

The Asian Art Museum of San Francisco



SELECTED WORKS



THE ASIAN ART MUSEUM
OF SAN FRANCISCO



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The Commissioners of
The Asian Art Museum of San Francisco
and
The Trustees of the Asian Art Museum Foundation
dedicate this book to

Rand Castile
Director of the Asian Art Museum, 1985–1994

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FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To travel Europe is to assume foreseen inheritance. . . . But to travel in . . . Asia is to discover a novelty previously unsuspected and unimaginable. . . . Suddenly, as it were, in the opening of an eye, the potential world—the field of man and his environment—is doubly extended. The stimulus is inconceivable to those who have not experienced it.

—Robert Byron, *First Russia, Then Tibet*, 1933

The character of the art in this book is broad, inventive, original, and stunning in its compass. For the arts of Asia are as vast as mankind, and as complex and remarkable. Yet, while they conform to little of what Western artists know or knew, these arts are born of grand traditions, nurtured talents, and splendid ideas. The arts of Asia originate in the largest of Earth's continents and represent the oldest continuum of civilized activity in this world.

Asian arts arise from perspectives magnificently different from those of Western concepts and attitudes of expression toward landscapes, peoples, and the accoutrements of everyday life. It is appropriate to begin this volume with the wisdom of Asia's ages—with, in fact, a citation from Confucius, the great teacher and instiller of values by whose words many have charted their lives:

The gentleman behaves in harmony, but never conforms; the man of small character conforms, but never behaves in harmony.

Asian artists represented in this book epitomize this dictum, for the best artists always extended the sights and insights of their audience by original and profound reflection upon their times and the world around them. The artists did not conform to established ways. Instead, they sought new harmonies.

An art museum's handbook is a guide to its collections, for collections are the key to the museum's qualities, purposes, and programs. Handbooks, once meant to be carried as one moved about the galleries—and this is still done—more and more have become standard references as well. This publication, long in the making, represents the first comprehensive treatment of the large and important holdings given to us by Avery and Elizabeth Brundage and by many other and subsequent donors.

Museums in the United States go back to the mid-nineteenth century, a time of America's great industrial and intellectual expansion. Americans of means traveled, and in their travels acquired works of art, much as the English had done a century earlier. The accumulation of these objects and pictures formed many of the great art museums of this country.

With few exceptions, museums west of the Mississippi are relatively recent in establishment, not often possessed of vast treasures gathered over long years of local patronage, nor have they necessarily benefitted from large endowments, like those accumulated over time by many eastern institutions. The Asian Art Museum, however, stands upon the extraordinary foundation laid by one dedicated and accomplished collector: Avery Brundage. His gift to San Francisco of some ten thousand objects

represents one of the great American benefactions. Avery Brundage's single vision was to build a comprehensive museum devoted exclusively to Asian art. Like Mr. Charles Freer of the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Brundage succeeded admirably.

The objects presented in this handbook are mostly from Mr. Brundage, but others have joined us and extended his vision with gifts of important Asian art in fields where the Olympian was not able to finish his work. Our task now is to continue a harmonious expansion of the Brundage collections, attempting through acquisition and gift to complete what he began so well.

This handbook presents a selection by our curators of the highlights of the Asian Art Museum collections. It is, therefore, simply an introduction to the subject, but it is also an invitation for the reader to investigate further, to visit the museum, and to see at first hand the arrayed masterworks of Asian art installed in the galleries.

We are grateful to the curators who authored this book. Their scholarship, specific knowledge of the collection, and dedication to the museum are important to the success of our collecting and to our programs. Dr. Patricia Berger, Curator of Chinese Art, Ms. So Kam Ng, former Associate Curator, Department of Education, and Mr. Clarence Shingraw, Chief Curator Emeritus, and Manni Liu, Acting Director, Chinese Culture Center, San Francisco, contributed to the handbook on subjects relating to Chinese art. Ms. Terese Tse Bartholomew, Curator of Indian and Himalayan Art, wrote entries in her fields, and Richard Kohn, independent scholar and adjunct associate curator for the exhibition *Wisdom and Compassion: The Sacred Art of Tibet* (1991),

co-authored two entries in this area. Dr. Kumja Paik Kim, Associate Curator of Korean Art, completed the citations for Korea. Dr. Nancy Tingley, Paul L. and Phyllis Wattis Foundation Curator of Southeast Asian Art, wrote the sections covering her area of expertise. Ms. Yoshiko Kakudo, Curator of Japanese Art, and Dr. Yoko Woodson, Associate Curator of Japanese art, wrote the sections treating our second largest collection. Dr. Terry Allen, noted historian of Islamic art, wrote the essays for objects in this area. Curator of Education Richard Mellott supervised the entire project, assisted by Michael Morrison and Kathleen Scott. Mrs. Hanni Forrester, head of the museum's photographic services department, coordinated the taking of photographs for the book. Museum photographer Kaz Tsuruta increases still further his high reputation with the images in this publication. Our registration department provided information about the collection and coordinated the movement of art works in their usual efficient manner. Ms. Lorna Price served most capably as its editor and editorial coordinator.

I thank as well the good volunteers who lead the museum, especially Mr. Ian Wilson, Chairman, The Asian Art Commission, and Mr. Johnson Bogart, Chairman, The Asian Art Museum Foundation. They inspire and encourage us with their outstanding leadership.

All of us at the Asian Art Museum are here to serve the art entrusted to us, and in that service we trust this handbook of the collections will help us reach out to new as well as familiar audiences through the great arts of Asia.

RAND CASTILE, Director
The Asian Art Museum of San Francisco



NEAR FAST



PIN WITH CERVIDAE

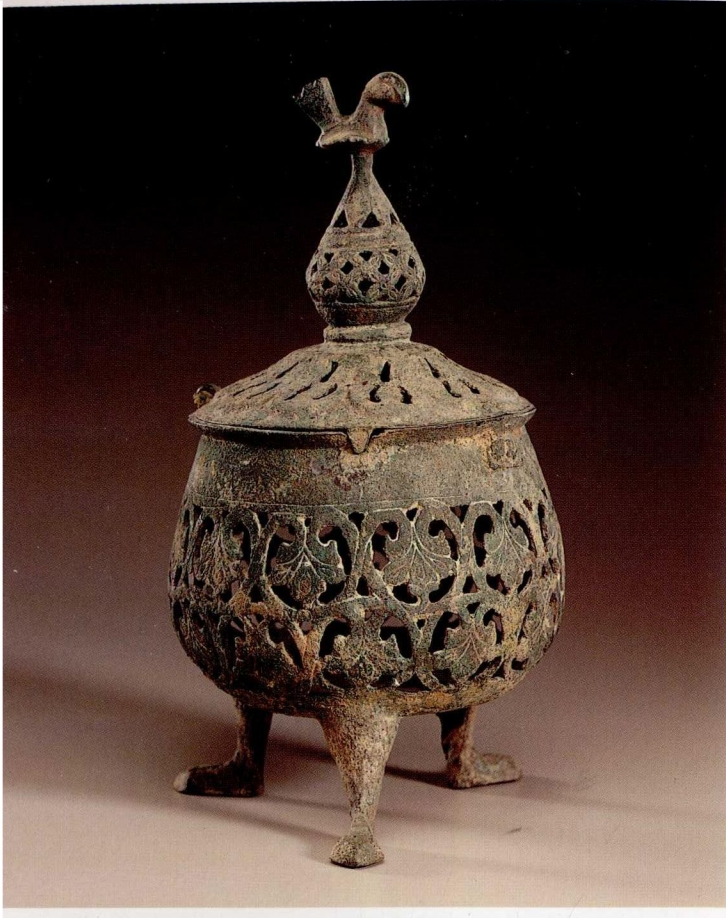
Iran, Luristan; 8th–7th century B.C.
 Bronze
 L: 7¼ in. (20.9 cm)
 The Avery Brundage Collection
 B62 B132

Engaging abstract bronzes like this pin found a responsive audience when they came onto the world art market following World War I. Their fantastic metamorphoses and economy of detail appealed to eyes familiar with the art of the new century, and they became fixtures in collections of non-Western art.

This pin is one of a group of bronzes from the mountainous region of Luristan in western Iran, roughly halfway between Baghdad and Isfahan; they are attributed to the ninth to seventh centuries B.C. They were cast by the lost-wax technique, a very ancient process. Similar pins offered as votives were found at a shrine excavated in 1938 at Dum Surkh. Most pieces are identified as horse-trappings; the shape of this pin, however, is suitable for a finial or a protome.

The art of the Luristan bronze-founders lay in their irrepressible inclination to turn hardware into animals. These deerlike animals grow as if from one common body or stem, their long necks attached to bumps that suggest shoulders. They thrust forward from the pointed end, where a dog jumps up the erect neck of a bearded goat or antelope, to the short, doubled heads at the front, which are bent forward radically. The forward thrust of the composition is heightened by hatched arrows engraved along the shaft. This complex, open form attracts maximum attention to a small object and makes economic use of material.

T.A.



INCENSE BURNER

Iran or Syria; ca. 12th–13th century
Bronze

H: 9½ in. (23.7 cm)

Gift of the Asian Art Museum Foundation
B69 B12

Incense was part of everyday life among well-to-do Near Easterners from Antiquity onward. In the Islamic period, Egypt in particular produced an ever-changing succession of artistically wrought incense burners for both Christians and Muslims. Openwork cast-bronze incense burners with grape leaves and bird finials survive, dating from early Islamic Egypt into the Fatimid dynasty (4th–6th century A.H./10th–12th century A.D.).

The Antique model of freestanding incense burner was small, with a long handle. The handle was later eliminated and the vessel enlarged, so that part of it would remain cool enough to grasp while it was in use. Later incense burners often have trays inside for the incense.

While it fits within an established genre, this vessel has an unusual shape: a swelling openwork body, flat and solid on the bottom, standing on three tapered feet. The long handle, now missing, was once riveted opposite the lid's hinge and would have extended the composition and balanced the body's roundness. The vessel lacks a tray. Smoke rose through the grape leaves in distinct streams, merging like clouds around the bird. The lid's slit openings may have been designed to impart their profile to the ascending smoke.

In both Egypt and Syria the motifs and genres of Late Antique art lingered for centuries after they had been displaced in Iraq and Iran. The grape leaves, with their incised details, are a specifically Egyptian design element. T.A.



SIYALK STEMMED CUP

Iran; Siyalk Level III style,
late 4th millennium B.C.
Pottery with painted black motifs
H: 11½ in. (28.7 cm)
The Avery Brundage Collection
B60 P469

This large stemmed cup, likely used for social drinking occasions, belongs to a traditional type common in the mid-fourth millennium. Many similar cups have been excavated at Tappah Siyalk in western Iran.

Siyalk stemmed cups usually show animals in silhouette and contained by simple geometric frames. Sometimes the animals stand in linear groups on a ground line, like a frieze; birds may appear in stacked columns. Siyalk potters were interested in varying sharply the vessels' profiles. This one has a concave foot, a slightly convex lower body, and a straight-walled upper part that flares gently toward the rim.

The painter has rendered the antelope-like animals with lean and muscular

silhouettes and a radically back-slanted posture expressive of their agility. The erect heads and loosely curving horns anchored to the upper border achieve a balance of forces that has the authority of numberless repetitions.

Vertical grids separate the animals and also focus the eye on them. Their finely drawn lines contrast with the thick-thin combinations of the upper and lower borders, organizing our gaze like good typography. Stippled on the foot, rows of upward-pointing isosceles triangles and soft, ovoid lozenges lead the eye up these most visible segments. The underside of the body has been left blank, to lighten the scheme. The cup's matte surface, characteristic of much prehistoric pottery, unifies the surface and fosters the perception that the painted decoration is part of the fabric of the vessel.

T.A.



STAG-SHAPED VESSELS

Northwestern Iran, Amlash; Marlik style,
ca. 10th century B.C.

Earthenware

H. P1: 11 in. L: 9½ in.

(27.5 × 23.7 cm)

H. P9+: 11¾ in. L: 8½ in.

(28.4 × 21.6 cm)

Gift of the Asian Art Museum Foundation

B68 P1, B62 P9+

Through the town of Amlash, on the Caspian Sea, the ceramics of an otherwise unknown ancient culture have reached the art market since the 1950s. They are presumed to come from the Iranian provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran, where excavations have revealed tombs containing a range of related pottery dating from the late second millennium B.C. well into the first. The wares include pitchers, cups, jugs, and figurines in the form of people as well as zoomorphic vessels. These examples are probably made for pouring rather than drinking, their heads forming spouts.

The two stags are sleek and smoothly modulated, but not at all simple. They are also surprisingly different, showing

the wide variation possible within so restrained a genre. Both capture a certain foursquare, attentive stance but in opposed ways. The red stag stands assertively, the front of the body thrust forward, with a break in contour behind the shoulder; behind it the body swells toward solidly planted hindquarters.

The gray stag, by contrast, seems surprised and inquisitive, with ears laid back and head turned as if ready to bound away. The lines of the body are as smooth as possible and describe it less naturalistically, but they create a sharper contrast between the long, slender body and the spiky antlers and ears. This is a remarkable characterization subtly achieved.

T.A.



IL-KHANID STAR-SHAPED TILE,
dated 1293

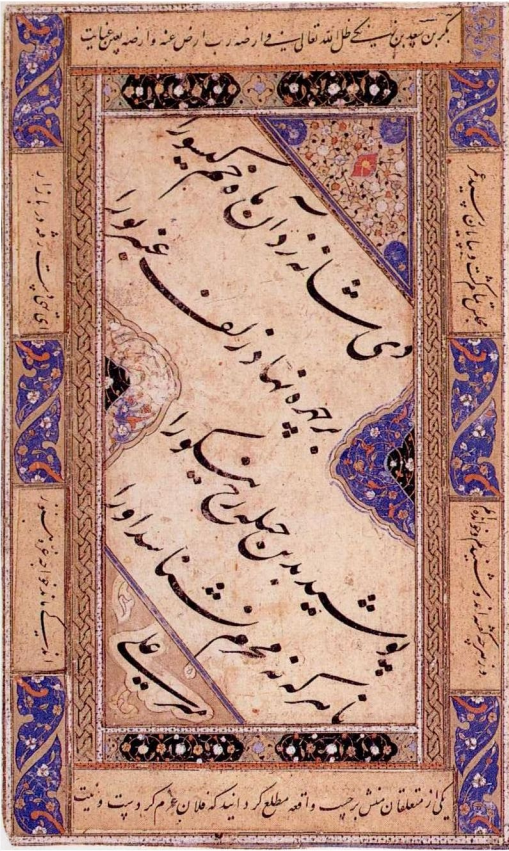
Iran, probably from Sultanabad;
reign of Gaykhatu (1291–1295)
Earthenware with lustre decoration
Diam: 8 in. (20.0 cm)
The Avery Brundage Collection
B60 P2148

Chinese dragons and phoenixes flew into the art of Islamic Iran in the seventh century A.H./thirteenth century A.D., after Chinggis Khan established a trans-Asian empire. Though the years of the Mongol invasions had devastated Iran, Chinggis's successors in Iran, the Il-Khanids (r. 8th/14th century) presided over the most brilliant artistic florescence the Islamic world ever knew. By 691/1291, the Il-Khanids had revived the economy, arts, and traditional apparatus of culture in Iran, though they had not yet adopted Islam.

Very similar tiles dating to 671/1271 have been found in a secure archaeological context at Takht-i-Sulayman, where the Sasanians and after them the Mongols erected palaces. These dado tiles in-

clude eight-pointed stars the same size as this one, and the cross shapes needed to complete a solid tile array.

In Islamic art the Chinese phoenix became the Iranian *simurgh*, the great royal bird of the epic *Shah Namah* (Book of Kings). Here it soars into a cloud-filled sky, its wings stretching to the points of the octogram. The cloud shapes derive from Chinese models, but are scattered in reserve against a dark ground in the same way that palmette leaves and birds are used in pre-Mongol Persian lustre pottery. Around the tile edge, Persian verses inscribed in an indifferent hand praise a slender, musky lover who is compared to the sun; the date appears in numerals in the upper right-hand corner. T.A.



ILLUMINATED PAGE OF NASTA'LIQ SCRIPT

Mir 'Alī Haravī (d. 1556)
Iran; Safavid dynasty, early 16th century
Ink and colors on paper
H: 8½ in. W: 5¾ in. (21.6 × 13.0 cm)
Gift of the Todd G. Williams Memorial
Fund and the Society for Asian Art
B87 D6

Mir 'Alī Haravī produced calligraphy famous among and sought after by the princes of three dynasties. His birthdate is unknown, but he lived "for a long time" in Herat, even after the Timurid dynasty fell in 913 A.H./1507 A.D. and was replaced first by the Uzbek Turks, then the Safavids. In 1528 he was brought, apparently against his wishes, to the Uzbek capital, Bukhara, where he died thirty years later.

Mir 'Alī was a master of the *nasta'liq* (hanging) script, in which this *qit'a* is written. In this genre a few lines of poetry are written diagonally on a small sheet, then illuminated and framed with decorative borders and smaller calligra-

phy samples from the same hand. All were written with a reed pen. Such pieces were avidly collected and often bound into albums.

These six unrelated lines were intended to be appreciated as examples of the calligrapher's art. Mir 'Alī's signature appears in the lower left triangle. The main inscription is from an unidentified poem. The six smaller lines of writing were cut from one or two folios of the *Gulistan* (Rose Garden) of the famous Persian poet Sa'dī.

The *qit'a*'s ornamental panels may point to a date in the later ninth/fifteenth centuries. The panels' bold colors and the effortless rhythms of their coiled foliage are typical of Timurid manuscript illumination, as is the complex construction of the almost seamless finished page. The powerful composition is as much the work of the unknown illuminator as of Mir 'Alī.

T.A.



BOWL

Mesopotamia; 9th–10th century
Pottery with *sgraffito* and splashed
lead glaze
Diam: 13 in. (33.0 cm)
Gift of Lewis K. Land and Elizabeth Land
B84 P2

Soon after the first wave of the Arab conquest, Muslim caliphs founded new cities in southern Iraq, where troops of the Arab armies settled with their families. Vast new markets for consumer goods sprang up as wealth poured in from the newly conquered lands, and imported Chinese ceramics were among the most welcome commodities. Their arrival sparked the long development of colorful Islamic ceramics.

Among these Chinese import wares was *sancai*, three-color splash ware of a whitish, nonporcellaneous clay coated with white slip and decorated with several colors of lead-based glazes. Iraqi potters were producing the type by the end of the eighth century; called Samarra ware, it became one of the standard 'Abbasid pottery types.

Samarra ware is of a very fine clay body, usually yellow but occasionally orange, like this bowl. It is coated with

white slip and an opaque white glaze containing tin. The interior has typical incised foliate decoration with green, ochre, and purple (manganese) glazes painted over the *sgraffiato* of four stemless palmettes separated by paired, parallel squiggles. Five radial lines of green and ochre glaze and five dabs of manganese oppose this fourfold symmetry. The unincised exterior bears only four loose circles in green and ochre with two curved strokes in manganese, a standard Samarra scheme.

Such ceramics were almost certainly not produced in Samarra, as the series began before that city was founded. But the remarkable consistency of both the style and the clay, from deposits along the Tigris or Euphrates, strongly suggests that their manufacture was a monopoly of one or two major centers, perhaps Basrah or Kufah.

T.A.