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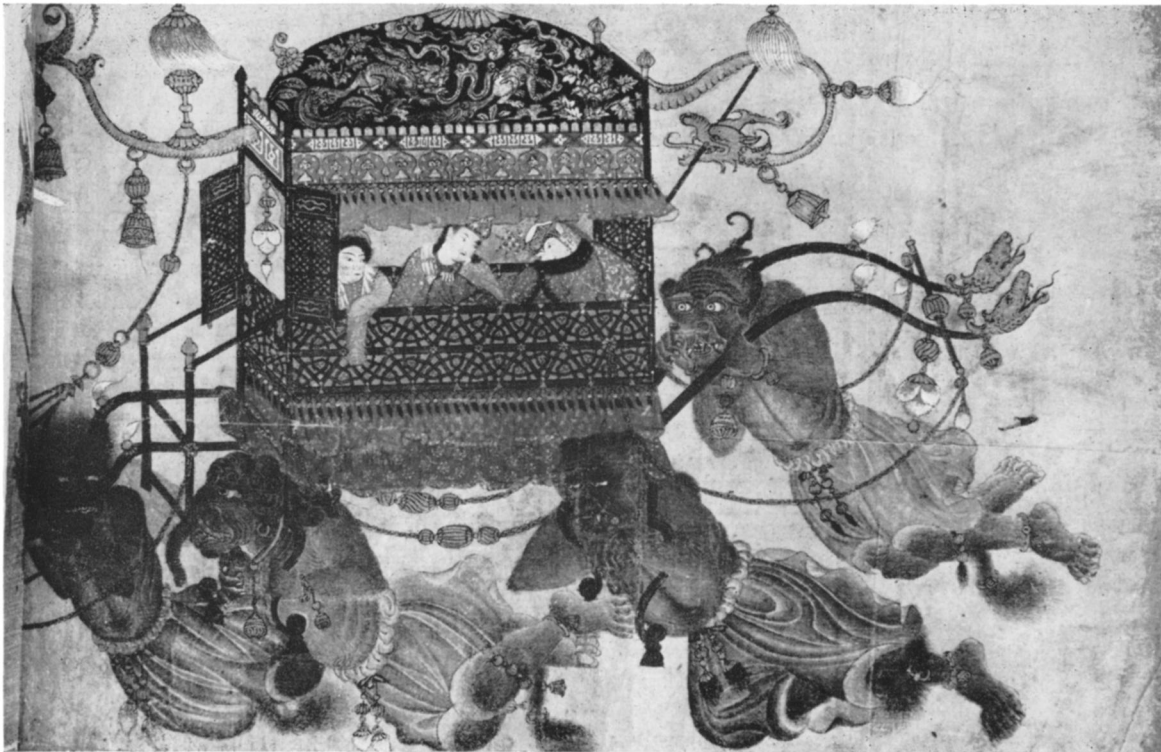
1. *St. Francis Appearing to Pope Gregory*, by Giotto and assistant, Italian (Florence), early XIV century. Fresco in the Church of San Francesco, Assisi. Photograph: Anderson – Art Reference Bureau

2. *Album painting. Central Asian (Transoxiana or Herat), about 1400. Topkapi Sarayi Library, Istanbul*

# Devotional Writing: *"Pseudoinscriptions" in Islamic Art*

DON AANAVI *Assistant Curator of Islamic Art*

In the Italian Renaissance fresco shown in Figure 1, the pattern of the hanging's border is made up of Arabic letters. The same phenomenon occurs in the painting from Central Asia shown in Figure 2, where the roof of the sedan chair is similarly adorned. Such inscriptions have been called pseudoinscriptions, or pseudoepigraphy, or mock calligraphy. These terms do not indicate that the writing itself is "fake" (for an alphabet chart is no less writing than is a dissertation), but that the letters or combination of letters are apparently meaningless. And interpreting the inscriptions as meaningless has caused the creators of these objects, whether Muslim or Christian, to be described as illiterate or naive.



3. *Abu Zayd writing an amulet. Detail of the Hour of Birth, by Yahya ibn Mahmud al-Wasiti. Miniature from the Assemblies of al-Hariri. Iraq (Baghdad), 1237 (634 H.). Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS Arabe 5847, f. 122v. From Arab Painting (1962) by Richard Ettinghausen*



But thousands of Islamic works of art of the highest quality bear these “meaningless” inscriptions. While it is true that in the various conquered territories of the early Islamic periods a large percentage of the population was illiterate, it is also true that basically Islam was a literate culture, and caution is needed before condemning the inscriptions on a host of objects in such a society as gibberish. For written Arabic, from the inception of Islam, was thought of as intrinsically significant, synonymous with the presence of something divine. Muslims believe, for instance, that the words of the Koran were engraved on tablets in heaven and were never to be translated nor transcribed into another tongue. It is not unreasonable to think that even the most ignorant Muslim, perceiving any Arabic letter or phrase, would apprehend it as writing and thus as something worthy of veneration.

Furthermore, within the vast category of Arabic “pseudoinscriptions,” whether in Islamic, Western, or Far Eastern art, there are few really meaningless phrases. Rather, there is a symbolic and abbreviated vocabulary, often possessed of magical associations. The Renaissance artist did not necessarily corrupt what was once a coherent Arabic inscription. Quite to the contrary, he faithfully recorded a standard Islamic phenomenon. Our concern here is not to fathom the reasons for the appearance of such motifs in non-Islamic art, but to suggest their function in their own context.

The magical properties of writing are characteristic of Semitic cultures in general, and one cannot underestimate the influence

of Hebraic attitudes toward writing upon Islam, especially in respect to abbreviations and magic or mystic associations. Nor is this connection based only on the influence received through Jewish converts to Islam, but also on the fact that throughout the early Islamic period Jewish silversmiths produced a multitude of objects for Muslim patrons, including charms upon which curious combinations of Hebrew and Arabic letters are seen. A Muslim charm is depicted in a miniature of the Baghdad school showing the Hour of Birth. In the upper left corner (Figure 3), the folk hero Abu Zayd is represented in the very act of writing it. Why has the painter represented the characters of the charm impressionistically, when it would have been as easy to represent actual words? Because he is being faithful to the actual appearance of such amulets: the writing on Abu Zayd’s scroll suggests the forms of Hebrew letters even more than Arabic, and the presence of pseudo-Hebrew as well as actual Hebrew is indeed common on Muslim charms. In fact, such objects frequently bore “secret” characters, whose mystic meaning was known only to the initiate.

Some Muslim inscriptions have been called “illiterate” because words have been split into parts in an illogical fashion. This feature, however, stems from the manner of writing early copies of the Koran. Scribes were concerned not only with the text, but with the design as well – and not simply with the forms of individual words, but also with their relationship to the entire page. Regardless of present-day prohibitions in Arabic grammar against the practice, in early Korans split

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words often appear at the ends and beginnings of lines. Liberties were taken even with the name Allah, the absurdity of which can be illustrated by such an unlikely Christian parallel as:

Jesu  
s

There were thus religious and literate precedents for the arbitrary hyphenation and abbreviation of Arabic.

In addition, at the beginning of twenty-nine chapters of the Koran, following the *bismillah* (the phrase meaning “in the name of God”), there occur strange letters, either in isolation or in combination (Figure 4). The meaning of these letters, fourteen in all, has never been agreed upon by theologians. They may be allusions to the names of God, or mysterious signs that appeared to Muhammad before the approach of a Koranic revelation, or abbreviations of the names of those who owned the various manuscripts of the Koran when it was first standardized. Whatever interpretation is offered, the fact is that in many instances isolated letters or fragments of words were pregnant with meaning, and a religious basis for interpreting them was established.

For example, the letter *kaf* (whose form is like the Roman S) appears not only throughout Islamic art, in all media, but in Christian art as well: it is represented on the facades of churches and even on the robe of God the Father in a fourteenth-century Italian painting of the Holy Trinity. According to Muslim theology, there are ninety-nine beautiful names of God (the hundredth being known to God alone), and the letter *kaf* is used as an abbreviation for one of the most often cited of these, the name *al-Kafi* (“the Sufficient”). The motif that decorates the sherd from Nishapur shown in Figure 5 is based on an interlace of four *kafs*. It is a design rife with meaning, for it refers not only to a name of God, but may also be understood as a reduction of, and by extension an abbreviation for, the word *barakah* (“blessing”)—and this word is one of the most frequently used calligraphic motifs in early Islamic art, especially on objects with magical associations.



4. Page from a Koran, with calligraphy by Ibrahim Sultan, grandson of Timur (Tamerlane). Persian, xv century. The group of letters at the upper middle of the right-hand margin are the ones that have never been satisfactorily interpreted. 8 x 5½ inches. Gift of Alexander Smith Cochran, 13.228.2

5. Slip-painted and glazed pottery sherd. Iran (from Nishapur), 1x-x century. Excavations of the Metropolitan Museum, 1937, 40.170.494a, b





6. Painted and glazed pottery bowl. Syrian (Rakka),  
XV-XVI century. Diameter 9 1/2 inches. Bequest of Edward C. Moore, 91.1.538



8. Casket. Syrian, XV century. Brass inlaid with  
silver, height 4 inches. Bequest of Edward  
C. Moore, 91.1.538

Another important example of this symbolic vocabulary can be seen on a bowl made in the Syrian city of Rakka (Figure 6). Part of the decoration consists of two letters repeated, an *alif* and a *lam*. This combination, simple though it may seem, is one of the richest of symbols. The Arabic article *al* ("the"), which the letters form, is crucial in the Muslim confession of faith ("There is no god but God"): it is the one element that distinguishes *Allah* ("God") from *ilah* ("a god"). *Alif* and *lam* often appear on Muslim charms, as in the amulet in Figure 7, where they could be interpreted as abbreviations of Allah or as substitutions for a Hebrew name for God, *El* (which is spelled with two etymologically related letters).

The characters on the clasp of a Syrian casket (Figure 8) are not abbreviations: they are magic. The four letters spell *buduh*, meaningless as a word but by no means "pseudo-Arabic." It is an instance of the use of the *abjad* system, most probably of Hebrew origin, in which letters stand for numbers used in magical formulas. *Buduh*, the letters of which function as the numbers 2-4-6-8, is one of the most popular formulas among Muslims, and is applied to objects especially to insure their safe delivery. Many of the Islamic inscriptions now passed off as meaningless are further examples of the *abjad* system. This is an area that is little understood and needs further study.



Certain groups of “pseudoinscriptions” cannot be interpreted as either overt or covert symbols or abbreviations. The simplest representative of this group is seen on a Persian brass casket of the Mongol period (Figure 9). The inscription, inlaid in silver, is a repeated U, whose verticals and horizontal crossbar are the two basic components of Arabic script. We are observing a design and not a word, but a design meant to inspire the viewer with the veneration accorded to writing itself. Caskets such as this one often contained sacred relics, and the mood of reverence has been suggested by its calligraphic decoration.

There are objects that bear combinations of coherent inscriptions with “pseudocalligraphy,” and therefore refute the notion that such apparently meaningless writing was necessarily the work of illiterates. One of these is a miniature (Figure 10) from the same manuscript as the scene of Abu Zayd writing an amulet. It portrays a group of parading horsemen holding banners, some of which quite legibly convey the Muslim confession of faith. Yet in the same painting we observe the use of “pseudoinscriptions.” One of these, on the banner of the horseman at the far left, seems to begin either as a debased version of *Allah* or perhaps as the word *lillah* (“to God”). But halfway through the inscription the very act of debasement is recorded, and the letters dissipate into a simple alternation of verticals and circles. Also in the form of “pseudocalligraphy” are the *tiraz* inscriptions on the clothing (given as rewards and worn with honor by the recipients, often conveying the rank of the owner and blessing and good wishes). While it is true that *tiraz* inscriptions were occasionally abbreviated by the omission of some letters, such reduction was never carried to the extreme evident in this painting. It seems irresponsible to attribute the summary writing to the artist’s being ignorant, bored, or sloppy, when the rest of the miniature is carefully and sensitively painted. In this manuscript, where the painter and calligrapher were one and the same man, Yahya ibn Mahmud al-Wasiti, and where the confession of faith appears clearly—for it is too sacred a formula



9. Casket. Persian (Mongol period), early XIV century. Brass inlaid with silver, height 5½ inches. Bequest of Edward C. Moore, 91.1.564

10. *Horsemen Waiting to Participate in a Parade*, by Yahya ibn Mahmud al-Wasiti. Miniature from the *Assemblies of al-Hariri*. 9½ x 10¼ inches. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS Arabe 5847, f. 19r. From *Arab Painting* (1962) by Richard Ettinghausen





11. Prayer rug. Turkish, XVII century. Wool, 5 feet 4 inches  
x 3 feet 5 inches. Gift of James F. Ballard, 22.100.123

to be tampered with—we see the artist deliberately deciding not to make some of the inscriptions legible. He apparently chose the abbreviated and ornamental forms of “pseudowriting” because he knew these few strokes would convey to the viewer the nature of the inscriptions he was referring to. His interest lay in having the writing understood as “inscriptions,” not as specific words.

An extraordinary example of the combination of two distinctly different concepts of writing is seen in the border of a Turkish prayer rug (Figure 11). One is a coherent inscription, an excerpt from the Koran proclaiming the omniscience of God. The other consists of a series of intricately massed letters, repeated calligraphic elements that spell nothing. In the lower right-hand panel, where the Koranic excerpt begins, the last “letter” of the “pseudoinscription” becomes the first letter of the coherent word *Allah*. Indeed, it is difficult to determine where one style begins and the other leaves off; just so, it is difficult to suggest where meaning begins and ends, for both inscriptions are inextricably bound up together. What lies behind this combination? A clue is the placement of the two types of writing. “Pseudowriting” occurs where the worshiper would have stepped onto the rug, at the entrance to the prayer niche that the rug symbolizes; the Koranic inscription appears around the niche itself, which he would have faced as he prayed. There is no doubt that the rug’s designer felt that the excerpt from the Koran was too sacred to be trodden underfoot, while the “pseudocharacters” would indicate the attitude of devotion with which one approached the place of prayer.

Arabic “pseudoinscriptions” exist on objects of the finest quality and in the most important of contexts. They are not simply decorative transformations of writing elements into pure ornament, nor unintentional misrepresentations of actual words. They reflect a thoughtful and enormously sophisticated attitude toward the significance of writing, and we would do well to remind ourselves that what we may not understand is not, by consequence, meaningless.

# Muslim: *An Early Fatimid Ceramist*

MARILYN JENKINS *Curatorial Assistant, Islamic Art*

There are very few concrete facts on which to base the history of Islamic ceramics during the first five centuries of Muslim civilization, from the early seventh to the early twelfth century. Contemporary literature names several cities famed for the production of beautiful pottery, but it gives little or no indication of what these ceramics looked like, or how and when they were made. Excavations very often provide art historians with datable examples and information about the evolution of style, technique, and iconography. But here, too, there are difficulties. Al Basra in Iraq, which was a major early ceramic center, is now partially under the Persian Gulf and has never been excavated. Medieval Baghdad, another important center, lies beneath modern Baghdad, and thus probably will never be excavated. Fustat, the center of ceramic production in medieval Egypt, has been haphazardly excavated, and consequently the opportunity it would have afforded for stratigraphic dating—assigning dates to objects in accordance with the levels on which they are found—has been lost.

Thus, scholars are compelled to rely heavily on technical, stylistic, and iconographic studies to establish the relative chronology of the ceramic objects made during this five-hundred-year period, because not only is information lacking in contemporary literature and ceramic centers, but there is not one dated ceramic object before 1118, to my knowledge, and there are very few bearing inscriptions that permit a precise dating.

There are only two published ceramic pieces bearing inscriptions that can help us in any way to date precisely a piece of pottery made during the first five centuries of Muslim civilization. Both of these were made in Egypt during the years when the Fatimid



1. *Luster-painted fragmentary plate, signed by Muslim. Egyptian (Fatimid period), about 1000. Benaki Museum, Athens, 11122. No. 9 in Appendix*



2. *Front and back of luster-painted bowl,  
signed by Muslim. Diameter 10 inches.  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles K.  
Wilkinson, 63.178.1. No. 10 in Appendix*



dynasty was in power, from 969 to 1171. One of these, a fragmentary, large, luster-painted plate, in the Islamic Museum in Cairo, contains a dedicatory inscription to "the Commander-in-Chief Gaban," an official in the court of the caliph al-Hakim, who ruled from 996 to 1021. Since Gaban bore this title only from 1011 to 1013, the plate can be dated within this two-year period.

The second object is a fragmentary luster-painted plate in the Benaki Museum, Athens (Figure 1), which bears an inscription on the rim: "[The work of] Muslim son of al-Dahan, to please . . . Hassan Iqbal al-Hakimi." Hassan Iqbal has not been identified as yet, but the use of al-Hakimi as part of his name does indicate that he was a courtier of the caliph al-Hakim. Thus, we can assume that this object was made sometime during the caliph's twenty-six-year reign—from 996 to 1021—and, further, that the ceramist Muslim ibn al-Dahan was working at that period.

This latter fact is particularly important because, although it was a common practice for Fatimid ceramists to sign the objects they made, Muslim is the only artist among them whose work can be dated to a precise historical period.

The number of Fatimid ceramic objects in Western collections is very small. Consequently, the Museum is fortunate not only to have four bowls of this type, but among them to have a bowl signed by Muslim, which is also one of the few objects signed by this artist that has survived intact (Figure 2). As on the other bowls bearing his signature, he has employed in its decoration the technique of luster painting. This technique, which was first employed on pottery in ninth-century Iraq, and from there spread to other Near Eastern countries, to Spain, and then to Italy, France, England, and America, was one of the most important discoveries made by the artists of the Islamic world.

The principal decoration on the interior of this bowl is a heraldic eagle with spread wings, claws, and tail, holding a trilobed leaf in its beak. Its head, body, claws, and the leaf are painted in solid luster with only some facial details and the outline of the body



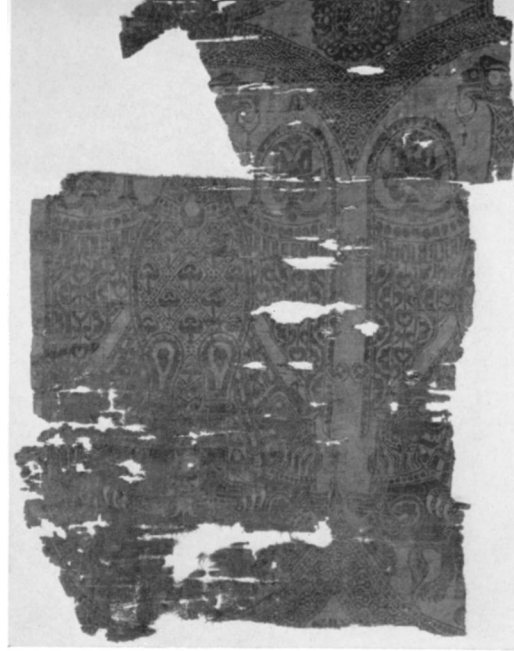
3. *Luster-painted bowl. Iraq, IX century. Diameter 7¾ inches. Rogers Fund, 52.114*

4. *Outside of luster-painted bowl. Iraq, X century. Diameter 12 inches. Fletcher Fund, 64.134*





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7

5. *Stone stele. Roman, from ancient Viminacium (near Kostolac, Yugoslavia), III century. From *Archaeologisch-Epigraphische Mittheilungen aus Oesterreich-Ungarn*, 15 (Vienna, 1892) by O. Benndorf and E. Bormann*
6. *Silk twill. Byzantine, XI century. Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 41.92*
7. *Limestone stele. Coptic Egyptian, about 600. Gift of Ernest Mackay, 14.1.459 a-d*
8. *Stone relief. Hispano-Islamic, from Madina az-Zahra (near Cordova), Spain, X century. Museo Arqueológico, Madrid*
9. *Detail of ivory box. Hispano-Islamic, XI century. Treasury of the Cathedral of Pamplona*
10. *Silk textile. Hispano-Islamic, XII century. Funds from Various Donors, 58.85.2*
11. *Detail of wooden ceiling, from the Cappella Palatina, Palermo, Sicily, XII century. Museo Nazionale, Palermo. From *Siculo-Arabic Ivories* (Princeton, 1939) by Perry Blythe Cott*
12. *Detail of ivory casket. South Italian, XI-XII century. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 17.190.241*

feathers being left white. The wings, tail, and upper legs are white, outlined and detailed in luster. In the area around the bird there are asymmetrical fillers, most of which contain a rather debased form of the “peacock-eye” motif, which is first found on Iraqi luster of the ninth century (Figure 3).

The luster-painted decoration on the back consists of concentric circles filled with and surrounded by dashes, a design that is only a slight variation of the customary exterior decoration of tenth-century luster-painted bowls from Iraq (Figure 4).

Muslim signed the bowl twice: once on the foot, and again below the eagle’s right claw.

In representing this heraldic eagle in a frontal position, Muslim was using a long-popular motif, one not just peculiar to the iconography of Fatimid Egypt. This symbol of strength was the insignia of the Roman legions (Figure 5), and from the Romans the motif passed into the Byzantine repertoire (Figure 6).

It is not at all surprising to find this same bird represented on our Islamic Egyptian bowl, because when the Arabs conquered Egypt, in A.D. 641, they became the rulers of a country that had been subject first to Greek



8



9



10

and then to Roman domination for most of the preceding millennium. The iconography and artistic style that had evolved in Egypt during this long period were not superseded with the coming of the Arabs, but continued to exert a very strong influence on Egyptian Islamic art long after the introduction, by conquering dynasties and migrating artisans from the East, of a more abstract iconography and style.

The Coptic stele shown in Figure 7 illustrates the use of the motif in pre-Islamic Egypt. It was made around A.D. 600, and represents a heraldic eagle strikingly similar to the Fatimid bird, in the representation of the body feathers, the band separating the body from the tail, the division of the wings, and the leaf in the bird's beak. The Christian Egyptian who created this work and his fellow Coptic artisans were strongly influenced by the Byzantine art of Constantinople, and this artistic influence on the Coptic community continued for many centuries after the Arab conquest. As Coptic artisans were often employed by the Arabs, these Christians were actively able to keep the Roman and Byzantine tradition alive in Islamic Egypt.

The same bird is also to be found on Islamic objects made in Spain in the tenth, eleventh,

and twelfth centuries (Figures 8-10), in twelfth-century Sicily (Figure 11), and in southern Italy during the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Figure 12). These countries all had, to a greater or lesser degree, the same classical heritage as Islamic Egypt, and their art produced under Muslim domination demonstrates the same continuity of pre-Islamic tradition.

What about Muslim's other work? Twenty bowls, complete or fragmentary, signed by him are known, and can be used as a fair basis for compiling his iconographical repertoire. From these it can be concluded that he most frequently decorated his objects with animals. Seven of the twenty objects have an animal or animals as their principal decoration. Another four objects bear representations of birds. Eight of the remaining nine bowls are decorated with interlaced bands, calligraphy or "pseudocalligraphy," and floral patterns, or combinations of these motifs, and one fragment is decorated with a human being.

The style of the eagle on our bowl is most closely related to that of a griffin on a bowl by Muslim in the Islamic Museum in Cairo (Figure 13). The heads of the two are almost identical, and there is a similar use of white

11



12



13. *Luster-painted bowl, signed by Muslim. Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, 14930.*  
No. 4 in Appendix

for certain facial details and the pearl collar. Both are drawn in a bold, heavy style, which gives them an even stronger, more robust appearance than most of his other animals. The shape of these two bowls is identical: they have relatively high, straight walls, giving them a simple but graceful shape that is more aesthetically pleasing than that of most Fatimid bowls, which have low, concave walls.

In his representation of animals, Muslim appears always to leave the shoulder and hip joints white and to indicate the ribs in white. This convention, however, is not peculiar to this artist, but is also found on animals on Fatimid ceramics not bearing his signature (Figure 14). Other stylistic characteristics of Muslim's pieces are likewise found on objects not signed by him, and probably not attributable to him.

This apparent lack of stylistic individuality is not an isolated case in Islamic art. It occurs in all periods and throughout the Muslim world. There seem to have been certain artistic conventions, perhaps standardized in pattern books, that were strictly adhered to in each period. This would explain the lack of individuality in the representation of the same motif by different artists of the same period.

Muslim was, however, a master ceramist, in the deft way in which he handled the standard motifs and the way in which he incorporated them into the overall design of his bowls. In fact, Muslim apparently enjoyed a certain pre-eminence among his fellow artisans, for not only was he permitted to dedicate a bowl to someone closely associated with the caliph, but he also seems to have counter-signed objects made by other ceramists, and thus may have been the master of an important atelier.

Muslim's work represents a zenith in the animal, floral, and abstract decoration of

Egyptian luster-painted ceramics, because after his time the decoration of Fatimid luster-painted pottery becomes mainly figural. The brief catalogue of his known work that follows, however, is more than a list of pieces made by a master craftsman. It represents a ceramic "pattern book" for Fatimid Egypt around the year one thousand, which can help make possible the placing of similar objects more securely into the early Fatimid period by serving as a sound basis for stylistic, iconographical, and technical studies of other Fatimid luster-painted ceramics.

14. *Luster-painted bowl, unsigned. Egyptian (Fatimid period), about 1000. Diameter 10¼ inches. Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 64.261*

#### REFERENCES

The date 1118 occurs on luster-painted inscription tiles in the tomb chamber of Imam Riza in Meshhed, Iran. They are listed by Arthur Upham Pope, "The Ceramic Art in Islamic Times, A. The History" in *Survey of Persian Art II* (London, 1939), p. 1666.

The plate bearing the name Gaban is discussed by Hassan al Bashah Hassan Mahmud, "A Pottery Plate with the Name Gaban Mawla al-Hakim bi-amri-llah Written on It" in *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, Cairo University*, 18, Part 1 (1958), pp. 71-85 (in Arabic).

The Coptic influence in Islamic Egypt is illustrated by a Fatimid luster-painted bowl in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, that is decorated with a representation of a Coptic priest. See Arthur Lane, *Early Islamic Pottery* (London, 1947), Plate 26A.

Ceramic objects that seem to have been counter-signed by Muslim are discussed by Abdel Ra'uf A. Yousuf, "Pottery of the Fatimid Period and Its Artistic Style" in *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, Cairo University*, 20, Part 2 (1958), pp. 173-279 (in Arabic). Several of Muslim's pieces that I have been unable to illustrate are shown in Yousuf's article, and in the book by Aly Bey Bahgat and Felix Massoul, *La Céramique Musulmane de l'Égypte* (Cairo, 1930).

I would greatly appreciate being informed of the existence of additional objects signed by Muslim.



## Appendix

### Quadrupeds



1. Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, No. 10876/2: base of bowl.

Animal (unidentifiable) executed in luster; animal must have covered almost entire bowl.

Ribs and shoulder joint left white. Two spots on animal and its belly left white, but outlined and dotted with luster to indicate fur. Above back of animal, ovoid filler outlined in luster and containing luster-painted dots and circles.

BACK: Appears to have had decoration consisting of concentric circles.

SIGNATURE: On foot: عمل مسلم  
plus undecipherable word written twice.

Below belly of animal: عمل مسلم

2. Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo (Bahgat and Massoul, Plate xiv, 4a, b): base of bowl.

Animal (perhaps gazelle) executed in luster; animal just covers foot of bowl.

Shoulder and hip joints and line on belly left white. Eye left white, with luster-painted pupil. Luster-painted leaf in mouth of animal. Narrow luster-painted band surrounds animal.

BACK: No indication of decoration remains.

SIGNATURE: On foot:

مسلم بن الدهان

3. Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo (Bahgat and Massoul, Plate xiv, 3a, b): base of bowl.

Confronted long-eared animals (unidentifiable) executed in luster and separated by vertical object; design must have covered almost entire bowl.

Inside of ear and eyes left white, with pupils in luster. Hastily executed fillers in luster in front of both animals and behind ears of animal on left.

BACK: Design appears to have consisted of concentric circles in luster separated by dashes of luster.

SIGNATURE: On back: عمل مسلم

4. Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, No. 14930: complete bowl. See Figure 13 of this article.

Winged griffin executed in luster surrounded by luster-painted band; this design just covers bottom of bowl.

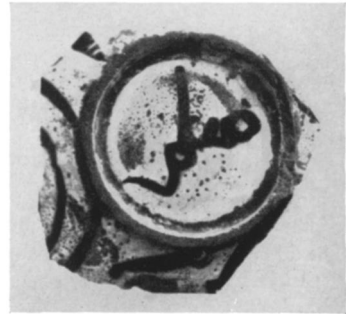
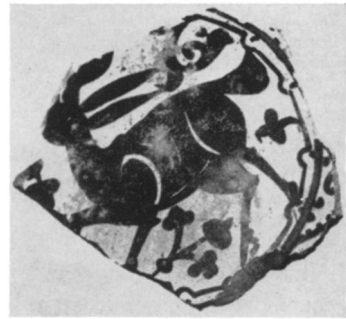
Shoulder and hip joints, claws, certain facial features, collar, and outer area of wing left white. Luster-painted leaf in mouth of animal. Tail and wing end in luster-painted leaf.

Wall of bowl decorated with alternating design of luster-painted palmette tree and "fleur-de-lis," outlined in luster, in ovoid luster-painted frame. Rim decorated with luster-painted band.

BACK: Concentric circles in luster filled with and surrounded by luster-painted dashes.

SIGNATURE: On inner wall of bowl:

عمل مسلم بن الدهان



5. Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, No. 6114/3: base of bowl.

Gazelle executed in luster, separated from rest of bowl by gadrooned frame outlined in luster with a luster-painted dot in each of the arcs; animal design in frame takes up more than bottom of bowl.

Shoulder and hip joints, ribs, and line on belly left white. Luster-painted leaf in mouth of animal.

Floral fillers in luster extend from frame into center of bowl. Debased palmette-leaf motif reserved in luster surrounds frame.

BACK: Concentric circles in luster filled with and surrounded by luster-painted dashes.

SIGNATURE: On foot: عمل مسلم

6. Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo (Bahgat and Massoul, Plate xiv, 2a, b): base of bowl.

Confronted long-eared or long-horned animals (unidentifiable) executed in luster, separated by tree outlined in luster; design must have taken up almost entire bowl.

Between each animal and tree, irregular filler outlined in luster and decorated with luster-painted spirals and dots.

BACK: Circles in luster surrounded by luster-painted dashes.

SIGNATURE: On back: مسلم  
Some of the signature area missing.



7. Benaki Museum, Athens: base of bowl.

Dog executed in luster; this design just covers foot of bowl.

Shoulder and hip joints, ribs, and eye left white with luster pupil. Luster-painted branch in mouth of animal.

Luster-painted floral fillers extend into center of bowl from luster-painted band surrounding dog.

BACK: Nothing remains of design.

SIGNATURE: On back: عمل مسلم

## Birds



8. Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, No. 6017/1: base of bowl.

Peacock executed in luster; design covers more than foot of bowl.

Areas in tail left white. Wing left white and decorated with luster-painted dots. Floral fillers in luster.

BACK: Concentric circles in luster filled with and surrounded by luster-painted dashes.

SIGNATURE: On back: مسلم



9. Benaki Museum, Athens, No. 11122: fragmentary plate. See also Figure 1 of this article.

Design on interior must have been divided into at least four areas.

On rim: floral scroll executed in luster containing luster-painted birds in various attitudes, some of them holding luster-painted leaves in their beaks. Eyes of birds left white, some containing luster pupils.

Gadrooned frame outlined in luster with a luster-painted dot in each of the arcs forms part of design of this plate.

Rest of design, aside from cartouche containing inscription, impossible to reconstruct.

BACK: Concentric circles in luster filled with and surrounded by luster-painted dashes.

SIGNATURE: In cartouche:

... مسلم بن الدهان وفق  
... الحسن اقبال الحاكمي

10. Metropolitan Museum, New York, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles K. Wilkinson, No. 63.178.1: complete bowl. See Figure 2 of this article.

Complete description given in text.

11. Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, No. 6124/1 (Yousuf, Plate 6a, b): base of bowl.

Peacock executed in luster, surrounded by luster-painted band; this design just covers bottom of bowl.

Outline and details of wing, line on belly, area on beak, upper part of legs, and eye left white with pupil in luster.

Decoration on wall of bowl impossible to reconstruct.

BACK: Concentric circles in luster filled with and surrounded by luster-painted dashes.

SIGNATURE: On back: مسلم

## Symmetrical Leaf Designs



12. Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, No. 15958: complete bowl.

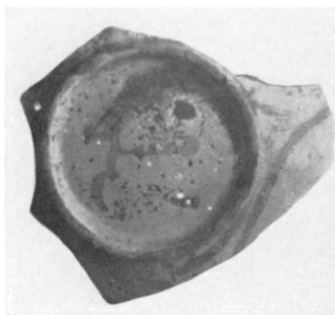
Design in center of bowl consists of four white leaves, each surrounded by white frame, silhouetted on luster ground. This design, which covers bottom of bowl, is set off from rest of bowl by luster-painted band.

Wall of bowl decorated with bold, luster-painted Kufic inscription: "Comprehensive well-being and perfect blessing." Luster-painted asymmetrical fillers decorated with spiral design in luster within inscription area.

Flat, out-turned rim decorated with luster-painted sawtooth band.

BACK: Concentric circles in luster filled with and surrounded by luster-painted dashes.

SIGNATURE: On back: مسلم



13. Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo: base of bowl.

Basic design appears to have consisted of interlaced luster-painted lines. In center, these lines circumscribe five half-palmette leaves with stems, in white reserved in luster, thus forming rosette, with white five-pointed "star" in center also reserved in luster.

Decoration on wall of bowl impossible to determine further, but undoubtedly related to central design.

BACK: Appears to have had decoration consisting of concentric circles.

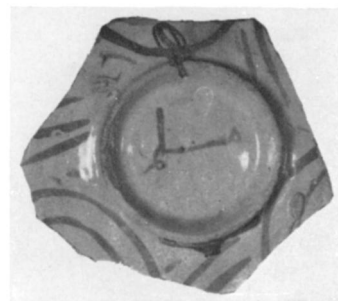
SIGNATURE: On back: مسلم

14. Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, No. 21482 (Yousuf, Plate 13a, b): base of bowl.

Four highly stylized white leaves silhouetted on luster ground, which was hastily incised with rectangles, circles, and spirals; this design covers bottom of bowl.

BACK: No indication of decoration remains.

SIGNATURE: On back: مسلم



15. Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, No. 12437/2: base of bowl.

In center, rhomboid design formed by four luster-painted, half-palmette leaves silhouetted on white ground; this design set off from rest of bowl by luster-painted band of same rhomboid shape.

Decoration on wall of bowl, except for four luster-painted leaves, impossible to determine.

BACK: Concentric circles in luster filled with and surrounded by luster-painted dashes.

SIGNATURE: On back: مسلم

## Interlaced Designs



16. Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, No. 1114: base of bowl.

Design consists of white interlaced bands decorated with alternating pattern, outlined in luster, of circles and rectangles; this design, silhouetted on luster ground, seems to have been an overall pattern.

BACK: No indication of decoration remains.

SIGNATURE: On back: عمل مسلم

17. Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo (Bahgat and Massoul, Plate xiv, 5a, b): base of bowl.

Design consists of white interlaced bands, outlined in luster and containing a pseudo-Arabic inscription in luster, radiating from luster-painted pentagon with white rosette in center; this design seems to have been an overall pattern.

BACK: Appears to have had decoration consisting of concentric circles.

SIGNATURE: On back: عمل مسلم

## Human Being



18. Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, No. 13968: base of bowl.

Seated figure executed in luster; design must have covered almost entire bowl.

Face, hand, shading, and costume details white.

BACK: Appears to have had decoration consisting of concentric circles.

SIGNATURE: On foot:

مسلم [؟ ابو] القسم

## Miscellaneous

19. Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo (Bahgat and Massoul, Plate xiv, 6a, b): base of bowl.

Center of bowl contains fragmentary luster-painted signature of artist. This area surrounded by luster-painted band.

Decoration on remainder of this fragment consists of circles outlined in luster with dots in center.

BACK: Impossible to determine decoration.

SIGNATURE: In center of interior:

عم ... مسل ...

20. Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo (Bahgat and Massoul, Plate xxii, 8a, b): rim of bowl.

Rim appears to have been decorated with luster-painted festoon. Below festoon was signature of artist.

Rest of design impossible to reconstruct.

BACK: Appears to have had decoration consisting of concentric circles.

SIGNATURE: On interior wall:

... ن الدهان ...

# The Origin of Coral by Claude Lorrain

LINDA LEE BOYER *Curatorial Assistant, Department of Drawings*

In 1674 Claude Gellée, called Le Lorrain, completed what has become one of his most celebrated pictures, *A Coast View with Perseus and the Origin of Coral*, now in the collection of Lord Leicester at Holkham Hall (Figure 1). The work was commissioned by Cardinal Carlo Camillo Massimi, Chamberlain under Pope Clement X. It is a well-documented painting; much is known about the character and taste of the patron, the source of the subject, and the artist's working methods as reflected in preparatory studies for the completed picture. Recently one more stage in Claude's preparation has been discovered, for the Metropolitan Museum has been able to acquire a beautiful,

1. *A Coast View with Perseus and the Origin of Coral*, by Claude Gellée, called Le Lorrain (1600-1682), French. Oil on canvas, 39½ x 50 inches. Collection of the Earl of Leicester, Holkham Hall, Norfolk





2. *The Origin of Coral*, by Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665), French. Pen and brown ink, brown wash, over red chalk,  $8\frac{15}{16} \times 12\frac{3}{8}$  inches. Royal Library, Windsor Castle. Reproduced by gracious permission of H. M. the Queen

hitherto unknown watercolor drawing for the painting (Figure 6). The drawing is dated and can be placed, chronologically and stylistically, in the sequence of studies.

Claude was one of the most brilliant artists working in seventeenth-century Rome. Born in 1600 near Mirecourt in Lorraine, he is thought to have first gone to Rome as early as 1612 or 1613, though perhaps it was a few years later. By 1627 he had established permanent residence in Rome and he remained there until his death in 1682. As a student he worked with Agostino Tassi (1580-1644), a fashionable painter of decorative landscape frescoes. Through him Claude came to know the Roman nobility, and thereafter he was commissioned by patrons of wealth and stature. The artist concentrated throughout his career on landscape painting; he made frequent excursions into the Roman countryside to study directly from nature. The majority of his early works represent pastoral scenes and coast views, and, in the 1640s, he began to introduce literary and historical themes into his pictures. His works are known for their faithful representations of details of nature, for their brilliant hues of green, blue, and orange, and above all for the remarkable pastoral atmosphere that pervades them all.

Cardinal Massimi, who died in 1677, was one of the great patrons of that time. A noted classical scholar and collector of antiquities, he also amassed pictures and drawings on an impressive scale. In the 1640s Massimi, by 1646 a secret chamberlain to Innocent X, commissioned three paintings from Claude: *Landscape with Argus Guarding Io*, *Coast View with Apollo and the Cumaeen Sibyl*, and *Wooded Landscape*. It



3. *The Origin of Coral*, by Claude Lorrain, 1672. Pen and brown ink, brown wash, 10 x 13 inches. Collection of Robert Lehman, New York

was during this period, too, that Nicolas Poussin executed two pictures for Massimi, *Moses Trampling on Pharaoh's Crown* and *Moses Changing Aaron's Rod into a Serpent*, and the two men formed a friendship that would remain a strong bond until Poussin's death. In 1653 Massimi was made Patriarch of Jerusalem, and the following year was sent as papal nuncio to Spain. Troubles developed in his relations with the Spanish court, and he fell into disgrace with the powers in Rome. From 1658, when he returned from Spain, until 1670 Massimi was out of favor with the papacy. This meant that he had difficulty in commissioning paintings from the great artists then in Rome, for celebrated painters such as Claude were so in demand that they could afford to turn down work if they did not consider the patron to be of a sufficiently elevated rank. Only Poussin remained faithful to his friend, and they were constant companions. Massimi concentrated on building his library and adding to his collection of antiquities. In 1670 Pope Clement X, a relative of Massimi's, was elected, and he was once again in papal favor. It was not long before Claude was back in the patron's employ: in 1673 he painted a *View of Delphi with a Procession*, and its pendant, the *Origin of Coral*, was completed the following year.

The subject, taken from Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 4: 740-752) is little known and rarely represented. Given his detailed knowledge of classical literature, it is not surprising that Massimi should have commissioned a picture depicting this obscure, if charming, story. In fact, one representation of the origin of coral was already in his collection, for he owned a drawing by Poussin of the subject (Figure 2), executed in the 1620s and now at Windsor Castle.

According to Ovid, the Medusa, one of three Gorgon sisters, had been very beautiful and was especially renowned for her hair. She attracted the attention of Neptune, who ravished her in the temple of Minerva. So outraged was the goddess that she turned Medusa's hair to snakes, making her hideous to the extent that all who looked at her turned to stone. Perseus, the son of Apollo and Danaë, set out to perform the terrible feat of killing the Medusa. Armed with a shield provided by Minerva and given wings for his feet by Mercury, Perseus made his way to where the Medusa was sleeping, surrounded by men and animals she had turned to stone. Careful to look only at her reflection in his shield, he severed the monstrous head from her body, whereupon the winged horse Pegasus sprang forth.

4. *The Origin of Coral*, by Claude Lorrain. 1672-1673. Pen and brown ink, brown wash, heightened with white, on blue paper, 10 x 12<sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches. Musée du Louvre, Paris



The powers of the Medusa's head remained active. Perseus flew over Libya with it and a few drops of blood fell to the ground, where they turned to swarms of snakes; thus, explains Ovid, Libya is a land "full of deadly serpents." Later Perseus came to the land of the giant Atlas, who ruled the borders of the western edge of the world, and asked him for shelter and food. Atlas refused the traveler these, and Perseus in a rage exposed the Medusa's head. The giant's beard and hair turned to trees, his shoulders and arms became ridges, and his head became a mountain top – thus the origin of the Atlas Mountains. Perseus then performed one of his most heroic deeds, the slaying of the sea monster who was about to devour Andromeda, the hero's future bride. After this feat occurred the origin of coral. About to wash his hands of the sea monster's blood, the victorious Perseus placed the Medusa's head on a bed of leaves and seaweed, in order that it not be bruised on the sand. The twigs hardened at the head's touch, and



5. *The Origin of Coral*, by Claude Lorrain. 1672. Pen and brown ink, brown wash,  $6\frac{1}{8} \times 9\frac{1}{16}$  inches. British Museum, London

the attendant nymphs, delighted at the phenomenon, applied more vegetation. Ovid explains that the seeds of this seaweed spread throughout the ocean and that ever since "what was a pliant twig beneath the sea is turned to stone above."

It is probable that before starting work on this commission, Claude saw the drawing of the origin of coral by Poussin in Cardinal Massimi's collection. Poussin included many characters from Ovid's tale in his representation of the event (Figure 2). Perseus is seen washing his hands, attended by Cupid, while nymphs look at the Gorgon's head on its bed of seaweed. In the right background Andromeda is chained to the rock, and the dead monster floats in the water behind her. Pegasus stands by a palm tree from which an allegorical figure of Victory plucks a branch. To the left is a group of nymphs and river gods, while Minerva and Mercury survey the scene from the sky.

COLOR PLATE:

6. *The Origin of Coral*, by Claude Lorrain. 1674. Pen and brown ink, brown, blue, gray wash, heightened with white gouache,  $9\frac{3}{4} \times 15$  inches. Purchase, Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Whitridge Gift, 64.253. Photograph: Hans Namuth



G. B. Piranesi del.  
1779.



There are six known studies by Claude for the *Origin of Coral*. His first thoughts for the painting are recorded in a drawing now in the collection of Robert Lehman (Figure 3); it can be dated 1672. He simplifies the composition by eliminating several of the figures depicted by Poussin, including only those that relate specifically to the myth. Perseus is seen at the right washing his hands and aided by a putto. Pegasus stands by a palm tree at the center, and the nymphs gather around the head of the Gorgon to the left. Andromeda, the monster, the figure of Victory, and the deities have been suppressed. Working with pen and brown ink on white paper, the artist is evidently concentrating on the placement of the figures, setting them in a roughly drawn landscape, with no attempt to achieve effects of light and shadow. In a drawing of 1672 or 1673 now at the Louvre (Figure 4), Claude develops the concept of the landscape. The rocks are more elaborate than in the first drawing, and the foliage is more detailed. The artist experiments with brown wash, watercolor, and white highlights on blue paper, thereby creating the effect of early morning light. In the British Museum (Figure 5) and at Holkham Hall are pen studies, dated 1672 and 1674 respectively, for the nymph group with the head of Medusa. Claude isolates the group, working out the solution for the placement of the figures. There is a study of the figure of Perseus in pen and pencil at Bayonne.

The Metropolitan's drawing, signed and dated *Claudio fecit Roma 1674*, is closest of all the studies to the finished work. There are details that vary: the shape of the rock and the position of the trees, for instance, differ slightly in drawing and picture. There is an assuredness and a finish to the drawing, however, that gives the impression not of a working sketch but of a solution reached as a result of the preceding studies. The position of the figures is little changed from the Lehman drawing, and the landscape, though more detailed, is essentially the same as in the Louvre sheet. Claude achieves the finish of the Metropolitan drawing through the use of extensive white heightening, which contrasts with the rich blue watercolor and brown and gray washes. The highlights animate the figures, and the landscape becomes monumental by being silhouetted against the blue sky and water, made brilliant by white clouds, the sun, and its reflection. The sheet takes on a magical radiance. The highly finished drawing has almost the appearance of a small painting, and it is thus probable that the artist presented it to his patron as a *modello* before proceeding with the painting itself.

Claude recorded the composition in a drawing in the *Liber Veritatis*. This album, now preserved in the British Museum, contains 115 free copies drawn by Claude himself after his own pictures. Claude signed the *Liber Veritatis* drawings on the reverse and recorded as well the dates of commissions and the names of the commissioners. The drawing after the Holkham picture is inscribed: *quadro per lminent<sup>mo</sup> & Reve<sup>mo</sup> sig<sup>re</sup> Cardinale massimi Claudio Gillee fecit Romae 1674* ("painting for the most eminent and revered Cardinal Massimi executed by Claude Gellée Rome 1674"). It is unusual to know of so many preparatory studies for a given painting; it is rare to have the *modello* and, as well, a copy after the picture in the artist's own hand. The dossier of the Holkham *Origin of Coral* is remarkably complete, and the Metropolitan is fortunate in being able to acquire such a beautiful addition to it.

1. Wager cup. Maker's mark: 1H or H1. German, about 1600. Silver-gilt, height 8 inches. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 17.190.579



# Wager Cups

YVONNE HACKENBROCH

*Senior Research Fellow, Western European Arts*

Among the German silver of the sixteenth century exhibited in our galleries is a curious drinking cup in the shape of an elaborately dressed female figure. This cup was intended for the amusement of dinner guests, but removed from the atmosphere of convivial gaiety, as it is now, the lighthearted mood to which the cup once contributed can be recaptured only through an inquiry into its origins.

Such drinking vessels originated in Germany during the last quarter of the sixteenth century within the Nuremberg circle of the Jamnitzer family of goldsmiths. Their gay character has suggested various descriptive names; “wager cup” is applied to those that, in addition to the larger bowl formed by the voluminous skirt, are fitted with another, smaller, one pivoted between the maiden’s raised hands. The name refers to the custom of filling the larger and smaller bowls at the same time and offering them to guests who competed in draining both without spilling the wine. This must have been a most difficult task indeed, particularly after the enjoyment of wine had unsteadied the hands of the contestants. Occasionally, wager cups are referred to as marriage cups, in which case the larger bowl was reserved for the groom and the smaller one for the bride. In Germany, whether made with one bowl or two, they are generally known as *Jungfrauenbecher*, or maiden cups.

The Museum’s silver-gilt cup (Figure 1) represents a lady in Venetian costume, with face, neck, and hands covered by flesh-colored enamel. Her hair is dressed in curls that rise like horns above her forehead, following a Venetian fashion introduced after 1580. A stiff lace collar encircles the V-shaped décolletage of her bodice, and the ample skirt is patterned with floral scrollwork to simulate Venetian brocade. The smaller bowl between her hands, by contrast, is left entirely plain.

The cup bears the marks of the city of Augsburg (a pine cone) and of the maker IH or HI, whose identity has not yet been convincingly established. Marc Rosenberg, who first published these marks in 1921, suggested the name of Joerg Hainler, who died in 1624, whereas Helmut Seling, who is preparing a major work on the goldsmiths of Augsburg, proposes that of Hieronimus Imhof, a native of Bamberg but active in Augsburg, where he married in 1620. The same maker’s mark recurs on a similar wager cup (Figure 2) in the Austrian Museum of Applied Art in Vienna. On this cup the



2. *Wager cup. Maker's mark: IH or HI. German, about 1600. Silver. Austrian Museum of Applied Art, Vienna. Photograph lent by Helmut Seling*



THREE COSTUME ILLUSTRATIONS:

3. Woodcut by Christoph Krieger (died before 1590), German.  $6\frac{3}{8} \times 4\frac{1}{4}$  inches. From Cesare Vecellio's *De gli Habiti Antichi e Moderni di Diverse Parti del Mondo* (Venice, 1590). Rogers Fund, 21.36.146
4. Engraving by Theodore de Bry (1528-1598), Netherlandish.  $4 \times 3\frac{5}{8}$  inches. From *Emblemata Saecularia* (Frankfurt, 1593). Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich
5. Engraving by Giacomo Franco (1550-1620), Italian.  $8\frac{7}{8} \times 7$  inches. From *Habiti delle Donne Venetiane intagliate in rame* (Venice, 1610). Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 34.68



lady's coiffure and bodice differ, for they are treated less formally, and the small pivoted bowl, instead of being plain, is decorated to match the skirt.

These wager cups in the shape of maidens, who appear all dressed up for a festive occasion, were inspired by contemporary costume books. From the early sixteenth century on, goldsmiths and silversmiths depended heavily upon the graphic arts. They drew their ideas partly from book illustrations and partly from folios of ornamental engravings, especially created to fill their needs. These pattern books served the dual purpose of providing the goldsmiths with new designs and of allowing prospective customers to point out their preferences when placing a commission.

The design for the wager cup in the Museum may have been taken from a woodcut illustration (Figure 3) in Cesare Vecellio's *De gli Habiti Antichi e Moderni di Diverse Parti del Mondo*, published in Venice in 1590, or one of its later versions. Several printings attest to the extraordinary popularity of the book, and translations indicate how far that popularity extended. The original illustrations were designed by Vecellio himself, and the woodcuts were executed by "Christoforo Guerra Thedesco da Norimbergo, eccellentissimo intagliatore in legno." Cristoforo Guerra, or Christoph Krieger, of Nuremberg had settled in Venice about 1550, where he died shortly before Vecellio's book came off the press. This contribution by a south German engraver may have especially interested the Augsburg goldsmith in or in Vecellio's publication; even if he had missed the first edition, he could have seen illustrations based on Vecellio's in Theodore de Bry's *Emblemata Saecularia* (Figure 4), published in Frankfurt in 1593, or in Giacomo Franco's *Habiti delle Donne Venetiane intagliate in rame* (Figure 5), issued in Venice in 1610.

In Germany there always had been a tendency to favor foreign designs over domestic ones, for they evoked distant lands and romantic longings, but, on the other hand wager and maiden cups featuring German costume figures do exist. There is a charming



6. The Museum's wager cup



7. Maiden cup. German, about 1600. Silver, height 5½ inches. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



8. Design for a cup, by Paul Flindt (active 1601-1618), German. Engraving, 8⅜ x 5⅜ inches. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 37.40.5 (37)

cup at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (Figure 7), representing a Nuremberg lady, with a plumed hat and with gloves in hand. This figure shows a certain resemblance to Jost Amman's woodcut illustrations in *Theatrum Mulierum*, published in Frankfurt in 1586, even though her bearing is more sophisticated and flirtatious than that of Amman's German matrons. The plain apron and the ornamental detail on the skirt are similar to those of the engraved design for a cup by the Nuremberg goldsmith Paul Flindt (Figure 8), but Flindt's cup is less articulated and lacking in feminine allure.

Engraved designs were usually printed in considerable numbers and, if necessary, could easily be replaced, unlike the individual drawings for which they were substituted; such preparatory sketches as did exist had only a remote chance of surviving the rough handling in busy workshops. This treatment may explain why no more than a single drawing for a wager cup has come to our attention: preserved at the Veste Coburg, it is attributed to another Augsburg goldsmith, Bernhard Vesenmaier. The drawing (Figure 9) features a German matron—whose generous shape provides for a capacious cup—in the elaborate costume of the early seventeenth century. The stoic expression on her face indicates indifference to or, perhaps, an unawareness of her fate, which was to be turned upside down and filled with wine, and then set aside after she had served her purpose.

The fashion for wager cups was short-lived in Germany, and did not extend beyond the middle of the seventeenth century. At that time similar cups, sometimes referred to as puzzle cups, were made in Holland, where the maiden's portrait was replaced by a windmill, characteristic of the Dutch scene. These windmills could be set in motion by blowing air through a tube at the back, which also served as a support for little figures of a miller and his helpers. These cups provided the kind of entertainment that would seem to have belonged to those jovial drinking parties depicted in some of Jan Steen's finest paintings.

9. *Drawing for a wager cup, attributed to Bernhard Vesenmaier (active about 1600), German. Brown ink and pencil, 11½ x 7 inches. Veste Coburg Collection*





10. *Wager cup. Maker's mark: TA, separated by two mullets. English, 1650-1660. Silver-gilt, height 7 inches. Worshipful Company of Vintners, London*

Although wager cups made outside of Germany are rare, three English examples, of the Commonwealth period, are known to survive. One of these (Figure 10) belongs to the Worshipful Company of Vintners, London; a pair (Figure 11) is in the Irwin Untermyer Collection in New York. Because of their scarcity in England, I am inclined to think that the Untermyer cups were also originally owned by the Vintners' Company. Every liveryman of the Vintners' Company was required to drink to the prosperity of the company from the larger cup, and the health of the master vintner from the smaller – without wasting a drop. All three cups have only maker's marks: that of the Vintners' Company shows the letters TA, with two mullets between them, those in the Untermyer collection the monogram IA. They were undoubtedly made in London, but any documentation of their origin was probably destroyed during the Great Fire of 1666 when all records of Goldsmiths' Hall were lost. Although based on German prototypes, these English cups are of an entirely different character. They display a new simplicity of form and of dress. The overskirt of each figure is tied back, exposing a plain skirt and long apron instead of the sumptuously patterned skirt of the earlier German cups. The English maiden's simple bodice is laced up the front. Her

straight hair is partially concealed beneath a bonnet with scalloped edges, which match those around the collar and cuffs of her long gloves. This modest outfit resembles those seen in the English costume engravings *Ornatus Muliebris Anglicus* (Figure 12), by Wenceslaus Hollar, published between 1640 and 1643. The unadorned bonnet, collar, and large apron are indicative of the Puritan outlook on life that was to result in a regime of overstrained morality. They also hint at rigid political and religious convictions, and complete intolerance of the frivolity of court society. Because of these guiding principles the Puritan maidens on these cups have assumed an air of quiet respectability and innocence, of the kind that seventeenth-century poets found in English milkmaids.

At the Victoria and Albert Museum is a later wager cup (Figure 13), made in 1706 at Dublin, by Joseph Walker. The design of this cup follows the earlier English Commonwealth examples, and the maiden appears in the costume of that period. Subtle changes, however, have been introduced: the maiden now wears a rakish three-cornered hat, and the pattern of her crinoline is derived from Spitalfields silk. These touches mitigate the austerity of the earlier costume and allow the cupbearer to display feminine charm as her contribution to the pleasures of the table.





11. A pair of wager cups. Maker's marks: 1A, conjoined. English, 1650-1660. Silver, heights  $6\frac{7}{8}$  inches. Inscribed around the rims of the bowls: *When riches faile friends groe scant. No Gutt to unkindness no woe to want.* Inscribed on the aprons: *Hands of I pray you Handle not me/ For I am blind and you can see/ If you love me lend me not/ For fear of breaking bend me not.* Collection of Irwin Untermyer, New York

OPPOSITE:

12. Costume illustration, by Wenceslaus Hollar, British (1607-1677). Engraving,  $3\frac{1}{2} \times 2\frac{1}{4}$  inches. From *Ornatus Muliebris Anglicus* (Antwerp, 1640-1643). Rogers Fund, 20.81.3

13. Wager cup, by Joseph Walker (active 1690-1722). Dublin, 1706. Silver, height  $6\frac{7}{8}$  inches. Victoria and Albert Museum, London



*A small section of a Far Eastern gallery has been set aside to show twenty-five objects that have recently come under our roof—either by accession or loan. They form a diverse group, ranging geographically from India to China and Japan, and chronologically from the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220) up to the eighteenth century. The following article discusses one of them, a handscroll depicting a spring festival, but each of these beautiful pieces is worth writing about, and each deserves a visit.*

*Photograph: Jerry Sarapochiello*



# A Dragon-Boat Regatta

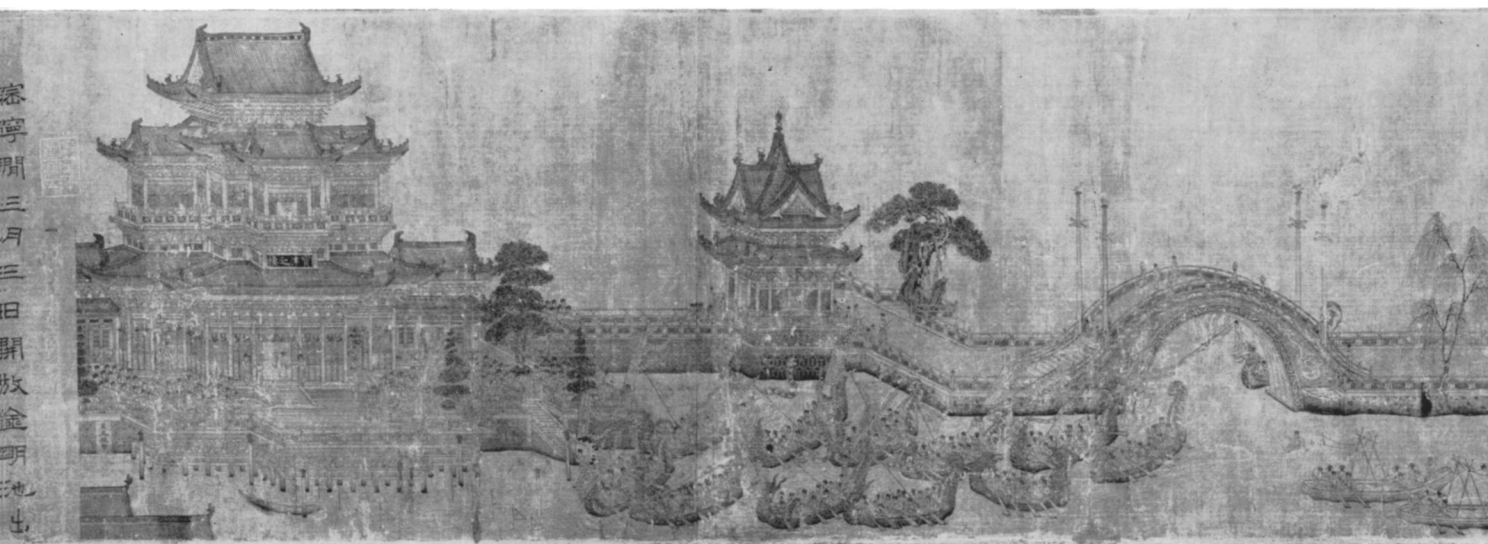
FONG CHOW *Associate Curator in charge of Far Eastern Art*

*In the lake of Chin Ming,  
On the rippling waters skimmed the dragon boats.  
The cheers of the crowds, the beating of the drums,  
And the sound of the bugles, all rent the air like thunder.*

These lines are part of a long inscription composed by the artist and written on a monochrome handscroll recently acquired by the Museum. The artist, Wang Cheng-p'eng, was a native of Yung-chia, in Chekiang province in southeast China, active at the beginning of the fourteenth century. He was a favorite of the Yüan emperor Jen Tsung (reigned 1311-1320), who bestowed upon him the title Ku-yün Ch'u-shih, "Recluse of the Solitary Cloud," by which he is best known. Wang Cheng-p'eng rose to the position of battalion commander in charge of transporting the tribute rice on the Grand Canal to the capital, Cambuluc, later called Peking. He was also an outstanding architect and a fine painter, noted for his renderings of the dragon-boat regatta and two other works: a monochrome handscroll, Mahaprajapati Holding the Infant Buddha, at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and A Toy Peddler, executed in surprisingly vivid color, dated 1310 and signed by the artist, in a collection in mainland China.

The Mongol or Yüan dynasty, founded by Kublai Khan, a grandson of the world conqueror Genghis Khan, was the first foreign house to govern all of China. Its rule lasted less than a century – from 1280 to 1368. Kublai Khan was eager to preserve Chinese culture and traditional institutions, and invited Chinese scholars and artists to join his court. Some accepted his invitation, but many refused to serve under foreign barbarian masters. The two groups – those who accepted Mongol patronage, and those who resisted it and lived in retirement – represent the two principal trends of Yüan painting: the traditionalists and the innovators.

Among the scholar-artists who accepted Kublai Khan's call, perhaps the best known is Chao Meng-fu (1254-1322), who became a court secretary and an invaluable adviser to the Mongol rulers. The greatest calligrapher of his time, Chao Meng-fu was a painter of landscapes, human figures, flowers and birds, and bamboo, as well as of horses, for which he is most famous. Occasionally Chao indulged in "ink play," using brushstrokes that disregarded the rules; for the most part, however, he closely followed the canons of traditional Chinese painting. For instance, he drew his inspiration for his landscapes and horses from the T'ang dynasty masters Wang Wei (699-759) and Han Kan (about the eighth century).



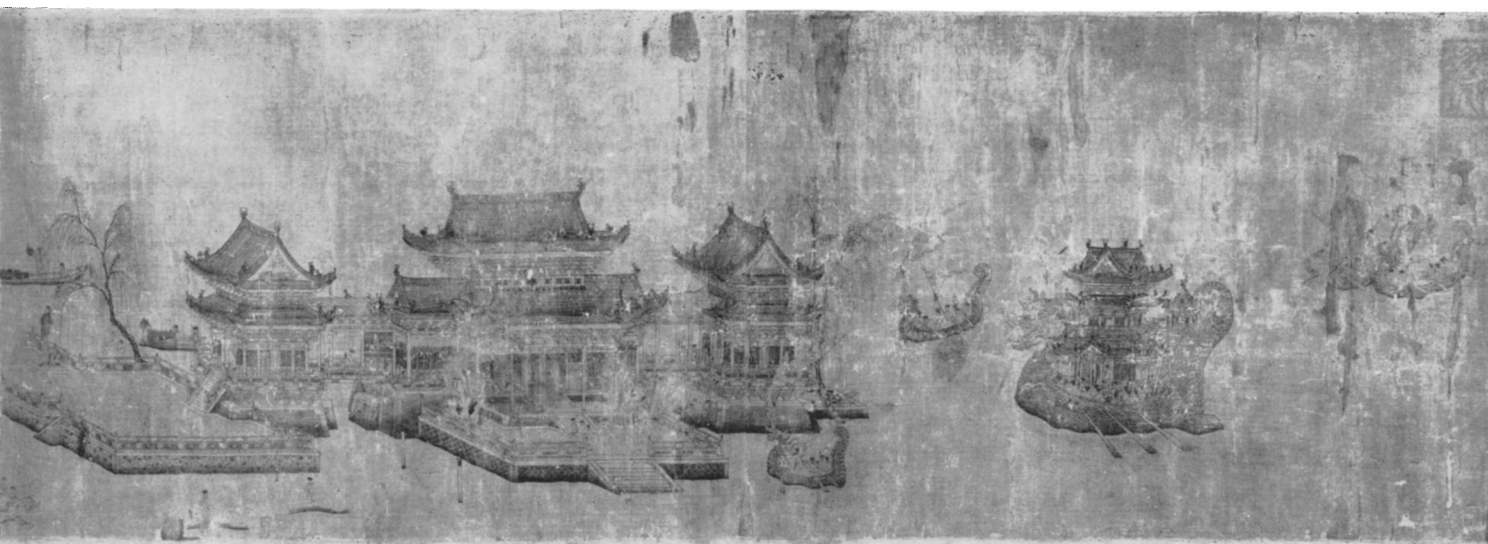
*A Dragon-Boat Regatta, by Wang Cheng-p'eng (working at the beginning of the XIV century), Chinese. Signed and dated 1323. Ink and wash on silk, height 13½ inches. Purchase, Bequest of Dorothy Graham Bennet, 66.174a*

Other artists, working chiefly around the Kiangsu and Chekiang provinces, away from the Mongol court, dared to break away from the traditional forms and techniques. The new styles of these “Four Great Masters”—Huang Kung-wang (1269-1354), Wu Chen (1280-1354), Ni Tsan (1301-1374), and Wang Meng (1308?-1385)—are still much admired today. These painters developed individual concepts of composition, new types of brushstrokes, new uses of color. They expressed themselves in commentary and poetry as well as in painting. The brush was used to demonstrate the scholar-painter’s literary talent, his calligraphic skill, and his artistic gifts. *Wen jen hua*, “the literary man’s painting,” became a major influence on Chinese painting for the next five hundred years.

Although the traditionalists and the Four Great Masters all concentrated on landscapes, other subjects were not neglected in the Yüan period. There were artists who specialized in so-called minor subjects: paper-white narcissus, grapes, tigers, eagles, fish, insects. Figure painting continued in the religious art of Lamaism, the official religion of the Mongols.

A traditional form of painting that came to the fore in the tenth century and reached its peak in the fourteenth century was *chieh-hua* or “boundary painting,” a term used to describe architectural paintings executed mostly in monochrome ink with a fine brush and the aid of a ruler. At times it can be applied to the painting of boats, carts, and other mechanical subjects.

An outstanding example of boundary painting is Wang Cheng-p'eng's handscroll, *A Dragon-Boat Regatta*. The scroll was a gift from the artist to Her Imperial Highness



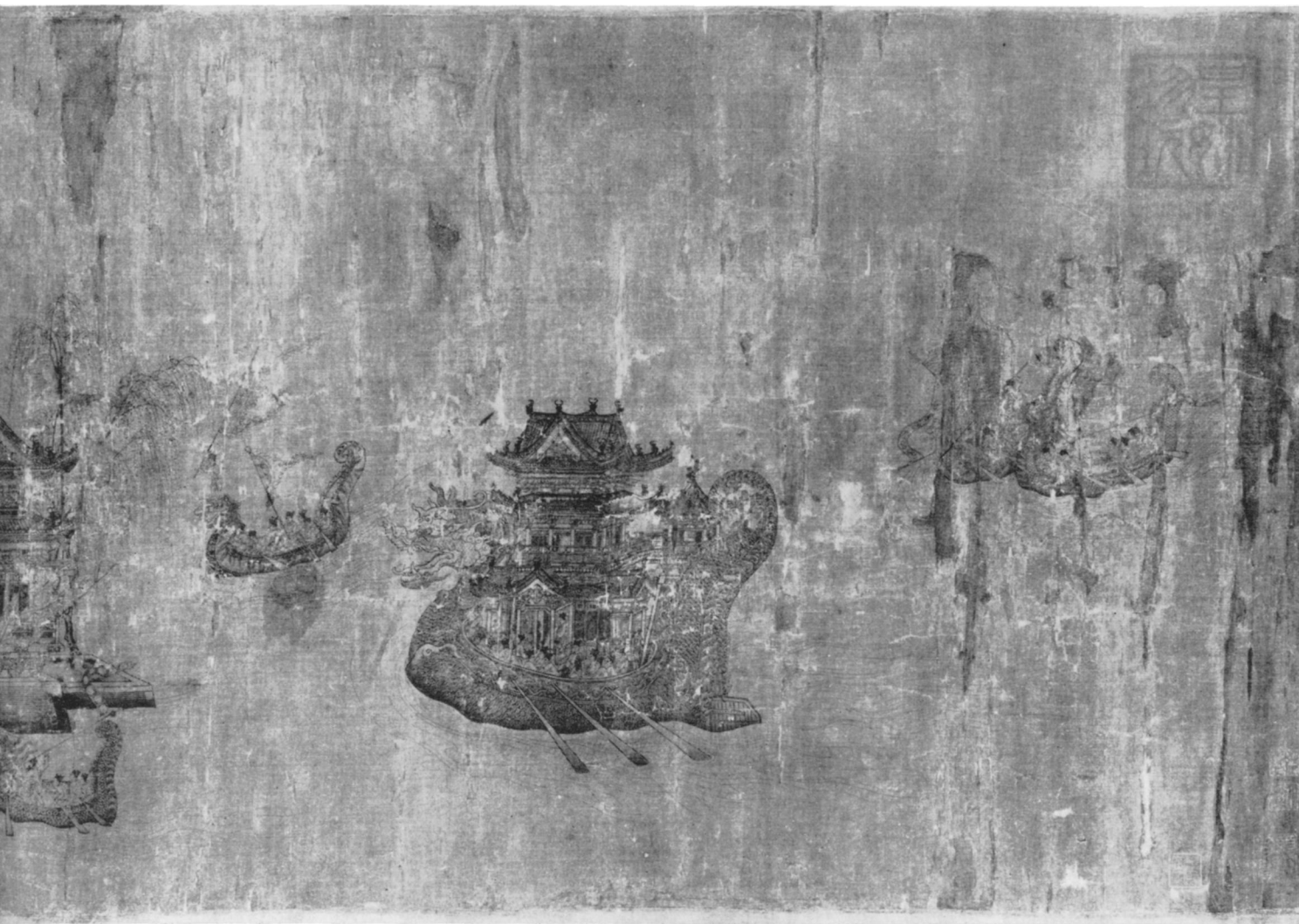
A translation of the artist's colophon:

*During the reign of Ch'ung Ning [Emperor Hui Tsung, 1101-1125, Northern Sung dynasty], on the third day of the third lunar month, the lake of Chin Ming [a marine training base near the capital, Kaifeng, in Honan Province] was opened [to the public for the dragon-boat regatta]. Embroidered pennants [strung with cash given by the royal family as prizes] were put out. Royal personages, ranking officials, and tens of thousands of commoners rejoiced in the event together, as recounted in Meng Hua Lu ["Reminiscences of the Old Capital" by Meng Yüan-lao].*

*In the third year of Chih Ta [A.D. 1130], on the great occasion of the Crown Prince's birthday, a scroll was respectfully presented to His Royal Highness bearing the following poem:*

*On the third day of the third lunar month,  
In the lake of Chin Ming,  
On the rippling waters skimmed the dragon boats.  
The cheers of the crowds, the beating of the drums,  
And the sound of the bugles, all rent the air like thunder.  
Colorful flags fluttered gaily in the bright sun.  
The pennant, now drenched by the splashy oars, seemed trivial as a prize;  
Yet with abandon the people from the State of Wu vied for it.  
In this world, there are many pitiful creatures struggling for favor or position,  
Happy to gain an inch of ground and saddened at losing a foot.  
But a universal celebration in which all men rejoice together means much more;  
Accordingly I painted this picture, a poem without words.  
Simple is Your Highness's way of living,  
Unmindful of lust or luxury;  
Only art and books  
Gladden your heart and please your eyes.  
At the time to toast your happy birthday,  
May I wish "Long Live Your Highness,"  
And may this painting serve  
As the Book of Everlasting Golden Admonitions.*

*Her Royal Highness Princess Aunt had seen this painting more than a decade ago, and she now asked me to paint another for her. But as I have grown old, my vision is weakening. Although I try to do my best, I am still afraid it is not good enough to present to such an austere personage. Wang Cheng-p'eng, Battalion Commander, in charge of the Imperial Guards for Rice Transportation, respectfully painted the scroll and carefully penned the calligraphy in the late spring of the third year of Chih Ch'ih [A.D. 1132].*



Ta-chang Kung-chu, the aunt of the crown prince (Kublai Khan's great-grandson) who later became Emperor Jen Tsung. Thirteen years earlier she had admired a painting of the same subject that the artist had presented to the crown prince on his birthday, and she requested that a similar scroll be painted for her. Her painting is dated 1323.

There are several known versions of these two dragon-boat regatta scrolls, one dated 1310 and the other dated 1323. Three, in fact, are preserved in the Palace Museum collection in Taiwan, and one was shown in the *Chinese Art Treasures* exhibition that toured five major museums in this country during 1961 and 1962. There is divided opinion among scholars as to which are the originals and which the copies. This is not the place to go into the pros and cons: suffice it to say that I feel the Metropolitan's scroll to be the original of the 1323 painting.

The subject of the scroll is the annual regatta of dragon boats that survives even to this day. This regatta has an ancient history. It commemorates a famous statesman and poet, Ch'ü Yüan, who drowned himself in the Mi-lo River in 295 B.C., despondent over his banishment after loyally giving his king unwelcome advice. According to the *Sui Shu*, the official history of the Sui dynasty (581-618), when local people went looking for the body of Ch'ü Yüan, they raced in their boats, pulling their oars to the beat of drums. Thereafter it became the custom to hold the race every year.

The regatta shown in our scroll takes place in Sung times, during the reign of Emperor Hui Tsung (also a gifted painter), on the artificial lake Chin Ming, near the Sung capital, Kaifeng. The painting closely parallels a literary record of the event contained in *Meng Hua Lu*, "Reminiscences of the Old Capital," by one Meng Yüan-lao, whose exact identity and dates of birth and death are unknown. In ten volumes, the author sets down in great detail what he saw during his twenty years of residence – from 1103 to 1123 – in Kaifeng. In volume seven, under the heading "Spring Festival," the dragon-boat regatta is described with all its sounds, colors, and excitement. The artist was familiar with this account, for it is mentioned in his inscription on the scroll.

According to *Meng Hua Lu*, gaily painted boats in the shape of dragons, phoenixes, and tigers, with colorful pennants flying, first performed drills to the sound of flutes, gongs, and drums. Then the commander waved the red flag from the Water Palace and the race began, again to the accompaniment of music and the cheers of the crowds. During the race, bands and singers, puppet shows, wild animal shows, and acrobatic acts entertained one and all. Firecrackers and fireworks added to the festive air. The winning team received a cash prize. At the end of the race the emperor gave a state banquet.

Our scroll opens, at the far right, with two small boats racing each other. Obviously they belong to opposing teams: one has the body and scales of a dragon, while the other has the stripes of a tiger. Each boat has a crew of ten: eight oarsmen, a captain standing on the head of the dragon or tiger and brandishing a banner, while a tenth man, in the center of the boat, carries a long streamer.

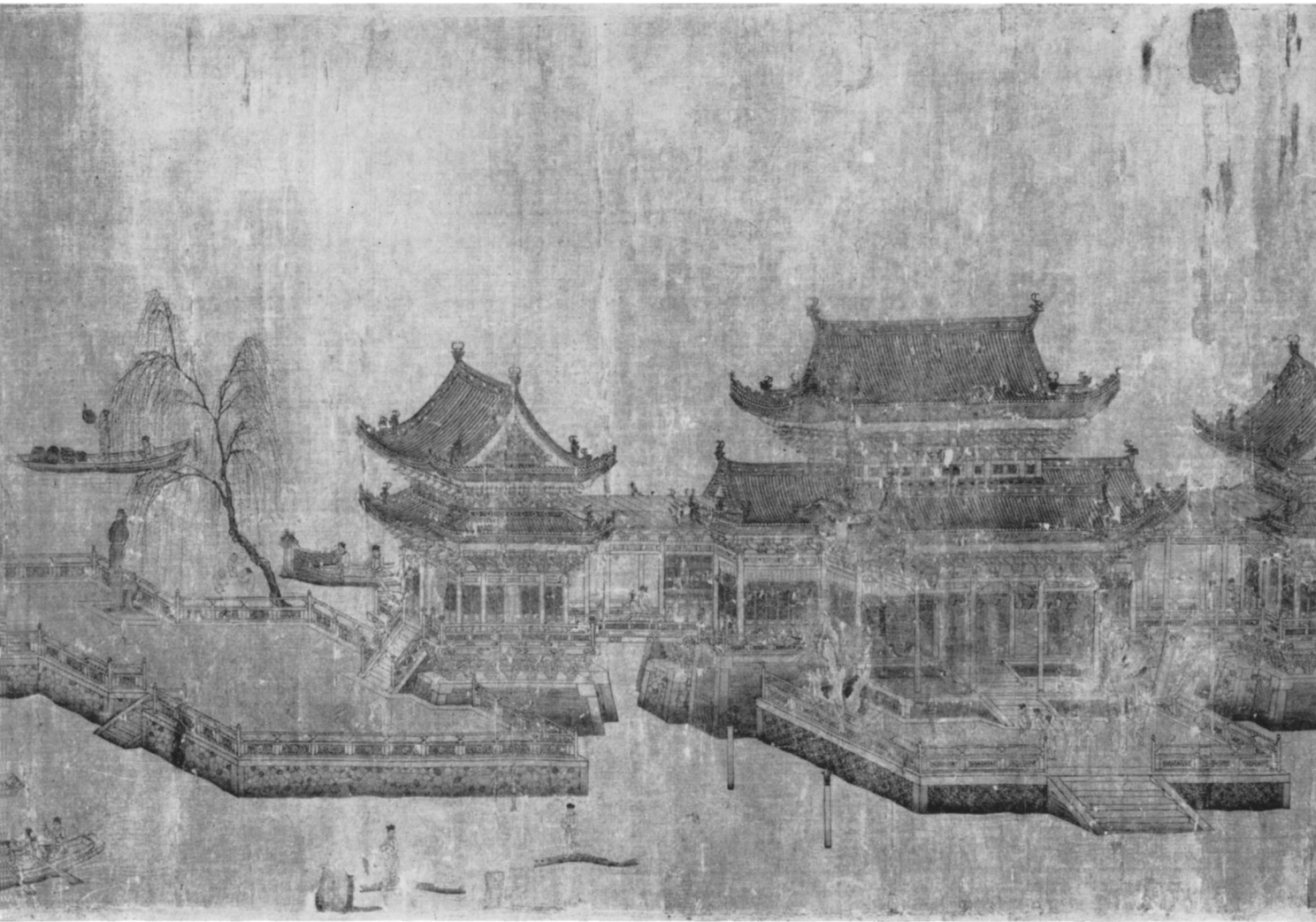
In front of the two small boats is a huge dragon barge with a structure in a typical Sung style in the middle, and a steering tower at the back. This is the imperial review-



ing stand, which follows the racers. A throne chair can be seen on each floor of the main building. “The size of the grand dragon boat,” writes Meng Yüan-lao, “was about 300 to 400 feet in length and 30 to 40 feet in width. The dragon head, tail, whiskers, scales, and carved decorations were all gilded. Iron weights the size of table tops were used to stabilize the boat, to prevent it from toppling over on account of the weight of the architecture.”

A short distance ahead of the dragon barge, a tiger boat is being rowed at full speed around the Water Palace, a complex of three buildings: a main *tien* (palace) connected by covered bridges with a *t'ing* (pavilion) on each side. Still another small boat with a man standing on its dragon head is moving toward the covered bridge.

The Water Palace, another imposing structure in the Sung style, marks the starting point of the race. On the terrace of the main building, adorned with beautifully shaped natural stones (*t'ai hu shih*, objects of great admiration among the Chinese), stand a



high official and his attendants. Next to them is the standard-bearer who signals the start of the race.

At the left of the complex, a large terrace decorated with willow trees and another fantastically shaped rock leads to a handsome arched bridge. On the lake near this terrace glide two men, probably entertainers, each standing on a curious-looking fish (according to Meng Yüan-lao, the fish are canoes made of single logs). Then come two small barges, both with a man holding a gong in the bow and a drummer at the stern. A swing stands in the middle of each barge: on one of them an acrobat is swinging, while the acrobat from the other barge is somersaulting into the water.

Back to the race. A tiger boat is emerging from behind the bridge, following eleven other boats closely vying to win the race. All these boats are larger, and carry musicians as well as oarsmen. The winner appears to be a tiger boat that has almost reached the goal, marked by colorful embroidered streamers hung with the cash prize.

At the end of the painting, row upon row of officials are watching the winning scene. Some are standing on a wooden terrace near the water, and others are inside a magnificent building, the "Palace of the Precious Stream." The depiction of this structure shows, especially clearly, the meticulous care the artist has lavished on the architecture, which is as much the subject of the scroll as the regatta. The building is an elaborate Sung grand palace, built of wood in the post-and-lintel system, with interlocking columns and beams. Resting on the columns are multitiered *t'ou kung* (brackets), which support the tiled roof ornamented with decorative finials in the shape of dragons, phoenixes, and other fantastic animals. Between the columns are movable wood screens probably covered with rice paper, which afford privacy, ventilation, and protection against the sun and glare reflected from the water. Bamboo shades offer additional protection.

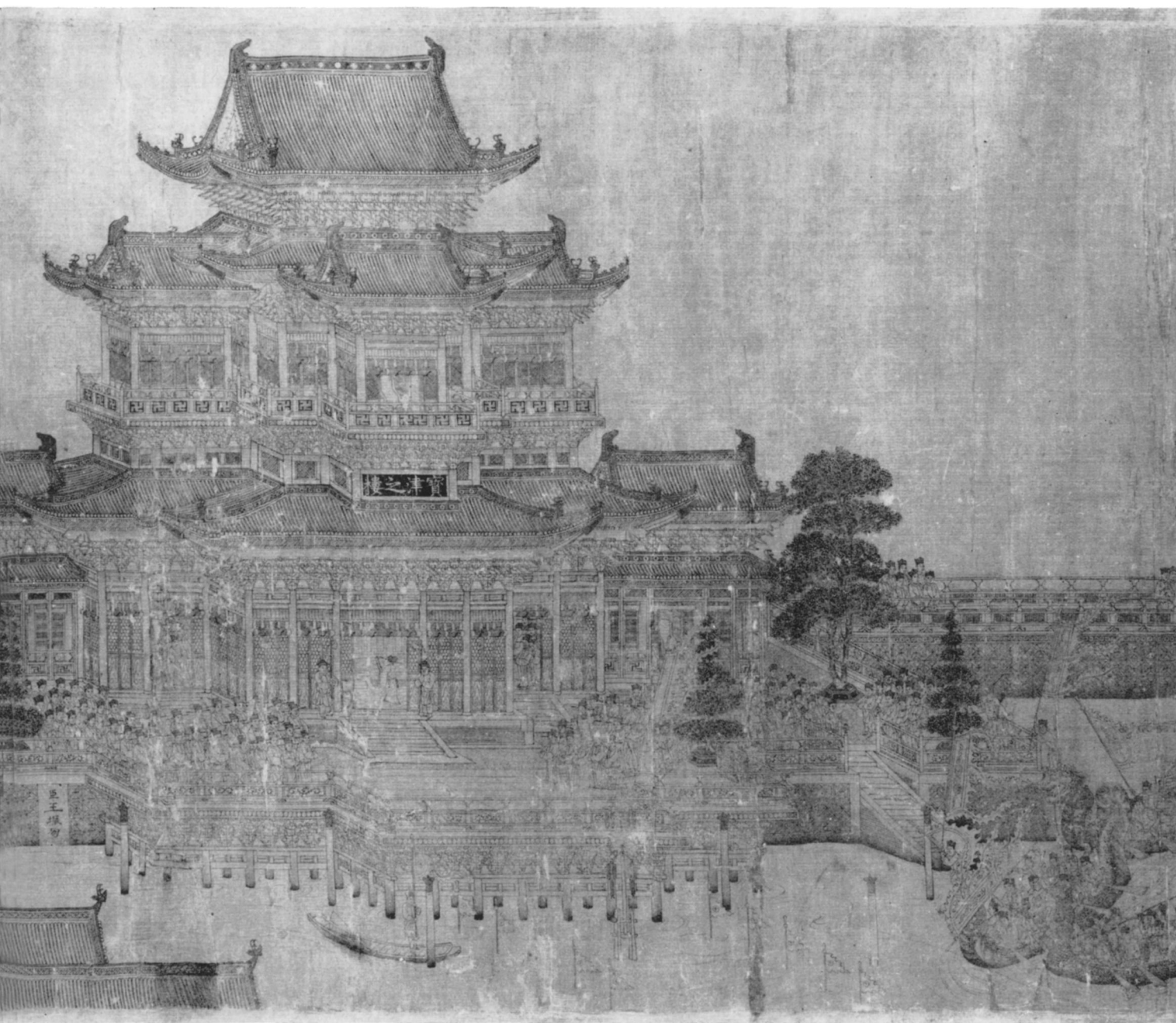
All the minute details of this long scroll are painted with monochrome ink on fine silk, with a light wash here and there to suggest volume, give definition, and provide contrast. Because the silk is worn in spots and darkened by the ravages of time, the first impression is one of extreme delicacy. But closer examination reveals the painting's strength: the brushwork is sure and there is knowledge behind each line. The perspective is right (in the Oriental sense). The architecture is solid, each roof bracket logically drawn, each bamboo blind rolled up correctly. Every face and figure has expression and life. Even trees are depicted with spirit.

Indeed, Wang Cheng-p'eng's mastery of the difficult technique of "boundary painting" is superb. As Chao Meng-fu explained to his son Chao Yung: "In most kinds of painting it is possible to dazzle the eyes of the people even if one neglects the rules, but in boundary painting it is not possible; here one is obliged to keep strictly to the rules."

The clear and crisp technique of Wang Cheng-p'eng reminds one of Dürer's fine engravings. I can think of no other Oriental painter who can draw so skillfully with a brush as the Recluse of the Solitary Cloud.

#### NOTE

Grateful thanks are due Yeh Cheng and Chang Cheng-tsu for their kind help in the translation of the artist's colophon.



密寧間三月三日開放金明池出  
錦標與萬民同樂詳見夢華錄  
大康氏銘遇

仁廟青宮十春節嘗作此圖進呈  
白三月三日金明池龍驤萬斛紛  
遊嬉歡聲雷動喧鼓吹喜色日射  
明旌旗錦標漂沫能幾許吳兒顛  
倒不自知因憐世上競者進  
退又何其癡但取萬民同樂意  
作一片無聲詩

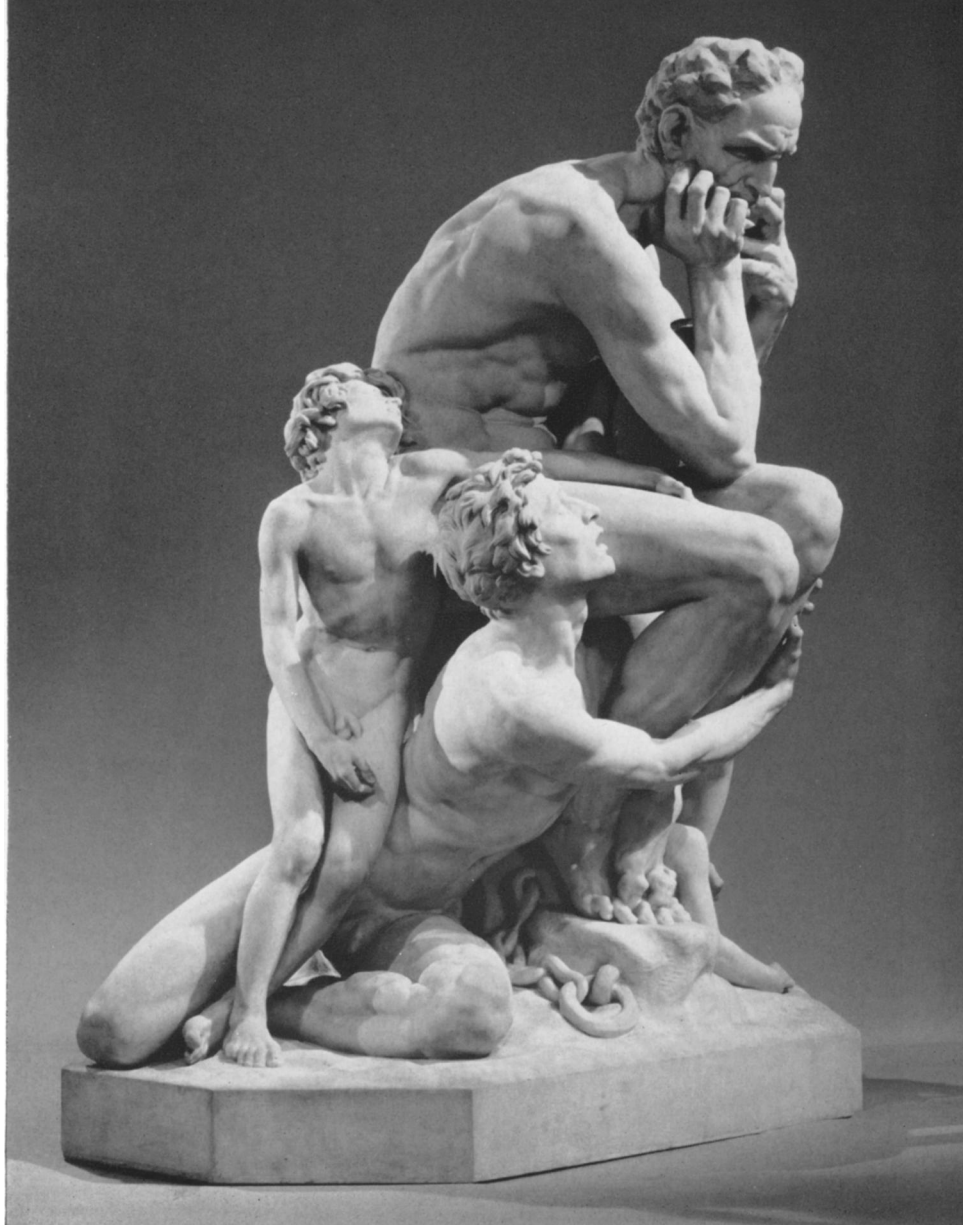
儲皇簡渚無嗜好藝圃書林悅心目  
適當今日稱壽觴敬當

千巖金鑑鏤恭惟

大長公至嘗覽此圖閱一紀餘今奉  
教再作但目力減如曩管勉而為  
之深懼不足呈

獻時至沿癸亥暮莫稟給令王  
百拜敬畫謹書

The technique of "boundary painting" requires the same skill as calligraphy, always considered a challenge by the scholar-painter. Four of the principal forms of Chinese calligraphy are represented on the scroll. Following a practice typical of Yüan artists, the painter wrote a long inscription (reproduced above; for translation see page 391) in beautifully executed characters of li shu, or clerical script. The plaque identifying the stately Palace of the Precious Stream is in k'ai shu, or standard writing, and the seal next to the first word of the artist's inscription is a collector's seal in chüan shu, or seal writing. The fourth type, hsing shu, or running script, is used at the very end of the scroll in parts of a colophon (not illustrated) inscribed by a former owner.



*Ugolino and His Sons*, by J.-B. Carpeaux (1827-1875), French. Executed in Paris in 1865-1867. Marble, height 77 inches. Purchase, The Josephine Bay Paul and C. Michael Paul Foundation, Inc., and Charles Ulrick and Josephine Bay Foundation, Inc., and Fletcher Fund, 67.250

On May 7 a special showing will open of the five monumental marble sculptures that have been successively on view in the Great Hall during the past season. These are, to list them chronologically, Caccini's *Temperance*, Monnot's *Andromeda and the Monster*, Lemoyne's *La Crainte de l'Amour*, Canova's *Perseus*, and Carpeaux's *Ugolino and His Sons*.

In an extraordinarily effective manner these five statues fill gaps in our sculpture collection. Together they may also be said to offer

a capsule history of European sculpture since the Renaissance. Caccini's *Temperance* is, for instance, a classic example of late Florentine mannerism (if we can't have a great Giovanni Bologna we gladly settle for a great Caccini); Monnot's *Andromeda* is in the full-blown Roman baroque style of about 1700; Lemoyne's enchanting figure is as rococo a sculpture as any we have laid eyes upon; the *Perseus* by Canova is a monument of neoclassicism; and Carpeaux's achievement is probably the ulti-

## Recently Acquired Sculpture

mate expression of Romanticism in marble.

Three other pieces are on display with the monumental sculptures. Two, the alabaster Charity traditionally attributed to Pilon and Puget's marble bust of Jean de Deydé, have been previously shown as recent accessions. The third, never before exhibited here, is also a portrait – but what a portrait! It is Samuel Bernard, the great banker of Louis XIV, as seen by Guillaume Coustou. In looking at this glittering performance in marble, one feels that in any age Bernard would have been an illustrious financier.

It is owing to the continued aid and enthusiastic support of Colonel C. Michael Paul that our collection of European sculpture of the post-Renaissance periods, and particularly of France of the seventeenth and eighteenth

centuries, has achieved an eminence that would have been undreamed of a decade ago. Colonel Paul is president of the two foundations – the Josephine Bay Paul and C. Michael Paul Foundation, Inc., and the Charles Ulrick and Josephine Bay Foundation, Inc. – that have enabled the Museum to buy six of the eight works in this new display. And these are not the first sculptures to come to us through funds from the two foundations: the other pieces that reached the Museum through Colonel Paul's good offices are displayed in a gallery adjoining the exhibition. This handsome room has been dedicated by the Museum's Trustees to the memory of Colonel Paul's late wife, Josephine Bay Paul.

JOHN GOLDSMITH PHILLIPS

## *Honorary Trustees and Curators Emeriti*

Under the recent revision of the Museum's Constitution and By-Laws, provision was made for the election of Honorary Trustees "from persons eminently qualified in one or more aspects of the Museum's activities and interests." At the meeting of the Board of Trustees held on March 12, 1968, Roy R. Neuberger and Professors Millard Meiss and Craig Hugh Smyth were unanimously elected Honorary Trustees. Mr. Neuberger is a prominent collector and has long been a friend of the Museum. He also served with distinction as the president of the American Federation of Arts from 1958 to 1967. Professor Meiss is presently at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, having previously been professor of fine arts at Harvard University and curator of paintings at the Fogg Museum. Professor Smyth is director of the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University, with

which the Museum has carried out cooperative educational programs for many years.

At the same meeting of the Board, it was determined to elect all living retired curators as Curators Emeriti for Life. The Curators Emeriti and their former departments are: Christine Alexander, Greek and Roman Art; Randolph Bullock, Arms and Armor; M. S. Dimand, Islamic Art; Margaret B. Freeman, The Cloisters; Stephen V. Grancsay, Arms and Armor; Robert Beverly Hale, American Paintings and Sculpture; A. Hyatt Mayor, Prints; Alan R. Priest, Far Eastern Art; Gisela M. A. Richter, Greek and Roman Art; Harry B. Wehle, European Paintings; and Charles K. Wilkinson, Near Eastern Art. Lydia Bond Powel was elected Keeper Emeritus of the American Wing.

DUDLEY T. EASBY, JR.

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