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The Metropolitan Museum
of Art BULLETIN





Two Hoards of Roman Republican Silver

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At least as early as the eighteenth century chance finds of Roman silver were being made in some countries that were formerly part of the Roman Empire. Since that time a surprisingly large amount of ancient silver has been recovered from tombs, or accidentally found in the earth where it had been entrusted for safekeeping in times of peril. The unexpected nature of the finds and the intrinsic value of the metal have brought public attention to the major discoveries, among which are the famous hoards unearthed at Berthouville and Montcornet in France, at Hildesheim in Germany, and, of course, at Pompeii and the nearby ancient villas of Boscoreale in Italy. At the time of their discovery some hoards are unheralded and very often come into private possession without much notice, only to be later dispersed with little record kept of their subsequent whereabouts. This is the case with two relatively small but not insignificant hoards of Roman silver found in Italy within the past seventy years. After remaining together in private collections, chance determined their dispersal at public sales, but by good fortune The Metropolitan Museum of Art now possesses a sizable share of each.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century Edouard Warneck, a European collector of antiquities and paintings, bought in Rome a set of ancient silver, composed of thirteen vessels and seventeen spoons, said to have come from Tivoli, a provenance that can neither be proved nor disproved. While in his collection it was published in a French archaeological periodical, but was not mentioned in print again until the whole group appeared as a lot in the auction of his wife's estate, held in Paris in 1905.

Nine of the vessels and eleven of the spoons came into the possession of Mrs. Chauncey J. Blair of Chicago, probably through a dealer who had secured the entire lot at the Paris sale, and in 1906 she presented her portion to the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. The remainder of the set, comprised of a pair of kantharoi (wine cups), a pitcher, a ladle, and six spoons, was purchased in 1920 by the Metropolitan Museum from the firm of C. and E. Canessa (Frontispiece).

Contents

Two Hoards of Roman Republican Silver

ANDREW OLIVER, JR. 177

The Heavenly Twins

PRUDENCE OLIVER
HARPER 186

ON THE COVER: *Sasanian silver-gilt plate. See article on page 186*

FRONTISPIECE: *Part of a set of Roman silver from Italy. 1 century B.C. Length of the ladle 6¾ inches. Rogers Fund, 20.49.2-9, 11, 12*



1. Silver *kantharos*. Roman, from Italy, 1 century B.C. Height $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Rogers Fund, 20.49.2

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Figure 1 shows one of the kantharoi. It is sparingly decorated with three bands of ornament: kymation on the rim, double guilloche on the body, and Lesbian kymation on the foot. These bands are not applied strips; the patterns were chased directly on the silver and were originally gilded, although now only traces of the gilding remain. The foot and handles were made separately and soldered to the bowl.

Each of the two kantharoi bears an identical inscription in tiny dots under its foot, recording the name of the owner and the combined weight of the cups:

SATTIAE·L·F·II·P·HS·I·A·S·C·VII

This can be rendered, "[The property] of Sattia, daughter of Lucius; the two [cups together] weigh two pounds, eleven ounces, and seven scruples." According to modern calculations of Roman units of weight, this is the equivalent of 962 grams; the two cups now weigh 916 grams (just over two pounds). It is likely that the difference was lost through corrosion.

The cups are difficult to date. The handles are derived from those used on numerous Greek metal cups made from the fourth through the second centuries B.C., the distinguishing feature being the top of the loop, which is flattened and turned back sharply toward the rim, from which it is detached. This type of handle is found on some other Roman silver cups. A pair in the British Museum, nearly identical in decoration to the Museum's, was found in 1906 at Welwyn, near St. Albans in England, in a tomb that contained Celtic objects dating from the end of the first century B.C. Another pair of Roman cups, elaborately decorated with laurel branches, was part of the great hoard of silver

discovered in 1930 in the "House of Menander" at Pompeii. This pair, now in Naples, must have been made before A.D. 79, the year that Pompeii was buried by an eruption of Mt. Vesuvius. The Welwyn and Pompeii cups, however, have taller proportions than the Museum's cups: their bowls are relatively deeper and their handles rise more steeply. Following a generally reliable rule of vase shapes, that squat proportions give way to taller proportions, we can roughly place the Museum's kantharoi in a sequence of metal cups. Certain second century Greek cups, with shallower bowls and handles set more horizontally, appear to be their immediate predecessors. The Welwyn and Pompeii cups, on the other hand, are probably slightly later. In the lack of other evidence, the Museum's kantharoi can be placed in the first century B.C., a date that is not contradicted by the style of the other objects in this hoard.

The ladle (Figure 2) is the descendant of a long series of Greek bronze and silver ladles, the earliest of which are probably derived from Phrygian examples of the late eighth century B.C. The flat, flaring handle rises vertically from a deep bowl and ends at the top in a hook in the form of a swan's or duck's head, a convention that appears on the earliest ladles. An inscription near the top of the handle, legible in Figure 2, again records Sattia's name and the weight:

SATTIAE·L·F·II·P·HS·I·A·S·C·VII

"[The property] of Sattia, daughter of Lucius; it weighs two ounces and three scruples." This is the equivalent of 57.95 grams. The present weight, 51.5 grams (just under two ounces), differs only slightly from the inscribed weight.

2. *Silver ladle. Roman, from Italy, 1 century B.C. Length 6¾ inches. Rogers Fund, 20.49.5*





3. *Silver pitcher. Roman, from Italy, 1 century B.C. Height 2¼ inches. Rogers Fund, 20.49.4*

In contrast to the cups and ladle, the pitcher or sauceboat (Figure 3) has no antecedents among Greek vase shapes, and, in fact, has no known parallels in Roman pottery, glass, or metalware. The long channelled spout and ring base are made in one piece with the straight-sided bowl. With its simple round handle soldered to the side, the pitcher is ideally suited for pouring liquids. It has neither decoration nor inscription.

This hoard contained two varieties of spoons (Frontispiece), which bring to mind the two Roman names for spoon, *ligula* and *coclear*. *Ligula* is the name for an ordinary spoon, and ten of the spoons found in this hoard – of which four are now in New York and six in Chicago – can properly be called by this name. They have shallow, oval-shaped bowls, and delicate offset handles that are rectangular in cross-section and end in roughly blocked out ducks' heads. These spoons are not exactly like any other Roman examples and appear to be among the earliest that have survived.

The other spoons, of which two are in New York (foreground of the Frontispiece) and seven in Chicago, have long been identified as *coclearia* or snail spoons. They are small, with a round bowl and a long, needle-shaped handle. The poet Martial surely refers to this variety in a Latin epigram entitled *Coclearia*:

I am suitable for snails, but not less useful for eggs;

Do you know, however, why I am called a snail spoon?

The answer can only be that the pick end of the spoon was particularly suited for extracting snails from their shells.

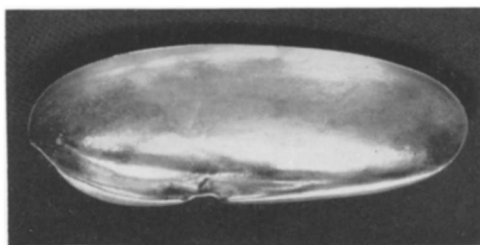
In addition to the spoons mentioned above, the Chicago Natural History Museum also received from Mrs. Blair nine vessels: a beaker of the shape commonly called a *modiolus* (Figure 5), a unique dish in the form of a mussel shell (Figure 6), a large round plate ornamented on the rim with beading and a Lesbian kymation (Figure 7), three undecorated little dishes, and three plain shallow cups (Figure 4), one of which is inscribed with Sattia's name and the weight of all three cups.

It is obvious from the affinity of all thirty pieces and from the inscriptions on four of them that this hoard is indeed a set, intended probably for daily use. The name Sattia is recorded elsewhere, but the owner of this set of silver cannot be connected with any of her namesakes, not even the Sattia who lived to the remarkable age of ninety in the reign of the Emperor Claudius. It is impossible to say when or for what reason the set was buried, except that it is conceivable that the occasion of the burial was a time of emergency, and that the owner intended to return and recover the silver.

4. *Silver cup. Roman, from Italy, 1 century B.C. Diameter $3\frac{1}{8}$ inches. Chicago Natural History Museum, 24311*

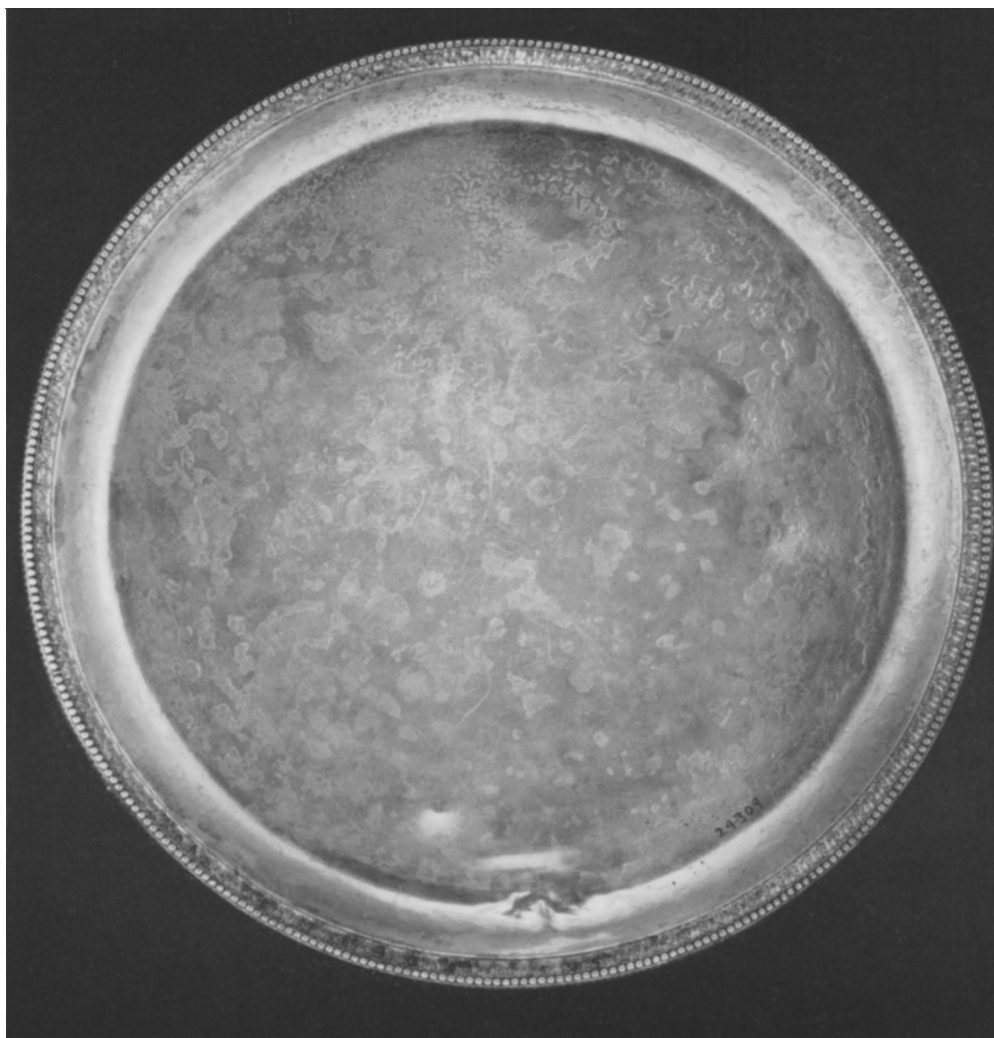


5. *Silver modiolus. Roman, from Italy, 1 century B.C. Height $5\frac{1}{8}$ inches. Chicago Natural History Museum, 24313*



6. *Silver dish in the shape of a mussel shell. Roman, from Italy, 1 century B.C. Length $5\frac{3}{8}$ inches. Chicago Natural History Museum, 24312*

7. *Silver plate. Roman, from Italy, 1 century B.C. Diameter $12\frac{3}{4}$ inches. Chicago Natural History Museum, 24309*



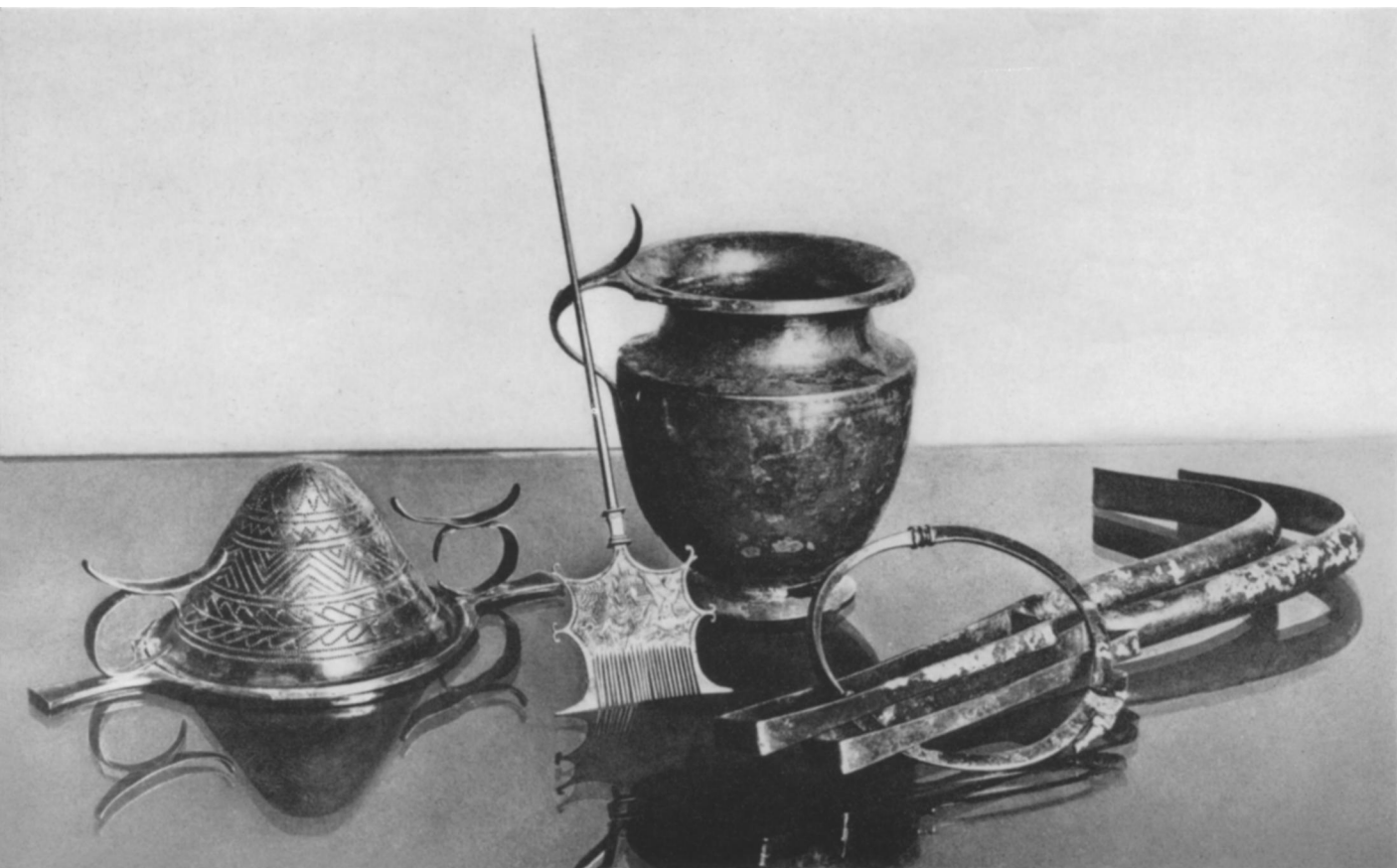
8. *The Roman silver hoard from the estate of Arnold Ruesch, sold in Lucerne in 1936. Plate 37 from Cat. Auktion Galerie Fischer, Sammlung A. Ruesch (Lucerne, 1936)*

The second set of silver is made up of only four pieces, and first became known to the public at the auction of antiquities from the estate of Arnold Ruesch held in Lucerne in 1936. Figure 8 reproduces the illustration published in the sale catalogue. The four pieces—a strainer, a jug, a comb, and a pair of strigils on a ring—were sold as separate lots, but the prefatory notice stated that they were found together in a woman's tomb in the neighborhood of Lake Trasimene in central Italy. Their uniformly excellent condition, as well as the contemporaneity of their style, supports the claim that they belong together. It is not known when the hoard came into Mr. Ruesch's possession, except that it must have been prior to 1929, the year he died.

At the sale in 1936, William Randolph

Hearst acquired the strainer, comb, and strigils, and brought them to this country. These three objects again came on the market in 1941, when a vast collection of art belonging to Mr. Hearst was being offered for sale at Saks Fifth Avenue and Gimbels. On this occasion, H. Dunscombe Colt purchased the strigils. It is apparent that Joseph Brummer, the New York art dealer, bought the strainer and comb, for it was from his galleries that the Metropolitan Museum acquired the comb in 1947, and from his estate, auctioned at Parke-Bernet in 1949, that the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore acquired the strainer. In 1961 Mr. Colt generously presented his strigils to the Metropolitan, where they were reunited with the comb. The jug is in a private collection in Switzerland.

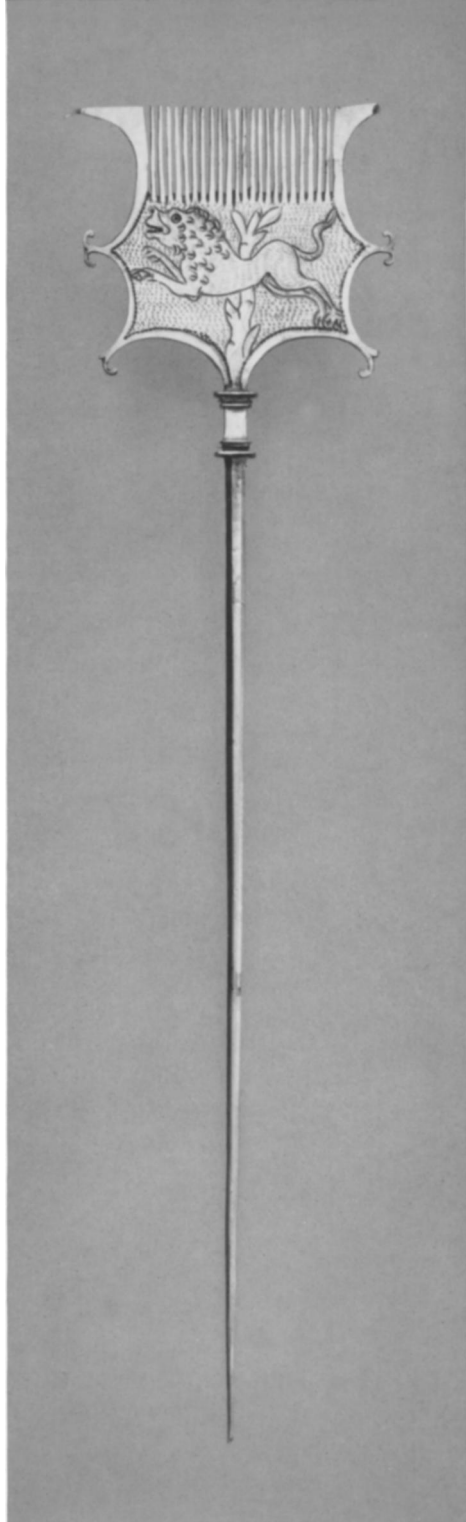
The comb (Figures 9, 10) is a curious in-



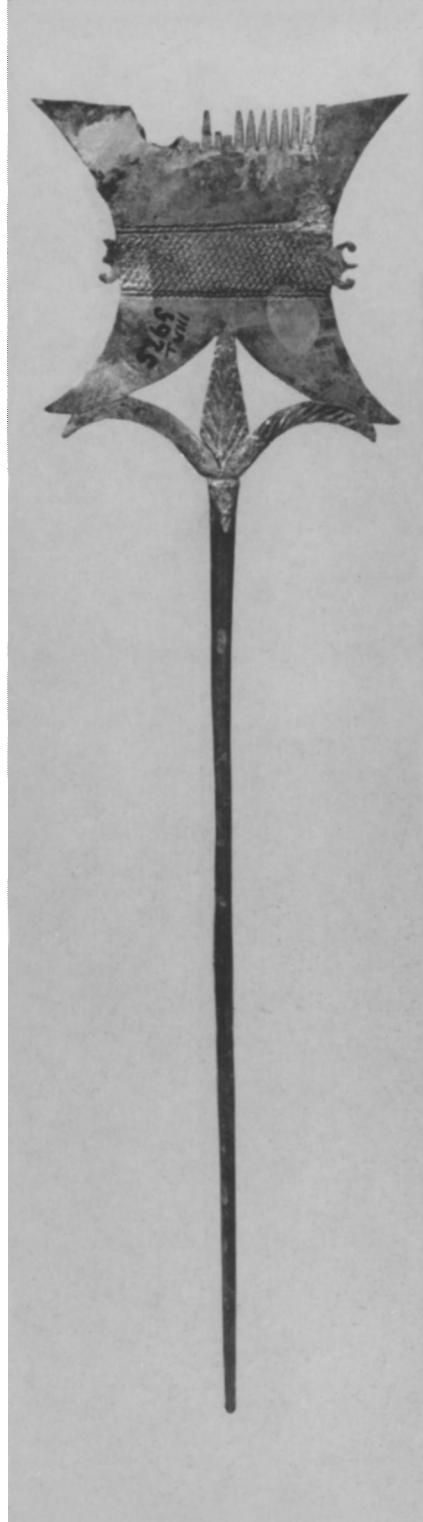


strument, because with its long octagonal shaft, it could also be used as a hairpin. The plate from which the teeth project is engraved on both surfaces with a hunting scene against a background of lightly impressed dots. One side shows a lion charging past a scrubby tree (Figure 10); the other side is a continuation of the scene and shows a hound springing to meet the beast and a winged huntress readying herself on a low rock, having drawn her sword from its scabbard (Figure 9). The identity of the woman is obscure, but she could be conflation of Artemis the huntress and a Lasae, Lasae being minor Etruscan female deities.

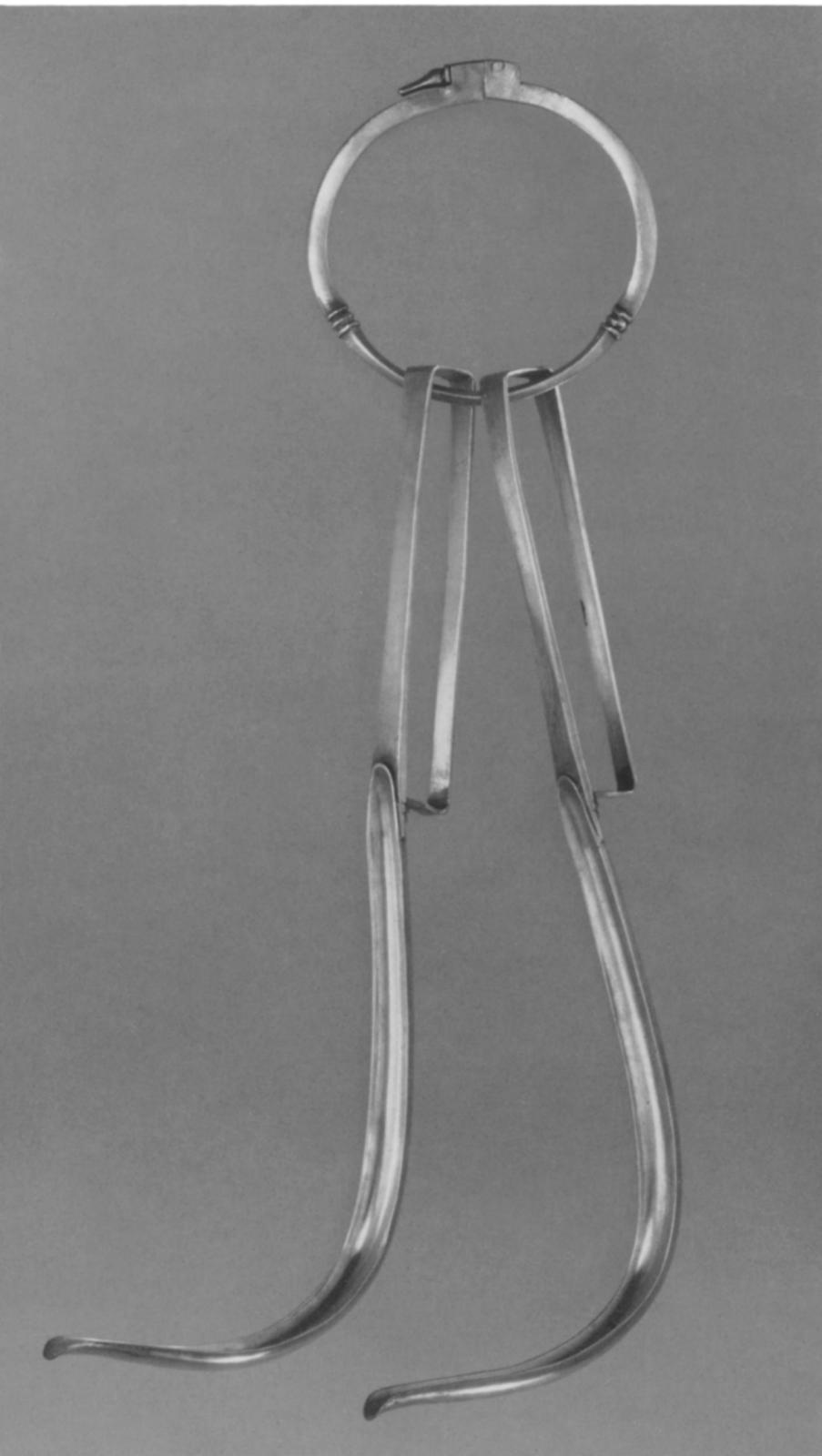
A similar comb was excavated from a tomb near Ancona in 1902 (Figure 11). It is ornamented with an engraved band of dotted lattice pattern placed between two tiny *peltæ* (the shields that Amazons carry), somewhat resembling the curlicues on the edges of the Museum's comb. From the same tomb came numerous other objects, including a silver cup, a pair of bronze strigils on an iron ring, gold earrings, and a necklace—the jewelry making it certain that the tomb was a woman's. Its date cannot be later than the first century B.C.



9, 10. Front and back views of the silver comb. Roman, from Italy, 1 century B.C. Length 7 inches. Fletcher Fund, 47.100.27



11. Silver comb. Roman, from Ancona, 1 century B.C. Length 6¾ inches. Museo Nazionale, Ancona, 5265. Photograph: Trani



Strigils, which were used by athletes to scrape off the oil with which they had rubbed themselves and also the grit picked up during strenuous exercise, came into fashion in the sixth century B.C. and continued to be standard equipment for the palaestra and bath throughout the Roman Imperial period. They have a curved channeled blade designed to scrape one's arms, legs, and body and a handle, which in Roman times is often a strip of metal bent into a long rectangle. Attic vases frequently depict athletes using strigils, and vases also show, but much more rarely, women using them at a bath. Occasionally there is a representation of a strigil, oil flask, and sponge suspended from a leather thong. It was probably not until the third century B.C. that a metal ring became the normal means of carrying strigils. The Museum's pair is attached to such a ring (Figure 12); a latch in the form of a bird's head secures the ends

12. Pair of silver strigils on a ring. Roman, from Italy, 1 century B.C. Length of the ring and strigils 11 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches. Gift of H. Dunscombe Colt, 61.88

of the ring, and when lifted from a slot allows them to spring sideways so that the strigils can be slipped off. From the presence of a woman's comb in this hoard and the knowledge that women also used strigils, we can assuredly say that this pair belonged to a woman.

The silver strainer now in the Walters Art Gallery, found with the Museum's comb and strigils, has a conical bowl perforated with thousands of holes disposed over the entire surface to form a rosette surrounded by concentric bands—a zigzag, chevrons, and a laurel wreath (Figure 13). The intriguingly simple idea of arranging the functional holes in geometric and floral designs, familiar to us from contemporary tea strainers, was used by silversmiths for ancient strainers as early as the fourth century B.C. The three-piece handles are aesthetically balanced and are well suited to the grip of one's thumb and first two fingers.

The jug can be recognized from the illustration in the Ruesch sale catalogue (Figure 8) as an example of a type that goes back at least to the late third century B.C. in Greece. The Roman silversmith has closely followed the shape of the Greek forerunners, but has replaced the typically Hellenistic handle, embodying a square knot, with a strip handle having a raised prong, similar in character to those of the strainer.

The date of this hoard, like the first, is hard to ascertain, but the evidence of the Ancona tomb makes it likely that the Museum's comb, and hence the other three silver objects, were made in the first century B.C. It is a pity that so little is known about its discovery, for an investigation of the burial and examination of other objects (if there were any), that may have been found with them, might have provided evidence for a more secure date. However unfortunate this lack of knowledge may seem, we must admit that the circumstances that have denied us proper archaeological investigation, together with the vagaries of the sales rooms and the generosity of private collectors, have enabled us to see this and the other hoard of Roman silver, albeit dispersed, in America.

NOTES

I am grateful to Giovanni Annibaldi of the Museo Nazionale of Ancona, to Dorothy K. Hill of the Walters Art Gallery, and to the Director of the Natural History Museum of Chicago for providing photographs of objects under their care. Donald Strong of the Greek and Roman department in the British Museum brought to my attention the silver cups from Welwyn, which are published in *Archaeologia* LXIII (1912) p. 20, pl. 2. (It is now seen that the so-called kylix handles mentioned in this article belong to one of the cups.) The hoard from the Warneck collection was first published in the *Bulletin de la Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France* (1897) pp. 365-367. Miss Hill has published the silver strainer in Baltimore in *The Classical Bulletin* XXVII (January 1951) pp. 25-26, and *ibid.* XXIX (November 1952) p. 3. The comb in Ancona is published in the *Notizie degli Scavi* (1902) p. 461, fig. 30.



13. Two views of the silver strainer. Roman, from Italy, 1 century B.C. Width 5½ inches. Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, 57.1814



The Heavenly Twins

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Ten years ago it could accurately be said that Sasanian metalwork of the third to seventh centuries A.D. consisted overwhelmingly of finds made in Russia, now collected in the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad. Although the Sasanians had ruled in Iran, no scientific excavation in that country had uncovered the silver-gilt vessels for which they are famous, and only a few pieces had been found there by accident. This unnatural situation no longer exists, for during the last decade a wealth of Sasanian metalwork has been dug up in Iran. Unfortunately, our knowledge of the new Sasanian sites is negligible, since the objects were discovered fortuitously and removed from where they were found without official record. The source, however, claimed for most of these pieces is the province of Guilan in northwestern Iran, an area where scientific excavations were made by an Iranian government archaeological expedition at a site called Marlik. The finds, which included gold and silver vessels, were not of the Sasanian period but of the late second millennium B.C. (A forthcoming *Bulletin* article by Charles K. Wilkinson, Curator Emeritus of Near Eastern Art, will describe a few pieces of this earlier period that are in this Museum and are related to those from Marlik.) It has, however, been suggested that a Sasanian castle tower exists at Marlik, and Sasanian glass is reputed to have been found in tombs in that region. There is therefore some evidence of Sasanian remains as well as those of an earlier date. We know from historical records that the Sasanians managed to

control this area to a greater or lesser degree, and that the inhabitants fought in the Sasanian army. Later Islamic authors refer to the region as Deilaman, and they note particularly that the inhabitants were renowned warriors. They also point out the impregnable nature of the region, where a man might guard his wealth undisturbed. A story is told by the tenth century Arab geographer Ibn al-Faqih of a map that was prepared of Deilaman. When it was shown to the Deilamite chieftains, to prove the uselessness of their resistance now that the secrets of their country were known, they looked at it with indifference. "O Amir," they said, "the map is incomplete. You have not shown the horsemen who guard the mountains." Inaccessibility remains a major hindrance to travelers today, and the local inhabitants continue to regard uninvited guests with some suspicion.

There are still many uncertainties in our knowledge of Sasanian art and culture, and this is almost entirely due to the absence of modern archaeological excavations at Sasanian sites. We know, however, with some completeness the general course of events during the period. After four centuries of foreign rule in Iran, first by Greeks, and then by nomadic Parthians, the Sasanians came into power in A.D. 224, and an Iranian dynasty controlled the country for the first time since the Achaemenian period. The Sasanians revived Zoroastrianism, which had developed under the Achaemenian kings, and made it the official state religion. Almost immediately they set out on extensive military conquests



1. Silver-gilt plate. Sasanian, IV or early V century A.D. Diameter $8\frac{3}{16}$ inches.
Fletcher Fund, 63.152

2. *Reverse side of the female with a jar, when detached from the Museum's plate, showing hammer marks*



in both the east and the west. To the west, the opponents were first Roman and then Byzantine. To the east, Afghanistan was part of the kingdom of the Kushans, a nomadic tribe who came under Sasanian domination under Hormizd II in the fourth century A.D., according to the numismatic evidence. Then in the fifth century the Huns spread into this area from farther east, and by the end of that century Iran had lost control of the countries to the east.

This background can explain somewhat the phenomenon of a superb silver-gilt plate (Cover, Figure 1) recently acquired by the Museum, reputedly from Guilan. In technique and style it is unquestionably a Sasanian work of extremely high quality. The subject matter and the arrangement of the design are, however, unique in Sasanian art, and there the artist has borrowed heavily from the west and was probably also influenced by the east.

Two confronted nude youths are represented standing before winged horses, whose reins they hold in their inside hands, while their outside arms hold spears with foliated ends. The spears are placed behind the horses' rumps, a physical impossibility that probably stems from the artist's wish to avoid the impression that the weapons actually pass through the animals' bodies. Both youths and

horses stand on decorated plinths. The horses bend their necks downward to drink out of an overflowing vase. This vase is in turn supported by a female half figure whose raised arms frame its sides. A row of four acanthus leaves on either side of her and one leaf on the front of her body give the impression that she is appearing out of the ground. Finally, in the field between the wings of the horses is a small seated musician playing a mandolin.

It is immediately apparent, even from a frontal photograph, that the elements of this scene are arranged at different levels on the plate. The complexity and heaviness that would have resulted from raising everything in high relief have been avoided by engraving part of the design on the background. The tops of the horses' wings, their inside hind and forelegs, their forelocks and their tails, as well as the hands of the youths holding the spears, the spears themselves, and the feet and hands of the small musician are engraved on the raised shell of the plate. All the other elements are made of separate pieces of metal carved out of solid silver (the two outer forelegs of the horses, which are entirely in the round, and the heads of the youths) or roughly worked in repoussé with chased or carved surface details. The figure of the female with the jar was separated from the dish during cleaning and restoration, and the repoussé hammer marks are clearly visible on the inside surface of the rather thick piece of metal (Figure 2). Every figure or object, with the exception of the acanthus leaves, is made not of a single but of several of such repoussé pieces. Each nude youth and plinth consists of seven, each horse of six, the female and jar of two, and the small musician of two. Since the acanthus leaves are also separate elements, this makes a total of thirty-eight added pieces of silver. The joins between all these parts, both where they come together and where they meet the background, have been so skillfully tooled over as to become almost invisible, and the final gilding would have hidden them completely. The ridges that held the additions in place were chiseled up from the shell of the plate and then crimped

over the margin of the inserts. At the outer edge of the design a deep groove can be seen, and this must have been the original guideline for the craftsman to follow in cutting the ridges. The design, except for the male and female faces and necks, is mercury-gilded; the background is ungilded silver. On the reverse the ring foot is attached by solder to the plate. This elaborate and difficult method of decorating an open plate is only one of many used by the Sasanians for silver plates and bowls. Although there is no evidence before the Sasanian period in the Near East of the technique of applying the separate elements used on the Museum's new plate, separate elements in relief added to vessels are known in earlier Elamite (southern Iranian) metalwork and in the Marlik and Kalar Dasht gold cups of the late second millennium B.C. On these, the heads of animals and birds were made separately and then worked or riveted onto the metal of the vessel.

A closer parallel to the Sasanian technique is apparent in late Roman metalwork. A silver handle of the second century A.D. in this Museum (Figure 3, described by Christine Alexander in the November 1955 *Bulle-*

tin) contains inserts that were set into already prepared slots with undercut edges. The outlines of these inserts for the most part do not follow the silhouettes of the figures or objects represented, and the handle and inserts were cast, not raised, but the method of application is essentially the same as that on the Sasanian plate. The separately made pieces on the latter closely follow the outlines of the figures, and this exactness as well as the fairly smooth gradations between one level of the design and another is a clear indication of the skill of the craftsman. The silver Roman handle was reputedly found in Iran and is a good illustration of how such techniques could have spread from one country to another. Although I know of no Parthian pieces made in this way, it is entirely possible that the method was already known late in that period.

The dating of Sasanian works of art presents many problems. Few excavations at Sasanian sites have been made. Those at Bishapur and Damghan in Iran and Ctesiphon and Kish in Iraq are the most notable published examples. These excavations have produced mosaic floors, stucco wall decorations,

3. *Silver handle. Roman, 1-2 centuries A.D. Width 8 $\frac{1}{16}$ inches. Rogers Fund, 54.11.8*





4. Detail of Figure 1



5. Silver-gilt wine vessel. Sasanian, about IV century
A.D. Height $7\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Cleveland Museum of Art,
gift of Katherine Holden Thayer, 62.294

glass, and pottery, but no luxury items such as silver-gilt plates. Fortunately, a number of Sasanian rock reliefs that exist in northern and southern Iran represent historical scenes or royal investitures with identifiable kings. Such kings are not only recognizable by the scenes in which they take part but also by the fact that in most cases they wear crowns identical to those in which they are represented on their coins. Although there are some intervals when none were carved, these reliefs show a definite development in style through the Sasanian period. In metalwork the ground is not so sure. The vast majority of published silver-gilt Sasanian plates or bowls also have scenes in which a king is represented, but the crowns worn by the figures are often different from any that appear on Sasanian coins. Consequently the dating of many of these pieces is necessarily based on comparisons of style with other firmly dated plates or with such works of art as the rock reliefs mentioned above. The Museum's new plate clearly falls into this category, since no king with a recognizable royal crown is represented on it and the subject matter does not in itself give any clue to the date at which the plate was made.

Perhaps the most misleading factor in the appearance of this plate is the purely Greco-Roman pose of the pair of nude youths, who are standing supported by their spears with one foot flat on the plinth, the other resting on the edge. Since they form the largest single element on the plate, the immediate first impression is that the plate must not belong to the Sasanian period at all but to the earlier Parthian era, when the art of Iran was strongly influenced by that of Rome. It cannot be denied that the youths are modeled on western prototypes, but this, as will be shown later, does not prevent the plate from being Sasanian in date. Roman craftsmen were deported to Iran from such places as Antioch in Syria by the victorious Sasanian rulers, and they had considerable influence on the architecture and art of Iran under that dynasty. Moreover, a number of details are typical of Sasanian and not Parthian art.

The half female with a somewhat lugubrious expression (Figure 4), who supports the water jar, is similar to female heads on other Sasanian vases. The jeweled diadem around the head, the necklace, and the hair drawn up to the topknot or in locks back at the sides are details that also appear on the females decorating a vase now in the Cleveland Museum (Figure 5). There, the hair forms a large ball above, and there are two long side locks falling to the shoulders, but these are just variations in a related type. Sasanian seals provide parallels for the unrealistic, evenly curled hair of the youths (Figure 6), for the foliated ends of their spears (Figure 7), and for similar horses, typically raising the foreleg, with curled tips to their wings and forelocks floating above their heads (Figure 8). A frequently used piece of Sasanian decoration is the abstract version of an acanthus border on the plinths under the feet of the youths and their horses: it is identical to examples on many other Sasanian plates and vases of the fourth to seventh centuries A.D.

These features all clearly point to a Sasanian date for the Museum's plate but do not narrowly confine it to a certain century within that period. To do that it is necessary to consider the style, and here, although a sequence for Sasanian silver-gilt vessels has long been suggested, we are, without a corpus of positively dated material, necessarily on uncertain ground.

One clue is the three-quarters position of the youths' heads. This pose first appears in datable plates with Hormizd II (303-309 A.D.) (Figure 9). From the evidence we now have, Sasanian plates of the third century show figures in pure profile, a characteristic that recurs in many of the later plates of the fifth and sixth centuries, which are deliberate imitations of earlier pieces. The three-quarters view is most common in plates of the fourth and early fifth centuries.

Another indication of date is given by what drapery there is, that on the half female. I am inclined to think that the deeper Sasanian bowls showing figures wearing drapery with parallel ripples that run obliquely, or



6. *Carnelian ring bezel seal. Sasanian, III-VI centuries A.D. British Museum, 120195*



7. *Onyx ring bezel seal. Sasanian, possibly Bahram IV (388-399 A.D.). British Museum, 119352*



8. *Carnelian ring bezel seal. Sasanian, III-VI centuries A.D. Anonymous gift, 62.66.14*

almost vertically, down the arms, body, or legs (Figure 10) are the earliest and of the third century A.D. The effect given is that of a windblown surface. Later, in the fourth and early fifth centuries, on open plates and vases, this parallel rippling over the surface of the garment disappears. The parts of the drapery that flow out from the body retain a more modeled series of ripples, but the drapery on the body clings smoothly to the surface and is generally covered with a decorative but unrealistic series of double lines

and dots. It is obvious that the half female in the Museum's plate is in this second stage. Although there appear to be ripples across the front of the body at the base, this inverted V is not drapery but the central acanthus leaf and part of the chain of leaves that spreads out from this figure to the right and left. The drapery in fact clings to the body and arms quite smoothly, and on it are engraved double lines and dots. This use of double lines to suggest folds in a purely linear fashion appears also on ivories from Begram, the summer

9. *Silver-gilt plate. Sasanian,
Hormizd II (303-309 A.D.).
Cleveland Museum of Art, John
L. Severance Fund, 62.150*





10. *Silver-gilt plate. Sasanian, Shapur I, III century A.D. British Museum, 124091*

capital of the Kushan kings in eastern Afghanistan. These are possibly of the second or third century A.D. The Sasanians spread into this area directly to the east of Iran in the third century, but Hormizd II was probably the first Sasanian king to sit on the Kushan throne. He is also the first Sasanian king to be represented, on the silver-gilt plates known to me, with drapery of this double line type. It is likely, therefore, that the appearance of this feature in Iran is the result of the close ties between the Sasanians and the Kushan kingdom.

A further indication of the eastern influence on this Sasanian plate is the fact that in the middle of the forehead of each youth is a small dot (Figure 11). This must, I think, be derived from the *urna*, the shining dot common on heads of Buddha. Its presence here can only be a result of Sasanian contact with Buddhist art in Afghanistan. The fifth century A.D. stucco heads of Buddhas from the stupas at Hadda in the east of that country not only usually have the *urna* but often unrealistically curled locks not unlike those of the youths. That the forehead dot



11. Detail of Figure 1

is not, in Sasanian iconography, the attribute of a single deity is proved by its appearance on the heads of females, possibly Anahitas, on the vase already mentioned in the Cleveland Museum (Figure 5) and on another in the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad. Whatever the significance of the dot to the Sasanians, it is a feature that appears for the first time in Iran during this period.

These stylistic details and signs of foreign influence suggest a date for the Museum's plate in the fourth or early fifth century A.D. During this time the Sasanians came to control a vast area, including part of Armenia to the west and extending into Afghanistan to the east. Later, at the end of the fifth century, the Sasanians lost control of Afghanistan to the Huns, and the close connection between the two areas for a time ceased. If, as seems likely, the plate comes from Guilan, a region far from the known residences of the Sasanian kings, then it must have belonged to some member of the nobility or a prince of the royal family, perhaps acting as governor of that area.

Progressing from certainty concerning the technique of the plate's manufacture to probability about the period in which it was made, we come to pure hypothesis on what is perhaps the most fascinating problem of all, the meaning of the scene represented. Those familiar with the myths and legends of Greece and Rome and the elaborate iconography of the Middle Ages, about which so much is known and understood, will find it hard to believe that the scene on this plate cannot be interpreted with any certainty. But such is the state of our knowledge of Sasanian religion and mythology of the Near East from the earliest periods is fragmentary. The student of ancient Near Eastern art finds representations of extraordinary mythological scenes, on the one hand, and a few texts, many incomplete, on the other. To connect the two is, at best, a matter of good guesswork. An example in the pre-Sasanian Near East is the identification of Gilgamesh, a legendary hero and ruler of the city of Uruk in southern Mesopotamia, with any male figure wrestling

with or grasping animals, a popular and common representation from Sumerian times onward. Yet neither the legends nor the representations of figures are specific enough to make such identifications certain, and it is entirely possible that some simple meaning—the power of man over animals—is all that is intended.

By Sasanian times the situation has not improved. The religion Zoroaster started some time around the seventh century B.C. in Iran had undergone many changes by the time it became the official state religion of the Sasanian empire. The scripture of this belief, the Avesta, was compiled at different periods, and much of it is known to us only from later manuscripts of the Islamic period. With these perils in mind, it might be best for one who is not an expert on Iranian religion to maintain total silence, but the temptation to suggest an interpretation is irresistible.

The youths are a pair and of primary importance in the scene represented on the plate. Beneath their feet are water, which their horses drink, and plants, the acanthus leaves that grow on either side of the flowing water. The small musician is clearly a secondary figure. Since their horses are winged and they themselves are nude, the youths are surely a divine pair. It has already been noted that the form in which they are represented is western in origin: to be more specific, they are unquestionably modeled on the Dioscuroi, Castor and Pollux. These heavenly twins, who became identified with the constellation Gemini, have a long history in Greek and Roman mythology, and representations of them on coins and gems into the time of the later Roman Empire (Figure 12), and as far east as Afghanistan, where they appear on the coinage of the Indo-Parthians, were surely known to the Sasanians.

Nude except for short capes, the Dioscuroi frequently appeared in the West with stars over their heads or resting directly on them (Figure 13). In the Zoroastrian religion, the stars, headed by Tishtar, the Dog Star, were the producers of rain: "The stars that have in them the seed of the waters, the seed of



12. Silvered-bronze coin. Roman (Ostia), Maxentius, first quarter of the IV century A.D. American Numismatic Society

the earth, the seed of the planets" (the Avesta). The twelve zodiacal constellations produced by the great god of this religion, Ahuramazda, included one called the Two Figures, or Two Images (the Bundahishn). The relation between this constellation, the western Gemini, and, earlier still, the Babylonian "great twins" is obviously extremely close. What is different in the Zoroastrian religion is the part played by the stars in the universe: it is they who bring water and plants to man. Certainly on this plate the youths, who must, I believe, represent this Zoroastrian constellation, are associated directly with water and plants.

The female holding a jar from which water flows may be Anahita, goddess of fertility, the heavenly spring whom Tishtar visits in the shape of a beautiful white horse. On the other hand, since the waters were themselves considered to be female, the rather minor position of the figure here perhaps means that she is only a personification of this element. In later Sasanian art, small females appear in the water with ducks and fishes, but these cannot be representations of Anahita and must, I think, be such female water sprites.

The remaining figure of the small musician is placed somewhat incongruously between the two great youths and their winged horses. He plays a mandolin, an instrument that remained a favorite in Iran, particularly in Deilaman, according to Islamic authors, up to their time. On the Sasanian vases decorated with females connected with the cult of Anahita, such musicians are frequently represented, playing a variety of instruments. The presence of a musician in a scene with religious meaning is not therefore unparalleled.

Created by Ahuramazda, the stars were for the Sasanians great benefactors of man. The constellations of the zodiac were the celestial leaders appointed by Ahuramazda. My guess is that the western Dioscuri type was taken over by the Sasanians to illustrate one of their constellations, and that the scene on this plate is a representation of these heavenly twins, standing with their winged horses over the gifts they offer to man.

NOTES

The reference to Ibn al-Faqih is to be found in V. Minorsky, "La Domination des Dailamites," *Société des Études Iranienne et de l'Art Persan*, no. 3 (1932), p. 5; that to the Avesta in *The Zend-Avesta*, Part II, tr. J. Darmsteter ("The Sacred Books of the East," XXIII), p. 9, Sirozah I, verse 13.

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13. Ring bezel seal. Roman, late Imperial period. British Museum, 1964-10-20, 1

Notes



STYLIZED FALCONS

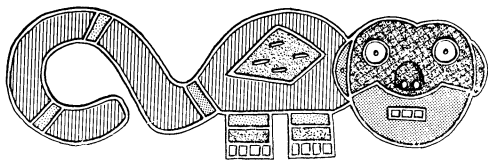
The double-spout bottle was a traditional south coast form, corresponding to the stirrup-spout jars of the north. This fine early example was incised, and then painted after firing with resin-based pigments in yellow, red, and very deep green.

South coast, Early Paracas style, about 500 B.C. Height 3¾ inches. Gift of Nathan Cummings, 64.228.97

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