

An Iranian Gold Piece

By

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Herodotus tells us that when the Persian fleet was wrecked off Magnesia in Thessaly in 492 B.C. on its way to punish Athens for aiding the rebellious Ionians, a man who farmed land along that coast gained great wealth by collecting gold and silver drinking cups and other precious objects that washed ashore.

This historical incident points up the extreme difficulty facing the expert today when trying to ascertain the validity and the origins of many objects of precious metals discovered by accident and offered for sale, or even in some instances excavated by expeditions. In some circumstances it is possible by laboratory analysis (spectroscopic and X-ray analysis for example) to determine the genuineness of the materials and even, when impurities are present, to find the origin of the ores. Gold alone, among the precious metals, is still beyond most of these methods. Consequently it is only in terms of "style" that one can evaluate the probable relationship of a gold specimen to its original cultural milieu.

Styles in a given area are normally defined by a group of objects which all share a number of common elements—arrangement of the design motifs, their placement on the object, technique of manufacture, use of specific details, and so on. In the Zagros region along the frontier of Iraq and Iran in the first millennium B.C., two well established styles are known: Late Assyrian (as seen in objects from Nimrud, Nineveh, and Ashur) and Achaemenian (as seen in a few objects from Persepolis, but even more as seen in the Persepolis reliefs). To these may be added elements of the so-called "Scythian" style (known best from discoveries in South Russia and Pazyryk) which appear here partially in connection with the short period during which the Scythians ravaged the area in the seventh century B.C. Still another style, heavily influenced by the Assyrian, and indeed in many instances scarcely recognizable as a separate style, is that of Urartu, the kingdom around Lake Van in eastern Turkey in the early first millennium B.C. It seems probable that the Medes, who preceded the Achaemenians, also would have had a style distinctly their own.

The gold piece shown here, purchased in 1955, represents one of these problematical objects. It measures $10\frac{1}{2}$ by $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches and is quite thin. It has been fashioned by hammering into a plaque with slightly raised figures and borders. The edges were originally bent to fit over the corners of the object to which it was attached—which was probably of wood, perhaps a box or a quiver. Small holes with the

impression of the heads of the tacks that went through them may be seen around the sides. The top of the piece has been cut away and we are thus denied knowledge of the complete form. A somewhat similar piece in a private collection ends with a large disc at the top filled by two rampant lions and it may well be that such a top exists somewhere for our plaque. The outer edge is bordered by a double raised line. A margin is then left which is wider at the bottom than along the sides. The central series of registers is framed by a single raised line to which is added a zigzag decoration along the lower edge made by the blunt tip of a small punch in pointillé fashion. Within the central panel are the remains of ten registers separated by single raised lines. Five of these registers contain paired lions; the alternate five, a floral pattern. This latter is most interesting as it recalls similar patterns on objects already known, but fails to repeat any of them to a precise degree. The larger frond-like element comes quite close to one on a silver rhyton in the Treasure of the Oxus. The bordering zigzag done in a solid line occurs on a silver pendant from Ziwiye. The floral elements in general have a curiously simplified and geometric quality.

The registers containing paired lions are arranged also in pairs. The two lower registers and the uppermost contain opposed lions flanked at either side by stylized trees; the two central registers have the lions themselves flanking a centrally placed tree. The trees at once bring to mind similar ones on the Persepolis reliefs. On close examination, however, one discovers that the latter are much more naturalistic, as they have the tiny off-shoot branches indicated along the diagonal branches, whereas in the piece illustrated here these are eliminated in favor of the patterned effect of simple parallel lines. As with the floral registers, the trees provide a curious geometric simplicity of their own.

The lions themselves also share this geometric quality. Their muscles, so accurately if bluntly rendered in Assyrian reliefs, have here been completely stylized in the forelegs. Yet, surprisingly, the haunches and rear legs retain a modeled quality. The elaborately chased manes of the lions flanking the central trees are probably meant to indicate the male, as opposed to the sleeker and less hairy females seen below. The general presentation recalls the walking lion sketched on the hem of the king's robe in the Palace of Darius at Persepolis. The stylization does not fit readily into any of the classical forms. It is clearly not Late Assyrian as it is

too abstract. But it does not conform to the beautifully modeled surfaces which we have come to associate with Achaemenian art. Yet at the same time it is too bold and simple in execution to belong to the Ziwiye group. It thus appears to fall somewhere between the earlier Assyrian and Ziwiye representations, but to be not yet fully classical Achaemenian. Perhaps the safest venture at the moment is that it is the product of a goldsmith working in western Iran sometime between these two periods, that is, between the seventh and the fifth centuries B.C.

EXPEDITION NEWS

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SUMER AND THE INDUS VALLEY

Dr. Samuel Noah Kramer has just returned from an eight months' trip, the principal purpose of which was to investigate at first hand in Pakistan and India the archaeological and epigraphic material of the "Indus" civilization, in order to compare it with the relevant Sumerian remains, thus acquiring a deeper understanding of their interconnections and interrelations. That there was considerable commercial and cultural contact between Sumer and the Indus Valley is quite certain as some thirty "Indus" seals have actually been found in Sumer, and must have been brought there in some way from their land of origin; hundreds if not thousands more must still lie buried in the ruins. In searching the Sumerian literary texts for possible clues, Dr. Kramer came to the conclusion that Dilmun, the Sumerian "paradise" may turn out to be the land of the "Indus" valley civilization. He has now spent fruitful months visiting archaeological sites and museums searching for evidence to support this theory.

Prior to his visit to Pakistan and India, Dr. Kramer attended the meeting of the International Congress of Orientalists in Moscow and spent time in London, Jena, and Istanbul working on Sumerian literary texts. He visited Iran, both to see its famous archaeological sites and to lecture. While in India and Pakistan he gave numerous lectures on the interconnection of the Sumerian and "Indus" civilizations. He came home by way of Japan where he had been invited to give a series of talks under the auspices of the Near Eastern Society of Japan and the University of Kyoto.

SUGGESTED READING

EASTER EGGS AND EASTER BREAD

OLYA DMYTRIWI, *Ukrainian Arts*. New York. 1952.

F. MARIAN MCNEILL, *The Silver Bough*, Vol. II, A Calendar of Scottish National Festivals, Candlemas to Harvest Home. Glasgow. 1959.

ALFRED L. SHOEMAKER, *Eastertide in Pennsylvania*, A Folk Cultural Study. Kutztown. 1960.

Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde, Vol. 53. Basel. 1957. This is a special issue dealing with Easter Eggs and Easter Breads throughout Europe.

THE AUTHORS



ROBBINS BURLING ("Boys of the Yellow Robe") has been associated with the University of Pennsylvania since 1957, where he is Assistant Professor of Anthropology. Dr. Burling obtained his Ph.D. degree from Harvard in 1958, the subject of his dissertation being *Garó Avuncular Authority and Cross-Cousin Marriage*. He spent the years 1954-1956 in the Garo Hills of Assam, India, as a Fellow of the Ford Foundation, doing a social anthropological study of the Garo. He has compiled a grammar of the Garo language which is now in press. In 1959-1960, he was Visiting Lecturer in Anthropology under the Fulbright Program at the University of Rangoon, Burma. It was during this time that he spent two months in Hopong with members of the Department of Anthropology of that university investigating the culture of the neighboring peoples.



MARIJA GIMBUTAS ("Timber-Graves in Southern Russia") is Research Fellow of Harvard University in the Archaeology of Europe, and for the year 1961-62 has been elected a Fellow of the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford, California. She has done graduate work in the archaeology, linguistics, and ethnology of Europe at the University of Vilnius, Lithuania and the University of Vienna, Austria, and at Eberhard-Karl University, Tübingen, Germany, from which she obtained her Ph.D. degree in 1946, as well as at Harvard. While her major scientific work at Harvard during the last ten years has been devoted to the prehistory of Eastern Europe, she is also interested in the prehistory of Siberia, and since 1956 has been working with the physical anthropologist, Dr. Janos Nemeskeri of Budapest, on culture change in Europe at the start of the second millennium B.C. as evidenced by the physical anthropological and archaeological data.



MARGARET L. ARNOTT ("Easter Eggs and Easter Bread") teaches English to International students at the University of Pennsylvania. She holds a Master's degree in Cultural Anthropology from the Kennedy School of Missions of the Hartford Seminary Foundation, Hartford, Connecticut, her thesis being entitled *Folk Customs Surrounding the Great Days of Easter in Greece*. For three years, 1946-1949, Miss Arnott taught English in the Boys School of Anatolia College, Thessaloniki, Greece, and later in 1953 returned to Greece to continue her study of religious folk customs. She holds a diploma from the University of Athens and has published in Greece, Switzerland, and the United States. Since 1957, she has worked on the Friedman Collection of Judaica for Houghton Library at Harvard University.