated about 900 B.C., likewise holding a mirror and enthroned on a lion. That goddess, however, holds a pomegranate, or a spindle with the top shaped like a pomegranate.

For the motif below the goddess on the lion, which shows two heroes attacking a long-haired, frontally postured demon, a parallel in which weapons are thrust into his head, comes from Tell Halaf, a site situated on the northern frontier of Syria. In the North Syrian relief, however, the rendering is much more formalized than in the lively style of the Hasanlu bowl. Moreover, representation of details is so precise here that we can recognize the type of each of the three daggers separating the motif of the goddess on the lion from the motif of a male figure tendering a cup to an empty bull-footed throne. The middle dagger of the three is an especially well defined type with the lower edge of the guard forming a crescent. Such daggers were found in tombs in the region east of Hasanlu toward the Caspian Sea, dated in the 12th and 11th centuries B.C. One wonders about the reason for placing these three daggers in the field. Were they meant to represent an offering like the sheep brought above, or were the daggers themselves symbols of gods?

Below the daggers and the enigmatic group of the man and the empty throne an extraordinary scene takes place: a woman tenders a child to a seated male figure who eagerly stretches out his hand to receive it, while holding in his other hand a hammer, presumably his emblematic weapon. Precedents for the motif of offering a small human figure can be found in earlier Iranian art but probably had a different meaning than the one here intended. The next scene is the most dramatic of the entire bowl: a hero, human or divine, battles a male monster whose upper body emerges from a mountain. The hero wears his long hair tied with a fillet, like the weather-god above, and a chevron-patterned kilt from the lower border of which hang tail-like tassels. His hands are protected by small ribbed shields which seem to have the function of boxing gloves in the contest with the monster which has claw-like fingers (except for the thumb) and only three shown on each hand. The mountain which protects the monster or which forms its lower body, rests on a crouching lion and ends at the back in an upward curving fishtail with three dog or wolf heads. The uppermost of these dog heads is partially surrounded by the flow of water spewed by the bull who draws the weather-god's chariot in the upper register. At this point a connection between the upper and lower registers is further stressed by the decoration of the background with small circles which reach from above to the back of the monster's fishtail. The association of the dog-headed fish-tailed part of the monster with water from the upper register suggests that it could have been thought of as a partly marine creature like the later Greek Scylla.

At the right of the monster and isolated by its bulk from the other figures is a goddess standing on two rams, opening her chevron-patterned mantle to expose her nudity in a manner well known from Syrian representations of the second millennium B.C. The goddess wears a necklace with three pendent crescents, a type of pendant for which numerous parallels can be produced from Western Asiatic excavations.

It is tempting to associate the three last described scenes with a Hurrian myth preserved in Hittite translation dealing with the doomed attempt of a Chronos-like "Elder God" to retain his domination of the gods (and the world) in the face of the ascent to power by the vigorous and youthful weather-god. The following summary of the myth of Kummarbis is based on the translation of A. Goetze in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts to the Old Testament,* edited by J. B. Pritchard and published by the Princeton University Press. This "Elder God," Kummarbis, descends to the Sea where a rock gives birth to a son of the god. The "Good-women and the Mother-goddesses" attended at his birth and set him upon his father's knee. Kummarbis hatched plans for the child to "attack the Storm-god and tear [him] to pieces like a mortal" . . . to "shoot down all the gods from the [sky] like birds and let him break them to pieces [like] empty pots." He decides to place the child, whose body was made of diorite, upon the shoulder of a mythological personage named Ubelluris. There the child was to grow a cubit a day, one acre a month. Within a short time the diorite man had grown into the sky and had made the Storm-god's consort leave her temple so that she "could no longer hear the message of the gods nor could she see with her eyes the Storm-god. . . ." In a first encounter with the diorite man, the Storm-god appears to have been defeated but a second encounter must have ended in the Storm-god's victory over the diorite monster.

While the names of the deities of our bowl may be different from those of the myth just mentioned, the motif of the goddess, isolated (at least on one side) by the diorite man, the offering of the new-born child to his father, and especially the powerful battle rendered in the bowl with all the fury of a world-shaking contest even to the smirk on the face of the mountain-monster which reflects the diorite man's self-confidence as expressed in the myth, all correspond closely to the literary description. We may speculate therefore whether a myth celebrating the Weather-god's victory over a mountain and sea monster was woven into the ritual pattern of the people for whom the bowl was made and whether it was therefore used at certain solemn occasions when that victory was celebrated.

Having made some suggestions for the interpretation of the scenes on the bowl, we must try to determine its date and style. As shown in the course of the description of the single motifs, association of specific details with dated objects from other regions weighs heavily on the side of a date before 900 B.C. rather than for one in the later 9th century, the level in which the bowl was found. Aside from these associations to which many more could have been added, there are two considerations which point to a date between 1100 and 900 B.C. rather than before or after those dates. The reason it is not likely to have been made later is that there is no evidence of the pervading influence of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, so noticeable in other objects found at Hasanlu and so strongly reflected in the works made elsewhere on the periphery of the Assyrian Empire from the 9th to the 7th centuries B.C. This also applies to the type of chariot pictured on the bowl which is of the light type represented in monuments of the second millennium B.C. rather than the heavy Assyrian type which prevails after the early 9th century B.C. Lastly, the fringes of the shawls in which some of the figures of the bowl are swathed are not long and softly undulated as in the Neo-Assyrian renderings, but resemble the short and pointed fringes found on an altar of the thirteenth century king of Assyria, Tukulti Ninurta I (1263-28 B.C.). Yet the style of the bowl does not conform to the subtle modeling found in that earlier Assyrian monument, but is more linear in character. This is not a matter of technique alone but of artistic intent. A preference for linear over modeled rendering can be observed from Iran to Palestine in the 11th and 10th centuries B.C.

In addition to being placed in the general stylistic pattern of the period, the bowl can also be associated specifically with the style of Iran as known from the monuments of Susa, which always manifested a linearizing and patternizing tendency. This tendency is most obvious in the design on the bottom of the bowl which has four rams, indicated in outline only, walking around a checkered square. The whole design is enclosed within a finely hatched chevron border, a type of pattern which would be found more frequently after 1100 B.C. than before, while the double guilloche which circles the top of the bowl is an earlier motif. The single guilloche of the lower edge occurs both earlier and later.

It is not only the general affinity to the linear tendency of Iranian style which indicates that the bowl was made in that country, but also small details which reflect specifically Iranian customs and ideas. The richly braided hairdress of the female figures, for example, can be found in Susa

and Luristan as can the forelock of the priest in the upper register of the Hasanlu bowl. Furthermore, the manner in which the figures sit with their legs bent at the knee and presumably crossed, likewise corresponds to renderings from Susa. On a seal impression from Susa dateable about 2500 B.C. even iconographical predecessors of the Hasanlu figures can be found in goddesses seated on lions in the manner just described. The fact that the archer in the bowl sets his bow on his foot seems to reflect a specifically Iranian custom since we find it again in the two figures of a Late Achaemenian tomb at Qyzqapan, but not outside of Iran. Another element of the bowl for which Iranian associations might be claimed is the flight of the eagle who carries a woman toward heaven. This motif appears about seventeen hundred years later in post-Sassanian metal-work. Whether there really was a connection or not cannot be said without having some intermediate links.

Not only should we locate the bowl in Iran on the evidence just presented but, as a working hypothesis, also in the ancient town which the University Museum is excavating at Hasanlu. Another gold bowl closely related in style to that of Hasanlu was found in a grave at Kalardasht on the Caspian shore. It has three walking lions worked in the round and attached by rivets to the bowl. The style shows the same taut vigor in the rendering of the lions as in the Hasanlu bowl and also the mark of the swastika on the haunch. Kalardasht also yielded a dagger like the one with crescent design pictured on the Hasanlu bowl, but no other metal objects of the period which would point toward a flourishing industry in the vicinity. Hasanlu, on the other hand, seems to have had a continuous tradition of producing excellent metal objects.

An indication that we should not place the workshop of the bowl further to the northwest is given by the renderings of figures on a silver goblet found at Trialeti, east of Tiflis in the Caucasus. While certain details of costume and furniture such as the tail-like tassels of the garments and the bull's feet of the throne suggest some relationship with Hasanlu customs as reflected in the bowl, and while even the chinless short-bearded men seem like caricatures of the ethnic type found on the bowl, the style of the Caucasus vessel is stiffer, cruder, less accomplished.

The bewildering number of works of art with which the bowl from Hasanlu has been associated throughout these pages reflect the various sources of its style and iconography. These, however, can be assembled in several clearly defined groups and the results will give some suggestions for the elucidation of one of the least known periods of Western Asiatic development. The ancient Mesopotamian elements lead us back to the 23d century B.C. when the Akkad dynasty extended its rule over large parts of western Iran and when seals of the period found at Susa cannot be distinguished from those made in the Mesopotamian homeland. A residue of strong Akkadian influence may have lingered in the artistic repertory of western Iran. The second and most significant source of influence is North Syrian art of the late second and early first millennium B.C. The question arises whether this influence only came through minor works seen by the artists of western Iran or whether we should assume that they also shared a common background with their North Syrian colleagues. If the identification of the representations on the bowl with a myth like that of Kummarbis is accepted, their common background would be that of the Hurrians, a people located at several sites in northern Mesopotamia in the third millennium B.C. but coming to prominence there and in North Syria only in the course of the second millennium B.C. Further excavation will tell whether the remains of the peoples preceding those of the destruction level at Hasanlu give any basis for supposition of a Hurrian substratum at that site.

The third source of influence and connections is the Elamite monuments of Susa with which the Hasanlu bowl shares details of costume and of such technical devices as the use of dots and rings to differentiate surfaces. Numerous associations, furthermore, exist with the bronzes of Luristan. The date here assumed for the bowl, however, is earlier than that of these bronzes. Similarities in costume, hairdress, and even stylistic relations, may therefore be explained by common preferences in these two neighboring regions.

Lastly there are the connections with the Caucasus through the renderings on the silver goblet of Trialeti. As implied above, however, the workmen who produced the type of metalwork of which the Trialeti piece is an example may themselves have been influenced by Hasanlu rather than have contributed significantly to the Hasanlu style. These relations to the Caucasus area, however, constitute another point which Mr. Dyson's work will clarify.

The fact that he asked the present writer to contribute her ideas on the bowl instead of reserving the discussion of his most spectacular find for himself, is an example of the most generous type of scholarship. It emanates a glow as radiant as that of the gold bowl of Hasanlu itself.