

LIONS IN THE TAREQ RAJAB MUSEUM¹

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The representation of lions, either as painted on pottery, in miniature paintings or as three-dimensional figurines, became popular in Egypt during the Fātimid period². Soon after they appeared in the arts of Moorish Spain and likewise in Salḡūq Iran. When they are painted on pottery they decorate lustre-painted or underglaze polychrome wares, while in metalwork they are depicted either engraved or inlaid with silver. However, almost simultaneously they were introduced either as two-dimensional figures decorating bronze vessels and, more importantly, as three-dimensional figurines. These last examples were used in many different ways. They appear as the handles of bronze ewers and jugs, others were lamps or incense burners. The Tareq Rajab Museum in Kuwait possesses numerous lions of almost every category. Here in this paper only the two- and three-dimensional examples are examined.

Our examination starts with two-dimensional figures. There are two large brass ewers in the Museum the neck of which on both sides are decorated with sitting lions. They were carried out in *repoussé*. Both ewers belong to a type that is well known and examples of these are dated to the 12th or early 13th century (figs. 1-2)³. Of the known and published brass ewers with figures of lions on the neck two comparatively well-known examples should be mentioned: one of them is in the British Museum, attributed to Herat and dated between 1180-1200 AD⁴. The other one is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, dated to the early 13th century⁵.

The second type of lion representations are when the animal appears in three-dimensional form as handle of a brass or bronze ewer or jug. Once more several such vessels are known. Two such examples from the Tareq Rajab Museum's collections

¹ An abbreviated version of this paper was delivered at the 20th UEA Congress.

² For lions on pottery vessels, cf. Grube 1976a:76, 79 a lustre-painted bowl, no. 40, attributed to Iraq or Egypt and dated to the 19th century; no. 67, pp. 105-107, an unglazed hanging ornament with moulded relief decoration also showing a lion, Iran or Iraq, 12th century and a prancing lion decorating a tile from Ġazni, no. 64, pp. 102-104. An almost identical lustre bowl to the Keir collection piece no. 40, depicting a prancing lion is in the Tareq Rajab Museum, cf. Fehérvári 2000: 72-74, no. 75. For a lion on a Fātimid painting, cf. Grube 1976b:48-50, no. I.18, plate 7/a.

³ Inv. nos. MET87TSR and MET166TSR.

⁴ Barrett 1949: plate 6; also in Ward 1993:78, plate 56.

⁵ Melikian-Chirvani 1982:114-118, no. 45. Melikian also refers and illustrates a similar ewer with a lion decorating the neck which was at that time in the Kabul Museum, no. 45a, p. 118.

are a ewer (fig. 3) and a jug (fig. 4)⁶. In both instances the lions are shown in prancing position. In this role the representation of the animals is rather simple and frequently they may also be interpreted as showing a serpent. Certainly that is the case in the ewer's handle. The depiction of the lion on the jug is more elaborate. There are engraved lines and grooves on its body and thighs indicating muscles (fig. 5). Here there is no doubt that the artist intended to depict a lion.

An extremely interesting and well detailed lion handle was in the Kabul Museum, the vessel of which unfortunately was missing. It was attributed to the *Hurāsān* school and dated to the *Gaznawid* period, i.e. 11th – early 12th century⁷.

The third type of three-dimensional representation is when only the fore-parts or protomes of lions were cast. Almost every museum and collection holding Islamic metalwork possesses such lion protomes. There are several of these in the Museum's collection. Most of them are uniform both in size and in details. The majority of them are simple figurines, without any additional decoration (fig. 6)⁸. However, among them there are a few which reveal engraved, incised or even copper or bronze inlaid decoration on their breasts. Among the museum's pieces there is an example which first of all is depicted in a stepping position, since its right foot is further ahead than the left one (fig. 7)⁹. Furthermore, the decoration on the breast seem to depict a human figure with a peaked helmet on its head and holding an animal in his arms. The third specimen is again different. The lion is shown with an open mouth and on its breast there is something which may look like an eagle with spread wings (fig. 8)¹⁰.

The question of course arises, what was the original function of these lion protomes? Fortunately the answer is given by several surviving objects which are resting on such lion figurines. Among them is a bronze support, made-up of three lion protomes in the Louvre. It was exhibited in Paris some twenty-five years ago, attributed to Iran and dated to the end of the 12th or early 13th century¹¹. A second example, a large incense burner is in the Tareq Rajab Museum which is again supported by three lion protomes (fig. 9)¹². In this case, however, the protomes appear to be even more decorative since their breasts have openwork designs but, at the same time, it

⁶ Inv. nos. MET808TSR and MET2193TSR.

⁷ Cf. Rice & Rowland 1971: plates 202-203.

⁸ Inv. no. MET955TSR.

⁹ Inv. no. MET967TSR.

¹⁰ Inv. no. MET953TSR.

¹¹ *L'Islam dans les collections nationales*, Grand Palais, Paris, 2 mai – 22 août, 1977, no. 379, pp. 174-177, inv. no. MAO357.

¹² Inv. no. MET212TSR.

has to be remarked that neither their noses, nor their ears of the figures are typically lion-shaped (fig. 10). Nevertheless several other objects are known and published, all supported by the conventional lion-headed protomes.

Another interesting and comparatively early application of lion-heads are on water-taps. In these instances they appear as the head of the tap while the actual handle on top may have the figure of a sitting bird, like e.g. on the water-tap in the museum's collection (figs. 11-12)¹³. Such lion-headed water-taps are known from two areas of the Islamic world: from India and, such a water-tap was sold at Christie's a few years ago and dated to the Sultanate period, ca. 15th century¹⁴. Nevertheless there are also examples from Salḡuq and early Ottoman Anatolia. One Anatolian water-tap was published by Bodur (1987:103, no. 40). Another Anatolian lion-headed water-tap was sold at Sotheby's in 1986 and dated to the 11th or 12th century¹⁵. The museum's water-tap seems to be much closer to the known Anatolian examples, the suggested date, however, is questionable. They could be somewhat later, probably of the late 14th or early 15th century.

Perhaps more interesting and aesthetically more attractive are the three-dimensional lions which vary greatly both in size and decoration. They were all cast in bronze, frequently in separate parts and their bodies were decorated with openwork, engraved and incised patterns, some with beautifully written Kūfic inscriptions. The inscriptions may include the signature of the artist, while others are simply benedictory. A large standing lion is in the Tareq Rajab Museum (fig. 13)¹⁶. This lion has a large widely open mouth, while the head is attached to the body by a hinge, thus it serves as a lid through which the incense could be placed inside the body. The head has engraved, i.e. *champlevé* decoration, while its body reveals extensive and finely executed scrolls in openwork. Around the neck there is an engraved inscription, written in foliated Kūfic script, reading:

al-‘izz wa-l-karāma wa-s-salāma wa-l-‘ināya wa-l-yumn li-llāh

"Glory, honour, peace, care and blessing belong to God Allah"¹⁷

The lion has a long and up-turned tail which terminates in a trefoil and it distinguishes this figurine from several others. There is an almost identical lion in the Louvre. It was several times published and illustrated and was, from the very

¹³ Inv. no. MET937TSR.

¹⁴ Christie's sale catalogue, 18 October, 1994, lot 402.

¹⁵ Sotheby's sale catalogue, 16 April, 1986, lot 156.

¹⁶ Inv. no. MET76TSR. Its length is 19 cm, height 22 cm and width 7 cm.

¹⁷ This lion is now exhibited in Singapore, cf. *The Harmony of Letters, Catalogue of an Exhibition*, Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore, 1997:105. At that time it was attributed by this writer to Egypt and dated to the 11th-12th century.

beginning, attributed to Spain and dated to the 11th or 12th century¹⁸. The similarity between the Tareq Rajab Museum and the Louvre lions are remarkable. This close similarity may suggest not only identical provenance and date, but perhaps even the same workshop or, the hand of the same artist(s). However, it has to be pointed out that there is one important difference between these two lions. Namely the head of the Louvre's lion cannot be opened. Thus, it could not have served as an incense burner. Therefore it was suggested that it was used as a fountain head. This indeed could have been the case.

There are of course a few lion-shaped fountains known. The most famous and well publicised example is in the Museum of Kassel in Germany. This lion still holds the end of a pipe in its mouth. It was first published by Sarre in the famous 1910 München exhibition catalogue¹⁹. Another closely related lion, which was also used as a fountain-head, is in the Islamic Art Museum, Cairo²⁰, while a third example is in the Keir Collection, Richmond, Surrey (Fehérvári 1976: no. 28, plate 9/b). Both lions hold a pipe in their mouths. The Cairo example is attributed to Fātimid Egypt while the Keir collection lion was considered to be of Andalusian origin. Such lions became also popular in Europe, where they were used as aquamanilae.

Other lion figurines may have been used as incense burners. According to Eva Baer (1983:58), only seven lion-shaped incense burners were known at the time of publication of her book. All these seven known pieces were attributed to Eastern Iran, i.e. to Hurāsān or to Afghanistan. One of them, which is the largest and the only dated one, is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It was found in Iran and bears the date of 577/1181-82 and names the artist and the owner²¹. A second example and, perhaps the best known of the seven, is in the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. It has no date, but is considered to be of the 11th or 12th century. It carries a name, but is not known whether it is the artist's or that of the owner²². A third lion is in the Cleveland Museum of Art, dated to the second quarter of the

¹⁸ Inv. no.7883. It was first published by Migeon (1907:228, fig. 189). At that time it was in the Mme Louis Stern Collection in Paris. Migeon 1927:382-383, fig. 191. More recently by Dodds (1992:270) cat. no. 54, illustrated on p. 271.

¹⁹ Sarre & Martin 1912: II, Tafel 154. It also appears in Mayer 1959:20. This lion has an engraved foliated Kūfic inscription, reading: 'amal 'Abdallāh al-mattāl - "Made by Abdallah, the Sculptor". This lion is attributed to Fātimid Egypt.

²⁰ Inv. no. 4305, cf. *Exhibition in Islamic Art in Egypt, 969-1517*, Cairo, April, 1969:57, no. 47. Baer 1983:157-158, fig. 133.

²¹ Baer 1983:58, n. 114; MMA inv. no. 51.56. It was first published by Dimand 1952.

²² Orbeli 1938:293-300, plates 53-54; more recently in *Masterpieces* 1990, no. 18, pp. 40-41 (in Arabic) and pp. 13-14 (in English).

12th century²³. A further lion-shaped incense burner is in the Louvre, once more attributed to Iran/Hurāsān and dated to the 11th or 12th century²⁴. The fifth and sixth examples are respectively in the Archaeological Museum (Islamic section), Teheran and the William Rockhill Nelson Art Gallery in Kansas City. The seventh specimen is in the David Collection in Copenhagen, attributed to Eastern Iran, obviously to Hurāsān or Afghanistan, dated to the 11th or 12th century (*Sultan, Shah and Great Mughal* 177, no. 136).

Meanwhile an eighth example turned up recently in the London Antique Market. It came up for sale at Bonhams. It has an extensive openwork decoration with a band of five-lobed palmettes around its body and more on its neck. The head is attached to the body by a hinge, thus it was clearly used as an incense burner. The long tail is turned back and has an openwork cable pattern, terminating in a three-lobed semi-palmette. It was attributed to Iran and dated to the 12th century²⁵.

To this impressive list of lion-shaped incense burners now three more East Iranian or Central Asian examples can be added. All three are in the possession of the Tareq Rajab Museum and all three reveal extensive openwork and engraved decoration. The first of these three is a comparatively large object, measuring 28 cm in length and 25 cm in height (fig. 14)²⁶. The head tilts and hence it was used for putting in the incense. Extensive and continuous scrollwork decorate the back of the body, the breast and the neck, executed in openwork. As Eva Baer remarked, plant ornaments but in particular continuous scrollwork were characteristic of Islamic metalwork. On the museum's incense burner the stalks are not only undulating and branching off to right and left, but they form nearly complete circles enclosing three-lobed palmettes (figs. 15-16). Somewhat similar, but perhaps simplified scrollwork can be observed on a 12th century globular lamp-stand link which is in the Seattle Art Museum (Baer 1983: fig. 116). The design of undulating scrolls enclosing three- or five-petalled palmettes of course can be traced back to style 'A' of Sāmarrā' where, among other places, it decorated the walls of the Ġawṣaq al-Ḥāqānī palace (Herzfeld 1923:215, abb. 304/a-b, 305; 216, abb. 306; Creswell 1942: fig. 183, plate 52/a, d-e).

The engraved decoration on the thighs are even more impressive. They depict three- and five-petalled palmettes within heart-shaped motives. The palmettes below are flanked by pairs of small leaves. This attractive and complex design may be rare, but not entirely unknown. A closely related border ornament decorates a bronze

²³ Cleveland Museum of Art, inv.no.48.308. Published by Shepherd 1957:115-118, no.23; Baer 1983:57-58, fig. 41.

²⁴ Pope 1939: plate 1297; Paris exhibition, 1977:165, no. 348.

²⁵ *Sale catalogue of Bonhams & Brooks*, 17 October, 2001, lot 349, illustrated in colour on p. 127 and on the cover.

²⁶ Inv. no. MET1341TSR.

mortar in the Metropolitan Museum, attributed to Hurāsān and dated to the late 12th or early 13th century²⁷. On the mortar, however, there are only three-lobed palmettes. Furthermore, on the mortar this design is presented as a horizontal band, while on the incense burner they are shown as irregular circles, actually radiating from a small rectangle. The engraved decoration of a bronze plate in the British Museum reveals even closer similarity to those on the thighs of the museum's bronze lion. The central part of the plate is decorated with engraved interlaced circles which then form a small hexagon in the centre and several irregular triangles and near heart-shaped spaces around all filled by three-lobed palmettes and below flanked by pair of spirals. The plate is dated to the late 10th or early 11th century (Barrett 1949: plate 2/a; Baer 1983:126; Baer 1998: fig. 52).

On the museum's lion on both sides of the body the scrolls below are framed by horizontal epigraphic bands, written in foliated Kūfic style (figs. 15-16). The inscriptions so far are undeciphered, but the words *baraka*, "blessing" or "Divine grace" and *yumn*, "happiness" or "felicity" may be read. It appears that the artist may have been illiterate and committed mistakes, hence the difficulty in reading it.

The treatment of the tail is also interesting. It makes a complete loop and is turned backwards on the body and it touches the back of the animal and terminates in a trefoil. Most of the known lion figurines have their tails up-turned and slightly bent, but they are almost vertical and end in a simple three-lobed pattern, like the previously examined lion from Spain (fig. 13). The Museum possesses, however, another lion figurine with its tail completely turned backwards and touching the back of the body and ending in a kind of grooved hoof-shaped pattern (fig. 17)²⁸.

While this second lion is closely related to the previous example, its body, thighs and neck reveal even more refined decoration. The head once more is attached to the neck by a hinge and therefore it tilts. At a close examination the head, strictly speaking, may not be that of a lion, but rather of a griffon. The lower part of the neck has an undulating scroll partly in openwork and partly engraved. The spaces among the loops are filled by three-lobed palmettes. Nevertheless it is the decoration of the body which deserves special attention. On both sides there are two intertwined scrolls starting from the back of the body and progressing forward and forming elongated ovals which are filled by three-lobed palmettes and at the back are flanked by pairs of small leaves (figs. 18-19). The pattern in the central ovals on both sides looks almost like five-petalled palmettes. They recall similar designs on a number of Hurāsānī metalwork. Melikian-Chirvani, referring to a lamp-stand base which was at that time in the Kabul Museum suggested, that "such details as the five-lobed palmettes (are) typical of the Sāmānīd period" (Melikian-Chirvani 1982:39, n. 64).

²⁷ Inv. no. 43.87. Cf. Baer 1983: fig. 137.

²⁸ Inv. no. MET2187TSR. Length 19 cm, height 18.5 cm, width 5.5 cm.

By an interesting coincidence, the Tareq Rajab Museum also possesses a similar lamp-stand base decorated with series of five-lobed palmettes with geometrical interlace above and below (fig. 20)²⁹. Another pattern which perhaps also indicates a Sāmānid date is the presence of 'Solomon's knots' on top of the hoof-shaped legs. A second object in the museum with identical five-lobed palmettes and geometrical interlace is on the cylindrical shaft of another lamp-stand which has two globular links, one on top and one below. The palmettes decorate the lower link (fig. 21)³⁰. Here we should also recall the lion-shaped incense burner which came up for sale at Bonhams to which reference has already been made above³¹. The main decorative feature of this lion is the openwork five-lobed palmette scroll running around its body and the neck. The scrollwork is well executed and the details are engraved. They come very close to the scrollwork of the Tareq Rajab Museum's lions.

The scrollwork on both sides of the museum's second lion, just like on the previous object, is bordered by an epigraphic band, written in floriated Kūfic. On one side it reads (fig. 18):

baraka wa-yumn wa-l-karāma
"blessing and felicity and plenitude"

On the other side (fig. 19):

al-ḥamdu li-llāhi wa-ṣukr[ā]
"thanks to God and gratitude"

The style of the inscription is very similar to that of an Iranian bowl in the St. Louis Art Museum, dated to the mid-12th century (Baer 1983:176, fig. 152; 178, n. 122). Although this writer is not familiar with the St. Louis bowl, but by judging from the style of script proposes, that it must be considerably earlier, probably late 10th or early 11th century. Another closely related Kūfic inscription is an artist's signature on a cauldron in the Victoria and Albert Museum, attributed by Melikian to Hurāsān and dated to the late 10th – early 11th century (Melikian-Chirvani 1982:48-49, no. 10, fig. 10A). One more interesting feature that should not be overlooked: the little birds placed in roundels on the animal's thighs. All four roundels depict a standing peacock. It was a much favoured and frequently applied decorative pattern on early Islamic metalwork of the Hurāsān school.

The Museum's third lion, which may appear similar to the previous two examples, nevertheless is quite distinct and its decorative scheme betrays some influence of Buddhist art. Hence its provenance is considered to be more of a Central Asian,

²⁹ Inv. no. MET1713TSR.

³⁰ Inv. no. MET1036TSR.

³¹ Cf. n. 25.

i.e. Afghanistan, rather than Eastern Iran (fig. 22)³². The body of this lion is decorated only with engraved designs, which include the so-called 'Solomon's seal' or 'the Buddhist eternal knot' which decorate the thighs. The tail, like those of the previous two lions, is turned back and touches the body but, instead of a trefoil it ends with a small knob on top. The neck and head opens up and therefore it suggests that again it was used as an incense burner, despite the fact that the body has no openings.

When we try to establish the provenance and the date of these three lion-shaped incense burners, the seven published comparative objects which were enlisted by Eva Baer, offer us considerable assistance. All those seven examples have their provenance either in East Iran, i.e. *Hurāsān* or, in the case of the Copenhagen lion, perhaps Afghanistan. According to Melikian-Chirvani, the scrollwork of three- and five-lobed palmettes are typical of the late *Sāmānid* period and of the '*Hurāsān* school'. Leaving aside the similarity of the museum's lions to those seven objects, the style and contexts of the inscriptions on two of these provide us further assistance. The style of the foliated and floriated *Kūfic* scripts indicate similar late *Sāmānid* dates. Perhaps more important, are the contents of these short inscriptions and here I wish to refer once more to Melikian-Chirvani who wrote (1982:34), that these inscriptions should be interpreted as *du'ā's*, i.e. prayers calling God's blessings on the owner.

All the above observations seem to indicate a provenance for these three lions somewhere within the *Sāmānid* or, if somewhat later, within the realm of the *Gaznawid* empire. What is most interesting that lion figurines played such an important role at that period and, although as has been shown above, they were also present in *Fātimid* Egypt and Muslim Spain, in that remote area of the Islamic World. To find the answer to this enigma, we should examine the archaeological material of earlier periods in that Central Asian region. The objects which may come to our attention and deserve closer examination, are the treasures that were discovered at Begram by the French excavations in the 1930s. Among the numerous finds from Begram were large number of ivory carvings. Those included the fragments of a coffer, among them a plaque depicting a therianthropic creature with an S-shaped tail. Another plaque showed a lion with a similarly treated tail. All these fragments are of course from the Buddhist period of Afghanistan and accordingly dated to the 5th or 6th centuries³³. These examples are too early for our incense burners, but the interest and preference to illustrate lions have survived right up to the *Sāmānid* and particularly to the *Gaznawid* period, as can be seen on the numerous wall and pavement tiles and the carved marble and stone plaques which were discovered at *Gazni*. One of the most remarkable examples is a marble plaque from *Gazni*, which was in the National Museum of Kabul, showing a prancing lion with a long tail turned completely back

³² Inv. no. MET1340TSR. Length 14.5 cm, height 16.8 cm and width 5.5 cm.

³³ Cf. Rice & Rowland 1971: figs. 25-26.

on its body and terminating, as it does on several bronze lion figurines, in a two-lobed semi-palmette³⁴.

From the above we may conclude that these three lion-shaped incense burners were most likely made by the 'eastern branch' of the Hurāsān school, perhaps at Marw or more likely at Gazni. Although some of the decorative details would suggest a late Sāmānid date; there is also a possibility that in fact they were made during the early Gaznawid period. Hence it is suggested that their date could be the late 10th or first half of the 11th century.

A related, but somewhat distinct group of these lion figurines are formed by objects which were used as oil-lamps. The second group is composed by lamps which have bird-shapes and, lion-heads. Of the first groups there is only one example in the Tareq Rajab Museum (fig. 23)³⁵. The body, it appears was cast in two parts, the lower and the upper parts separately. The lower part which serves as the holder for the oil, is closed below and on the sides. It looks that the hind legs were cast together with the lower part, but the front legs, together with the wick holes, were made separately. All together there are four wick holes in front: two pointing forward and two pointing sideways. There is a fifth wick hole at the back where the short up-turned tail serves this purpose.

There is extensive decoration on both the lower and upper part of the body. The four thighs have the frequently applied pattern of 'Solomon's knot', or 'the Buddhist eternal knot' that we have already found on one of the incense burners (figs. 24-25). There is an epigraphic band running around the edges of the lower part of the body. It is written in a beautiful floriated Kūfic. Unfortunately in places it is much worn and hence difficult, or impossible to decipher. On one side it reads (fig. 24):

baraka wa-yumn ... s-salāma ...

"blessing and felicity ... and peace ..."

On the other side the inscript is much worn (fig. 25).

The upper part of the body has extensive openwork design of geometrical interlace. The head is attached to this upper part and tilts, thus allowing the oil to be poured inside. Around the edges of the neck there is a geometrical scrollwork, typical of the late Sāmānid period. The eyes are hollowed in an oval form and the mouth is open. The geometrical design, the 'Solomon's knot' and the style of the inscription indicate an East Iranian or even East Afghanistan provenance for this lamp and a late 10th or early 11th century date.

³⁴ Bombaci 1959:12, Fig. 10. Also Rice & Rowland 1971: fig. 170.

³⁵ Inv. no. MET2208TSR. Length 31.5 cm, height 25.7 cm, width 6 cm, with the holes 19 cm.

Such lion-shaped oil-lamps are, albeit not frequent, but not unknown either. A somewhat similar bronze lamp came up for sale at Bonhams³⁶. It is in the shape of a standing feline with four wick-holes in front, arranged the same way as it is on the museum's piece. However, the decoration of the object is more restricted. There are only incised palmette designs on the back of the animal. This lamp was attributed to Iran and dated to the 11th – 12th century.

As to the second group of vessels with bird-shapes and lion-heads, there are three such vessels in the Tareq Rajab Museum. The first one of these three is an oil-lamp, while the other two are incense burners. First we shall examine the lamp (fig. 26)³⁷. It was purchased at Sotheby's and in the catalogue was dated to the 12th or early 13th century³⁸. The lamp was cast in several parts. The lower part of the body, which serves for holding the oil and to which the wick holes are attached, is closed, except on the top behind the back where the oil was poured in. In front there are three wick holes, all angular with a large rectangular opening on top. One of them points forward the other two sideways. There is a fourth wick hole at the back embedded in the triangular tail. It stands on three tapering feet. The neck and the head were most likely cast in one piece. The neck is tall, tapering and is bent terminating in a lion's head.

The vessel is decorated with incised scrolls and lines on the body, the neck and the head. The back of the body, the tail and the top of the wick holes have incised lines, while at the lower edge of the neck there is a geometric scrollwork, identical to that on the neck of the previous object (figs. 23-24). Melikian-Chirvani illustrates a rose-water sprinkler which is in the Iran bastan Museum, Teheran, decorated with an identical geometrical scrollwork on the upper part of the body. It is attributed to Hurāsān and dated to the late 10th or early 11th century (Melikian-Chirvani 1982:36, fig. 12). The shape of the vessel, its incised decoration, but particularly the aforementioned geometrical scrollwork, suggest a considerably earlier date than it was given by Sotheby's. It dates most likely from the late Sāmānid period, i.e. late 10th or early 11th century.

A second bird-shaped and lion-headed object appears to be an incense burner, since its neck and head opens up, so that the incense can be placed into the body (fig. 27)³⁹. The neck, breast and the back have openwork decoration showing inter twined scrollwork, while the front parts of the wings carry 'Solomon's seal', or the

³⁶ *Bonhams & Brooks sale catalogue*, 17 October, 2001, lot 332, p. 118. A similar piece was also sold at Bonhams in 13 October, 1999, lot 223.

³⁷ Inv. no. MET392TSR. Length 24 cm, height 19 cm.

³⁸ *Sotheby's sale catalogue*, 28 April 1994, lot 93.

³⁹ Inv. no. MET2188TSR. Length 14 cm, height 14.7 cm, width 6.5 cm.

Buddhist 'eternal knot'. This piece can clearly be attributed to eastern workshops of the *Hurāsān* school and dated to the late 10th – early 11th century.

The second bird-shaped and lion-headed incense burner is a comparatively large example. It is cast in bronze, has an extensive openwork decoration with a wide and short neck, terminating in a large lion's head (figs. 28-29)⁴⁰. The openwork decoration was lavishly applied on the breast, the front of the wings, neck and the head. On the breast there is a strapwork forming a large circle and four smaller ones around while the spaces in between are filled by scrollwork. Similar scrollwork can be seen on the wings and the lower part of the neck. The openwork on the head appears on the sides, showing clusters of seven circular holes, arranged as a kind of a flower, surrounded by incised lines. The mouth and the nostrils are open and are outlined with incised lines, while the almond-shaped eyes are engraved. The bird stands on two solid feet.

This writer has not seen any similar example. However, the shape and the decoration of this vessel is quite distinct from those of Eastern Iran or Central Asia. While the origin of zoomorphic vessels and objects may be traced back to the pre-Islamic period of the Near and Middle East, nevertheless they were soon imitated in other areas of Asia and later on in Europe. It was particularly in India, where such zoomorphic vessels, either as jugs, ewers, incense burners or aquamanilae became very popular. Several such objects have survived from the Sultanate period. They remained much favoured in Mughal times as well and numerous such examples have survived and are preserved in private or public collections. The Indian examples stand out from their Near Eastern counterparts, first of all by their size. They are considerably larger than the Near Eastern pieces. Furthermore, they are distinguishable because of the quality of their material and by the refined casting and the more delicate and extensive surface decoration. The most comprehensive and up-to-date publication of Indian zoomorphic objects is by Mark Zebrowski, who carried out extensive study on Indian metalwork, whether bronze, silver or gold (Zebrowski 1997). While there is no immediate comparative object illustrated in his monograph, the style and quality of the Tareq Rajab Museum's object indicates an Indian provenance and, as for its possible date, probably between the late Sultanate and early Mughal period, i.e. 15th – 16th century.

The Museum also possesses a few lions depicting them in movement or standing on their own. There is no indication that they were ever attached to any larger objects. Thus, they were not supports, nor decorative elements of a large vessel or furniture. Most likely they were just simply decorative three-dimensional figurines placed on some furniture. Alternatively, some of them could have been intended for small children as toys.

⁴⁰ Inv. no. MET1333TSR. Length 18 cm, height 24.3 cm, width 9.5 cm.

One of these lions in the Museum's collection presents a walking lion (fig. 30)⁴¹. It is also made of cast bronze, the tail is attached to one of the hind legs. There is a small opening at the back, the function of which is difficult to explain. It is certainly not due to any breakage. It is a comparatively small object, measuring 6.7 cm in length and 4.7 cm in height. Its provenance is not known, but most likely comes either from Central Asia or from India. As to its date, it is even more difficult to determine, but cannot be much earlier than the 12th or 13th century.

The next examples depict two rampant lions (fig. 31-32). They look almost identical, although they differ both in size and in decoration⁴². There is only a slight difference in size. The first example (fig. 31) measures 6.5 cm in length and 5.2 cm in height, while the second one (fig. 32) is 6.3 cm in length and 5 cm in height. The cast bronze bodies of both animals are decorated with engraved details, particularly on their heads and manes. The tails are curved, on the first lion almost in an S-shaped form, that of the other one, while also curved, it is more open. Zebrowski illustrates similar rampant lions, but they are considerably large and were used as incense burners (Zebrowski 1997:103, fig. 109). The museum's lions are solid cast bronze and in any case are too small to have any practical function.

For closer comparative material for these two rampant lions we have to turn to Central Asia, or more precisely once more to Afghanistan. Reference has already been made above to the ivory carved lion figurines that came to light at Begram and to the much later Gaznawid lions which were found, but not excavated at Gazni⁴³. The similarity to these Gaznawid lions are so striking that one is inclined to suggest that they may have been made at Gazni during the second half of the 11th or early part of the 12th century.

Finally among this group, there is a standing lion in an upright posture showing realistic features (fig. 33)⁴⁴. The tail is slung back behind the left hind legs. When this piece was acquired by the museum it was identified as Indian and dated to the 16th or 17th century.

⁴¹ Inv. no. MET1309TSR.

⁴² Inv. nos. MET1313TSR and MET1336TSR.

⁴³ Cf. Rice & Rowland 1971: figs. 25-26, 170; Bombaci 1959:12, fig. 10. Also Scerrato 1962. Scerrato refers to a Fātimid linen fabric with stamped decoration in brown and gold showing lions with similar S-shaped tails and suggests that the idea of such lions may have come from Fātimid Egypt. Cf. fig. 69. Furthermore, he adds that all the glazed tiles were found in the layers above Mas'ūd III's palace and are most likely post-Gaznawid (p. 265).

⁴⁴ Inv. no. MET1559TSR. Length 9.3 cm, height 10.3 cm.

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Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.



Fig. 6.



Fig. 7.

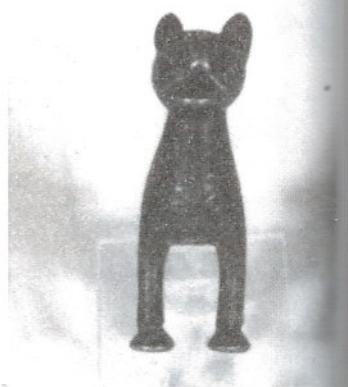


Fig. 8.

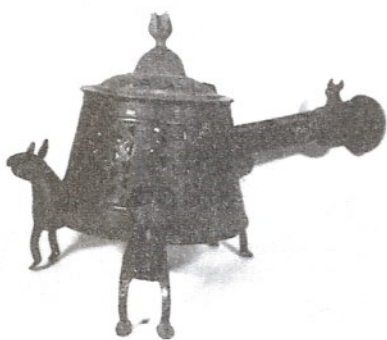


Fig. 9.



Fig. 10.



Fig. 11.



Fig. 12.



Fig. 13.



Fig. 14.



Fig. 15.



Fig. 16.



Fig. 17.



Fig. 18.



Fig. 19.



Fig. 20.



Fig. 21.



Fig. 22.



Fig. 23.



Fig. 24.



Fig. 25.



Fig. 26.



Fig. 27.



Fig. 28.



Fig. 29.



Fig. 30.



Fig. 31.



Fig. 32.



Fig. 33.