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"Themes and Images on the Animate Buff Ware of Medieval Nishapur"

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## P R E F A C E

As a method of ordering the material, I have divided the examples of animate buff ware into two groups:

a. those marked "w", are the items included by Charles K. Wilkinson in his catalogue of the wares excavated at Nishapur, by the Metropolitan Museum Expedition, and published by him in: "Nishapur: Pottery of the Early Islamic Period";

b. those marked "o" are the examples I have collected from other sources.

Chapter 1, is a description of the pots; technical and visual. At the end of the thesis, I have included an Appendix, in which Table A is an alphabetical division of the buff ware items according to theme and subject. It is included in the text of Chapter 1, but also relates to the reference letter(s) applied to each piece beside its illustration in the Plates.

For practical reasons, the items in group "w" have been illustrated in the order in which they appeared in the Wilkinson catalogue; the "o" group are arranged according to my list of theme and subject, as given in Table A.

Table B, lists such measurements as I have been able to glean from the published sources. As far as shapes are concerned, I have included profiles of the pots wherever possible among the illustrations. For the "w" items, I have given the location in Nishapur where each was found, and these are marked on the map on Plate 1.b

When it was too late to remedy the error, I realised I had included two of Wilkinson's pots in the "o" group, since they had been published elsewhere. The error persists only in the illustrations, as lists and tables have been corrected.

In Chapter 2, I have looked for a background against which to set the pots. For this, I have focused on a few salient or interesting aspects of demography, culture and commerce; a trial dig or two into the great "tepe" of the history of the time, and Nishapur in particular.

In contrast, Chapter 3 is a visual scan; first of some contemporary wares which are known to have been in Nishapur alongside the buff; then, bearing in mind what others have said, and with a few clues from Chapter 2, I have played "stylistic Pelmanism", with the surrounding civilizations and cultures, past and tenth century.

For transliteration of Persian and Arabic names and words, I have followed the Cambridge History of Iran. With regard to dates, I have given them according to the Christian era unless otherwise stated. On occasions I have followed them with the Hijra dates, if I thought it particularly relevant.

I would like to thank my Supervisor, Dr Julian Raby, for his wise guidance and considerable patience, and also Dr James Allan for his tuition and help over the past two years. My thanks are also due to Mrs Philippa Martin for much help in the Library of Eastern Art.

Finally, I dedicate this effort to my father, on his eighty-fourth birthday, 24th May, 1983.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1935, the Iranian Expedition of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, began shaking the dust of a thousand years hibernation off the coveys, flocks and herds, the bellicose warriors and bibulous squires on the ceramic buff ware of medieval Nishapur. I like to think that the wide-eyed surprise was mutual.

This is an attempt at a fresh look at one of the most idiosyncratic ceramic productions of Islamic Iran. Localised, often crude in potting and decoration and on occasion grotesque, yet its very peculiarity catches the eye, draws it back for a second look and jolts the iconographic memory. It is harder to cast these bowls a casual glance and dismiss them than many more aesthetically pleasing examples of the potter's art.

I have not focused on close comparisons with their ceramic contemporaries. To chase each motif through the labyrinthine potters' quarter of that city alone, apart from other provincial centres of Iran and Central Asia, and the metropolises of the Abbasid west and Samanid east in the ninth and tenth centuries, would be far beyond my novice grasp of Islamic ceramic history. All I have attempted is to catch the general drift of such ideas as have been put forward for the origins of themes and images on these vessels, and with this small swag of hypotheses, set off on a brief academic sojourn to see what my own eyes tell me, and what can be gleaned from the wise and the ancients along the way.

## CHAPTER 1

### PROVENANCE

As with most antiquities, the circumstances under which Nishapur ceramics were found and became available to museums or the open market are crucial. Wilkinson has pointed out that prior to 1935 this was via minor commercial excavations or the haphazard diggings of local farmers who used the detritus of unbaked sun-dried bricks from the mounds of the old city as fertilizer for their fields.<sup>1</sup>

Seventh and eighth century Khurasan had been divided into four Quarters, named from the four great cities which at various times were, separately or conjointly, the capitals of the province; namely, Nishapur, Marv, Herat and Balkh. This had been for Umayyad and early 'Abbasid administrative purposes. When the Tahirids came to power in 821/205, they made Nishapur the capital of the province since it was also the chief town of the westernmost of the four Quarters.<sup>2</sup> The city flourished until the twelfth century, when it suffered a series of disasters; earthquakes in 1115 and 1145, and pillage by the Oghuz Turks in 1153. Nonetheless, Yaqut, who visited in 1216, referred to it as the richest, most flourishing and populous city on earth. It was sacked by Tolui, the youngest son of Chingiz-Khan, in 1221, and given the coup de grace by another earthquake in 1232. Thereafter, the city was rebuilt on another part of the plain.<sup>3</sup>

Between 1935 and 1940, the Metropolitan Museum of Art Iranian Expedition carried out excavations on a few selected areas, returning to close the dig in 1947. Large quantities of Islamic materials were obtained, chiefly glazed and unglazed ceramics, mostly dating from the ninth to the early thirteenth century, but also glass, some metalwork and many coins. Architectural ornamentation of brick, carved and painted stucco, and wall paintings in black or polychrome on white were also found.<sup>1</sup>

The excavation was considered comprehensive enough to prevent making errors that are apt to arise from trial sondages, and Wilkinson confirms that his catalogue, "Nishapur: Pottery of the Early Islamic Period", contains only pieces excavated by the Metropolitan's expedition, plus a few pieces acquired by them directly from peasants who had found them while working in their fields or on road building at the time. As he says, these pieces "genuinely came from the soil of Nishapur".<sup>2</sup>

Since I have not worked from the objects themselves but only from published material, it has been necessary to take a great deal on faith. For body, glaze, colour, often shape and invariably for details of restoration, I have been in the hands of others. For this reason, I have used the pieces of figural buff ware illustrated in the catalogue, as the best touchstone available to me when considering examples of less easily verifiable provenance, and also other contemporary ceramic productions from Nishapur and elsewhere.

This seemed advisable, since after the surrender of the concession the site was ransacked in search of salable objects. As Wilkinson says: "Nishapur deserved a better fate than death by looting". He considers that much pottery designated "Nishapur" does deserve the title, but other pieces undoubtedly do not. He suggests that some may come from other sites to the west, such as Gurgan, Juvain near Sabzevar, the ancient Baihaq, and Qumis near Damghan, on the road to Ray, but that others are forgeries.<sup>1</sup> Alas, I am in no position to say with him: " ... the individuality of the designs is so marked that a full acquaintance with the pottery of Nishapur usually enables one to classify authentic examples of it from no more than a black-and-white photograph".<sup>2</sup>

#### CHRONOLOGY

As with the provenance of Nishapur ceramics, we are dependent on the Metropolitan excavation for details of a chronology for them. Wilkinson considers that buff ware was probably not made before the ninth century and appears to have died out in the eleventh.<sup>3</sup>

A continuity from pre-Islamic through to Islamic times cannot be traced, since the site of the Sasanian city has not been definitely located, and no pre-'Abbasid ceramics were found during the excavations.<sup>4</sup> However, the seal impressions and the coins bearing the name of Abarshahr or Aparshahr, and the knowledge that it was the capital of a district of the same name, speak for a town worthy of consideration. It was also the seat

of a Nestorian diocese in 430, according to the Syriac sources.<sup>1</sup> The lack of evidence for or against a continuum with regard to ceramic design and production, is a lack indeed.

The nearest comparable site which, in contrast to Nishapur, has been excavated to Sasanian and Parthian levels, is Marv, in South Turkmenistan. There, in the late 1950s, buff ware was found at tenth-century level, and deemed to be of local manufacture. At fifth or sixth-century level, a two-handled pottery vase was found, with figural painting on it; evidence for a vigorous, if not identical, form of ceramic decoration in the eastern provinces previous to the Arab invasions.<sup>2</sup> (Plate 36.a)

Wilkinson says, candidly, that precise dating is simply not possible in this pottery, and the sequence in his catalogue does not indicate chronological order, nor does development from simple to more sophisticated decoration tally with a time shift.<sup>3</sup> Since there was no stratigraphy, there are no external controls that can be brought to bear on the group, and dating is entirely dependent on a very broad assessment of the context in which they were found. When it has been possible to develop an internal chronology for the various types, Wilkinson has pointed this out, but the buff ware remained enigmatic in this respect.<sup>4</sup>

## DISTRIBUTION

When considering the ceramic finds from Nishapur in general, there is the problem of what was made in the city and what was imported. However, the quantity of buff ware found there was so great, and its absence in Transoxiana and the rest of Iran so complete, that Wilkinson considers its local manufacture cannot be questioned. This is despite the fact that no kilns or wasters for this ware were found.<sup>1</sup>

It is significant in this respect, that the small Metropolitan team was able to excavate only a limited area of the whole of the great medieval city, as will be evident from the map. (Plate 1b).

The figural examples of buff ware in the catalogue number thirty-three, many of them shards and incomplete pieces, plus two items with Nestorian Christian symbols on them. These last are not strictly speaking figural, but the implications of their presence need to be assessed. Wilkinson says he has presented a sufficient body of authentic material, with no attempt to show only the best.<sup>2</sup>

In his survey paper on the regional distribution of medieval Persian pottery, Andrew Williamson argued for localised production, and relatively small distribution areas, for all ceramic types except those representing a complex technology which was hard to imitate, such as polychromy, lustre or porcelain, and these were a minute proportion of the ceramic output of the time.<sup>3</sup>

He suggests that the distributions illustrate the little explored wealth of very local cultural identities, which are concealed beneath the broad pattern of Islamic trade.<sup>1</sup>

This would seem to confirm Wilkinson's findings, although it may be as well to remember that images travel light in the mind's eye and earthenware weighs heavy in the saddle-bag.

#### TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION

For technical description I am, yet again, in the hands of Wilkinson, and what follows is taken from the catalogue and his article "The Glazed Pottery of Nishapur and Samarkand".<sup>2</sup>

"In Nishapur the ware was made in every degree of quality from well-turned and elaborately decorated pieces to crudely painted kitchen utensils. Buffware does not seem to have been used for lamps.<sup>3</sup> Whatever the workmanship, the typical color of body and surface is buff. Sometimes the color of the surface is light enough to be described as bone-colored, in which case an engobe is probably present as a ground for the painted decoration. When the surface is darker, more truly buff, the decoration is usually painted directly on the water-smoothed surface. The basic design is painted in a pigment that fires to a near black. Because of the presence of manganese, this black this black often has a purple cast. Sometimes it is a purplish brown. The colors most often added are yellow and green. The yellow, usually intense, is the color of English mustard. On more elaborate vessels so much opaque yellow was used that it rather than the buff serves as a background to the major decoration.<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes it has a green tinge. Because it contains tin oxide, it is opaque, and as the blobs of this color are applied freely, not to say carelessly, they often overlap and obscure the black lines. The green, derived from a copper base, is transparent when thinly applied. It becomes almost black when much copper is present, at which stage it also obscures the painted design. This partial obscuration, softening the strongly drawn outlines, is not always unpleasing. Incidentally, the same green is used in the color-splashed ware of Nishapur. The two yellows used in the color-splashed ware, on the other hand, are unlike the buff ware yellow. A third color, a brick red slip, is used occasionally, always in a minor role."

In this regard, o54 may be of interest, since large background areas between the arms of the cross are filled with red.

"The glaze, which has a high content of lead, often has a green tinge. It covers the inside and the outside of the bowls and dishes and in many examples the base as well. The glaze rarely flakes off, probably for the reason that there is usually no engobe beneath it, or, if there is an engobe, it is applied thinly. (By contrast, in the black on white ware, with its thick engobe, the flaking of the glaze is frequent.) When the glaze has eroded - often the case - the black drawing and the blobs of yellow remain in such fresh condition it is hard to believe that glaze ever covered them. Such pieces may suggest that they were fired twice, once for the decoration and again for the glaze, but in fact, like all the other glazed

earthenwares of Nishapur, they were fired only once. Unlike the yellow, which contains much clay and remains as an impasto on the surface, the copper base of the green fuses with the glaze, and when the glaze disappears, the green disappears with it, usually leaving a telltale gray area on the surface."<sup>1</sup>

#### COMPOSITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

"The decoration ordinarily covers the entire inside surface of a bowl or dish, in contrast to the treatment in certain other Nishapur wares (the black on white and the opaque white, for example), in which the decoration is limited and selectively placed. This is interesting in that it proves two fundamentally different styles were popular in Nishapur at the same time.

The decoration of the buff ware falls into two main categories, one without animate forms, and one in which bird, animal, and human figures appear. The differentiation extends to the subsidiary decoration, that filling the spaces of the inanimate designs usually consisting of cross-hatches checkerings, and the like, and that filling the spaces of the animate designs consisting of rosettes, dotted circles, and various intricate small patterns. Generally it may be said that the backgrounds of the animate pieces are more complex than those of the inanimate. The line between the inanimate and animate designs cannot in all cases be firmly drawn. Still, considering the great variety of the designs and the large number of vessels excavated, the hybrid pieces are surprisingly few."<sup>2</sup>

I have quoted Wilkinson at some length, because his factual description brings out an important feature to bear in mind when embarking on a personal inspection of the pots; namely, that although they may share a body, the spirit is very much their own.

These pots convey an overwhelming sense of space compulsively filled, and the plethora of background motifs confuse the eye and cause the composition to appear more haphazard than it really is.

Large human and animal figures make full, if clumsy use of the space allotted. This is often determined by the rim, or inner base ring, of the bowl's structure, and is emphasised by retaining bands of calligraphic braiding, floral or geometrical motifs, or creatures in procession. Where there is a circular movement, animals and birds move in the same direction, overwhelmingly anticlockwise. Where a central figure is the focal point, they move from right to left, and in this case attendant creatures, usually birds, may face inwards in heraldic fashion rather than pursue their hectic circuits. There is also a tendency to fit them into the spaces available, according to the law of the jig-saw rather than nature; a bird flying, or strutting, upside-down beneath the belly of a prancing charger is almost de rigueur, as in w62, o2, o5, o6, o7 and o9.

Composition based on radial lines issuing from a central point, so characteristic of their inanimate buff ware brother, seems to be rare among the figural pieces; o43 is exceptional among those I have traced, and o55, which Wilkinson connects

with the Christian context,<sup>1</sup> provides an interesting comparison. Examples of the "animal wheel" and its derivatives, I would class as compositions circular in inspiration, for example, w60, w61, o45 and o49.

All decoration is starkly outlined in black against the bone-coloured engobe or yellow covered ground, then relieved with filler patterns or solid colour with areas in reserve. On other occasions the background may be filled with dark pigment and the figures left in reserve, as with the central medallion of w63, and a further outline in reserve around the figure is usual in this combination.

The background cover is characterised by the agitated whirling of a myriad small motifs. Rosettes with sproutings and trailing tails flutter like sycamore wings between bird, beast and human. Dotted circles cluster, spirals configurate and diminutive, fine-lined barakehs dart between them all.

Wilkinson has drawn attention to the fact that although some of these motifs are to be found on other contemporary wares from Nishapur, the idiosyncratic way in which two or more motifs may be joined together, sometimes at abrupt angles, is peculiar to the animate buff ware. He suggests this continues a tradition from Central Asia, as in the cave paintings of Bazalik, where arbitrarily joined flower and leaf forms are scattered on the background. A clear example of this is to be seen on w59.<sup>2</sup>

Areas within the figures are contrasted by patches of small, linear patternings of dots, dashes, crosses, herring-bones, circles,

simple floral textile designs and stylised fur and feathering. No area of solid colour is left completely unadorned.

The exteriors of the bowls tend to be decorated with simple, repetitive abstract elements, and a strong vertical emphasis. The lanceolate leaf form appears on several, for example, w62, w74, o29 and o41, and may be alternated with other linear designs. Sometimes, the motif used may be found also in the repertoire of principal decoration on these pots, though not necessarily from that of the bowl in question. For an interesting example, see w73, where the stylised plant form is to be met with again as the supporting growth for the strange, vegetal phenomena in the hands of the twins on the Freer bowl, o20. As Wilkinson notes, the contrast between static, repetitious designs on the exteriors and the agitation of the inner surface of these bowls, is characteristic.<sup>1</sup>

Regarding the epigraphic element in the decoration, Wilkinson remarks that simulated Kufic appears on a number of vessels. He considers it nearly always meaningless or representing barakeh, a benediction word suitable for any religious faith.<sup>2</sup> If indeed it is barakeh, then the kaf is written in mirror image, and along a base line.<sup>3</sup> It appears in a variety of sizes, but the basic structure of the calligraphy remains the same. There are other, block-like configurations of letters, such as on the rim of w62, but even when boldly inscribed, they have the quality of a type face rather than that of a calligrapher's hand; a further sharp contrast to the contemporary black on white

ware, already referred to by Wilkinson.

Wilkinson also suggests, that the lapels of the tunic worn by the rider on w71, are drawn in such a way as to resemble Kufic, and the same might also apply to the lower part of the decoration on the saddle cloth.<sup>1</sup> An intriguing thought!

### HUMAN FIGURES

An uncompromising severity of line, angularity of form and stiffness of pose characterise the human images in the buff repertoire. It is as though the decorators of the pots were painting by formulae, a limited number of formats for basic poses, dress and activities pinned up before them, and very little incentive for elaboration or interpretation. The main variety appears in the patterning of infills and the cluttering of backgrounds.

The images are often crudely conceived and carelessly executed, which may be another indication of repetitive production. To the modern eye the results may often appear most bizarre and disquieting, especially as we do not really know what they signify, and have no comforting prototype for reference. May be they are merely an expression of Nishapuri humour? This is not the moment to speculate.

At first sight they are like marionettes; their wooden bodies and peg limbs bulkily padded out with flock, and their garments sewn from a rag-bag of cotton scraps. Alternatively, their skeletal forms are disguised beneath a stiff caftan or bell-shaped skirt. This, when combined with long raven tresses

or shoulder length curls, and a beard, leads to some confusion as to the sex intended.

They ride steeds like Victorian rocking horses, sit perched precariously on tilted stools, or sit, straight as pokers, voluminously pantalooned thighs extended, and heavily booted lower legs crossed before or beneath them.

There is a pose for running and perhaps for dancing, or lurching, at a bacchanalian carouse. They stand, four square and arms akimbo, are to be seen with sword, polostick, beaker or flowery wand in hand, or bird on wrist. They stand, sit or cavort in pairs, holding a wreath or drooping plant between them, and the lutenist strums. Their expression of mild disdain preempts the smiles of lesser mortals.

Their facial features are striking. Whether full face or in profile, heads are flat-topped, low browed and jaws are cut well and truly square. In profile, the passage from brow to chin is defined by a single in-step or none at all, and often no attempt is made to define nose and mouth further. A line across the lower cheek is used to convey gauntness of countenance, as Wilkinson has pointed out.<sup>1</sup>

When faces are in full or three-quarter view, noses are more likely to be indicated. The outline of the eye socket may be carried downwards into a trefoil, as on o5, or to a simpler snub, as on the Kansas City bowl, o22. On the Keir bowl, o21, w59 and others, the snub is given small diagonal extensions above the pursed mouth. Mouths are always small, and often not indicated at all. Short, cropped beards are

usually depicted by a single black line, running up into the hair, as on w62. Even where faces are beardless, ears are often dispensed with, although the suggestion of an earring is sometimes discernable, even when the ear is not.

There seem to be two main conventions for depicting eyes; the elongated eye as in w62, and the small-eyed squint, as in o22. They are not, however, mutually exclusive, so that the gentleman from St. Louis, o12, among others, transfixes one with an owlish stigmatism. The elongated eye is often used on profiles where no other features may be indicated. There is usually a pair of them on the full and three-quarter faces, although to expect conventional relationships between eyes and nose is rash.

The elongated eye gives these crudely drawn faces a mesmeric quality, which, at its best has a weird elegance, as on w62. There, it is enhanced by the delicately curved eyebrow, sweeping back to the extended beard line. Among the more horrific examples are the seemingly dead sockets of the twins, on o19, and the nightmare cavaliera and her attendant ghouls, on o11.

Sometimes, there is the hint of a three-dot design between the eyebrows, which may be a tatoo mark,<sup>1</sup> although they appear also in other contexts, such as to the rear of animals, and as a background motif. A good example is the Freer bowl, o20.

There are two main hairstyles worn by these characters. One consists of a thick, black layer across the top of the head, sometimes crimped, that falls to a fat curl at shoulder level.

There is often some kind of relieving decoration along this hair layer, either rosettes, as on w62, or plain circles, as on o5. Likewise, the shoulder curl may have a rosette or small area in reserve at its centre. In some cases, a line of beautifully ordered kiss curls frame the brow, and there may be a hint of a prinked side whisker.

Often it is not clear what, if any, connection exists between the bifurcated scarf, an idiosyncrasy of the dress of these figures, and the hair. On w50 the projecting roll of hair is so placed as to resemble a cloak clasp, at the junction of neck and shoulder, while on others, such as o16, the hair roll and the scarf baubles would seem to be clearly differentiated. On the Cleveland bowl, o25, the hair of the seated figures appears to flow straight into the bifurcated scarf, with no break or indication of a shoulder curl, only an earring.<sup>1</sup>

With reference to Wilkinson's bowl w66, where the seated figure appears to have plaits, he says that the hair definitely ends at the shoulders. It seems, therefore, that in the many cases where the figures appear to have long hair, one should be, at least, sceptical.

Headgear is worn by some figures, such as the cavalier on o6, who appears to wear a kind of tarbush with a fine tassel dropping down the back. Perhaps the man on fragment o4 is wearing a turban round a central cone, and the military gentlemen on o1 and o2 are certainly sporting species of helmets. The cavaliera on o11 is the only one to wear the suggestion of a crown. The lutenist on o22 appears to wear a tricorne hat,

with more than a passing resemblance to the bull-horned helmet found on Sasanian seals depicting the moon god Mah. (Plate 41.d.e) Is it hair or ram's horns on w65; and on w69, curls or a Khurasani tam-o'-shanter? There is much on these bowls to vex the sartorial pedant.

This being the case, I will point only to salient features of costume, which may be relevant when discussing the possible origins of this figural style.

### COSTUME

The right hand sleeve of Wilkinson's cavalier, w62, and the left sleeve of w59, are deeply slit with bound edges, as noted by Wilkinson.<sup>1</sup> This is also clearly evident on the right-hand figure of the o22 group.

Wilkinson has suggested that the knee-high black boots worn by the cavaliers and figures seated cross-legged, are in fact little shoes, separate from the upper part of the boot, and suspended by a cord from the wearer's belt.<sup>2</sup> A most practical idea for horsemen, in a society where footwear was often being shed. These upper parts of the boots are sometimes decorated with a motif in reserve, or a clearly defined seam line.

Jackets with schematically defined lapels are worn with voluminous pantaloons or breeches, characterised by a criss-cross design, perhaps simulating quilting, or bold floral motifs. These tuck into the top of the boot-leggings, and are characterised by contrasting knee patches on the

seated figures, but not on the horsemen. Wilkinson sees them as a misunderstanding of such earlier images as the Bodhisattva at Dandan Oiliq.<sup>1</sup> (Plate 43.a) It is curious that the knee patches also turn up on the skirted figures of the Cleveland bowl, o25.<sup>2</sup> The bell-shaped skirt, on a waistband, appears to be worn either with a simple, long-sleeved top, as on o25, or with a jacket with lapels as seen on w59. On the latter a pair of shalvar peep from beneath the hem line.

The perplexing bi-furcated scarf is worn by skirted and jack-booted figures, but never by the cavaliers.<sup>3</sup>

#### ARMOUR

With regard to armour, among the examples I have gathered together there are five bellicose knights on complete bowls: w62, o1, o2, o3 and o14, and two fragments, w71 and o4. o9 wears a vest of lamellae, but has his eye on something other than the foe, and the curious Berlin fragment, o10, leaves much scope for interpretation, but the cavalier may be wearing a shirt of mail.

The knights all brandish short, straight-bladed swords of the Sasanian type, and the hilt of w62's has a distinctive "V" at either end. This type of hilt was in use among the people who in earlier centuries ranged from the heart of Asia to the plains of Hungary, as Wilkinson has pointed out. He also notes that it is not possible to say whether this sword was in use in medieval Nishapur, or appears here as

an iconographic archaism.<sup>1</sup> All swordsmen appear to carry their weapon in their left hand, though this may be a necessary artistic license, since the figures ride from right to left across the bowls, with their rein in their right hand. The alternative would be compositionally awkward. Fragment o4, and the Berlin swordsman on foot, ol4, also carry small, circular shields.

o1 and o2 are clad in some protective garment from neck to knee, while o3, ol4 and w62 have protective shirts only. o1, o2 and o3 have helmets, o4 a species of turban, and Wilkinson's cavalier appears to wear nothing but his hair, or at most a close fitting pillbox. He also wears a sleeve of contrasting design to the rest of his shirt. The dandy on fragment w71 may be concealing his sword-proof vest beneath the lapelled jacket of boldly patterned cloth.

There is a general tendency for the horsemen, along with other figures shown side or three-quarter face, to have their torsos depicted full frontal, while their legs remain in profile. It is noticeable how the resulting awkwardness has been modified on w62 by the introduction of the oddly vested arm.

The figure of the warrior which appeared among the polychrome on white ware finds at Nishapur, and is discussed by Wilkinson as number 48 in that section of his catalogue,<sup>2</sup> I have included for comparative purposes, along with the fragment number 59.<sup>3</sup> (Plate 37.a.b). Tentatively, he points out the similarity between the tall pointed helmet,

and that worn by figures on some post Sasanian silverware.<sup>1</sup> An example is the Hermitage dish from Kulagysh, in the Ural foothills. (Plate 47.a). Wilkinson also mentions two bowls in private collections, an archer and a dancer, which have the strong "V" line projecting from their headgear. The archer wears a knobbed helmet similar to that on No.48. There is also a buff ware bowl, of doubtful authenticity, in Berlin, where the "V" is found.<sup>2</sup> It is interesting, that Wilkinson does not mention, and I have not come across, any evidence for archers on buff ware.

The belt with pendant thongs, as on the chocolate soldier of fragment 59, mentioned above, has been discussed by Otto Dorn, in her article on Achtamar, regarding its use and significance among the peoples of the steppe.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, I reluctantly draw attention to oll, the cavaliera and her hideous retinue of sword-bearers, whose garb owes more to the tracksuit than the wardrobe of the knight or squire. However, the tailored, military cut of the uniform of the chocolate soldier may bear comparison.

ANIMALS, BIRDS AND OTHER CREATURES

a. Horses: In general, the horses are the small headed, thick barreled type, with stiffly arched necks, familiar from Sasanian silverware. The manes are hogged, tails braided and they are given the elongated eye of human figures. They come dark, dappled or pale, and besides the pendants from chest and breeching straps, they are sometimes inhabited by curling stems and palmettes. This last decorative attribute is true also of the bovids, as is the characteristic of the head being in reserve, all but the muzzle, as if a mask were being worn. Similarly, both animals may have hocks, knees and fetlocks emphasised by dots, circles or rosettes. There is a tendency throughout the animal kingdom of the buff ware bowls, to tweak any little excrescence, such as the tip of a tail or fetlock, into a tight curl or floriate motif. A feature familiar from objects in precious metal, such as the dish depicting the goddess riding a mythical beast, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>1</sup> (Plate 41.a)

The bridles match up well with the Sasanian type of combined bit and noseband, also in the Metropolitan.<sup>2</sup> Two of the riderless horses, o41 and o42, are shown with bits and embryonic reins. The stirrups are small and circular, with the leathers suspended from half way down the elongated saddle cloth, and the saddle is usually indicated by a sharply raised pommel and cantle. The similarity to the rider figure from Panjikent, is striking in these respects, if less so in painting style. (Plate 44.b)

b. Birds and Horned Beasts: To be ornithologically precise is often not possible with these birds, but I do think that the more obvious characteristics such as the peacock's and swallow's tails should be respected.

The stylised wing shape, which is upended as a peacock's tail, and often encloses a palmette, is noted by Wilkinson<sup>1</sup> and well illustrated by w76. Wings attached to the neck, or to the tri-cusped halo, are a further idiosyncrasy of the buff ware birds, as on w73 and w72. Their heads are always in reserve, while their bodies are in colour or filler pattern. Where the body colour ends and the reserve begins, is usually marked by two or more encircling lines or a chevron collar. Wilkinson notes that the chevron is found only on the buff ware of Nishapur, although it also occurs on similar ware of the tenth century from Marv.<sup>2</sup>

w83 is an unusual variation shared with the buck on o43. They are given button eyes, are often crested, sometimes pretentiously so, as on w59, and on occasion they carry a leafy twig, blossom or palmette in their beaks, but by no means always. The use of calligraphic lines to indicate an elaborate tail is common, and the fragment w82 illustrates the last two points.

A stylistic idiosyncrasy found on the birds and the horned quadrupeds, which I shall refer to as ibex for the sake of brevity, is the pot-hook in reserve, which extends back into the body, from the neckband or chevron, as on w73 and w88.

Sometimes it develops into a half palmette, as on the fragment w79. Whether this is intended as a stylised wing, is hard to say, particularly as a dislocated wing may also be attached, as on o8. The birds share pin legs and spikey feet with most of the hieratically smaller creatures, such as hares, though larger animals tend to be more correctly pawed and hoofed. There is no accurate relation between animals as regards size.<sup>1</sup>

The caprid-cervid creatures tend to be more stereotyped than the birds, and further removed from an identifiable original. They have little bullet heads with squared off snouts and their horns sweep back more like those of a gazelle than an ibex. The ingenuity of the pose on o43 is rare, as are the curling ram's horns on the animal wheel of w60. This is a notable departure from Sasanian iconography.

The hare appears in recognisable form on several pots, but usually in a minor role, as on w80, and as the astonished companion of the 'shamanesque' figure on w65. The solo figure on o35 is a rarity, and although on buff ware, it relates in design more to the heraldic animal types to be found on the polychrome on white ware.<sup>2</sup> A surprising attribute is the elongated eye form.

c. Bovids: There were no bull-like creatures found on pots during the Metropolitan excavation, but the examples on o36, o37 and o24, are very handsome specimens. In common with the horses they have the larger eye form, and bodies inhabited by elaborate scrolling stems. Their humps are tailor-made for a rosette.

d. Creatures of the Imagination: Purely imaginary creatures are not a major feature of these figural bowls, however odd the more mundane varieties may seem to be. Most of the more unearthly beasts appear in the role of familiars, as on o39, o40 and o41. Though none of this type of bowl decoration was found during the excavation, Wilkinson does refer to them when discussing the rather strange hunting leopard, leaping up behind the rider on w62. He comments on its crested head and "wing", and suggests it may have some kind of supernatural connotation, and if this is so, then the figure may be someone other than a hunter, particularly as it is not usual to hunt with a sword.<sup>1</sup> Certainly the cheetah is most heraldic in stance, or perhaps just disconcertingly friendly, and it would look quite at home, all alone, on a polychrome on white bowl, such as that published by Wilkinson in another context.<sup>2</sup> However, having lived with the images on these bowls for a while, I would hesitate before drawing conclusions, either on the strength of quaint juxtapositions or stylised poses.

THEMES AND SUBJECTS

In order to identify themes and subjects depicted in the decoration of the pots, I have ordered them into fourteen major categories, some with sub-sections. It is interesting that out of the fourteen, only nine are to be found in the Wilkinson group, and that is including the necessarily free interpretation of some fragments.

Naturally, this cannot be used to prove anything, because of the limitations of my gathering as well as those of the Metropolitan's excavations, already referred to.

The following table represents this breakdown of theme and subject-matter, in the order in which the "o" group is presented in Plates 13 to 35.

<u>GROUP</u>	<u>THEME/SUBJECT</u>	<u>"o"</u>	<u>"w"</u>
A	Solo Cavaliers		
	(a) sword in hand	5	2
	(b) polo-stick in hand	3	-
	(c) bird in hand	1	-
	(d) unidentified object in hand	1	-
	(e) the 'cavaliera'	1	-
B	Solo Figures		
	(a) standing	2	3
	(b) moving	1	-
C	Solo Seated Figures	2	3
D	Figures in Pairs	5	-
E	Musicians	2	-
F	Cavaliers in Groups *	1	-
G	Seated Figures in Groups	3	-
H	Solo Creatures		
	(a) bird	3	2
	(b) ibex	3	-
	(c) others	1	1
I	Bovids	2	-
J	Creatures with a Familiar		
	(a) horse plus	5	1
	(b) ibex plus	2	1
K	Birds Only	6	4
L	Ibex Only	1	2
M	Mixed Groups of Creatures	2	6
N	Christian Symbols	4	2

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\* This bowl includes bovids.

Both groups contain an anthropomorphic vessel, w72 and o17.

From this random survey, the negative evidence is as interesting as the positive; Sasanian royal iconography is notable by its absence. The only headdresses which could possibly be crowns are those worn by the cavaliera and two of her attendants, on o11, and the drawing on this bowl is too peculiar for it to be clear.

However, Wilkinson does mention a bowl in Copenhagen, described in a letter to him, depicting a man with a crown above, not on, his head, and in each hand a leafy stem.<sup>1</sup>

The ritual blood-letting, so familiar from Sasanian hunting scenes on silverware, does not seem to occur on these bowls. The animal companions of the chase are there; bird on the wrist or perched on the crupper, and the hunting leopard already referred to. Swords are brandished, but with more bravura than bloody intent, and the game gambol by unmolested.

Certainly, polo was an aristocratic pastime, but here, instead of a ball, there is usually a recumbent bird beneath the horse, awaiting the lordly swipe, as on o5, o6 and o7.

A rather coy little bow on the necks of birds is the nearest resemblance to the floating ribbons of Sasanian iconography, for example on the bird above the cavalier's right hand on w62.

The winged circle does appear, but oddly distorted into a tri-cusped halo around the heads of certain birds, as Wilkinson has pointed out.<sup>2</sup> A clear example is on the anthropomorphic jug, w72, and there is one in the flock on o16. The motif appearing beneath the extended saddle cloth of the

horse on w62, may be this familiar emblem in a debased form.

There appears to be much drinking and conviviality, but the ruler figure, stretched at ease upon a couch, his saqi at hand, is nowhere to be seen. The groups, such as o25 and o27, show little obtrusive hierarchy among the figures.

Ettinghausen associates the two figures holding a wreath between them, on o17, with Sasanian royal investitures, non-royal ring ceremonies and the genii on a late Sasanian seal impression from Qasr-e Abu Nasr.<sup>1</sup> However, these imps in pyjamas are certainly a far cry from Sasanian silver and Taq-i Bustan.



## CHAPTER 2

### SOCIAL ASPECTS

If Ettinghausen is right, the search for a social metier in which these pots may have figured, will lead into the back streets, bazaars and rural areas within the geographical catchment zone of medieval Nishapur.

There is a problem, however, in turning to the local histories for this kind of information, since at best they are obscure. As Frye has pointed out, the city histories of the Islamic world are little more than collected biographies of the religious leaders and learned men who lived there. The emphasis is on pious deeds, pronouncements or writings, and these must needs be scoured for odd bits of interesting information of more general social application.<sup>1</sup> This requires panning by the keenest of eyesights and most formidable of linguistic skills, since something may be deduced even from the particular use of a certain word.

This is exemplified by Bulliet in his finely drawn portrait of "The Patricians of Nishapur", but he, too, says that although the core of an individual's identity still lay in local dialect, history and customs, this dimension is hardly visible in the literary works of the period, which were part of the cosmopolitan veneer of Islamic religious practices and imperial administrative procedures of an upper crust, if not artificial, culture.<sup>2</sup>

Evidence for local customs and allegiances, which were the rule among the masses, is discernible mainly in the oblique references to residential areas and the organisation of trade, such as the khans allotted to merchants from specific towns and countries.<sup>1</sup>

In the tenth century, Daqiqi, and later Firdausi, were two among a number of story-tellers or poets seeking to preserve the heritage of Iran, before it was forgotten and absorbed by the new Islamic culture, which was changing not only the old Persian language, but also substituting new ideas and ideals for the ancient Iranian mores.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from the ultra-rarified ra'is families, who had become Samanid courtiers, the last, popular, surviving evidence of the old Sasanian order at this time, was the dihqan image. Cahen describes them as covering a whole gamut of people, from simple cultivators of the soil, who were scarcely better off than their neighbours and subordinates, to true lords of the manor and founders of dynasties.<sup>3</sup> Their importance for national identity is evidenced by such cultural activities as the collecting for posterity of the Shah-Nama; but it was their twilight years.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, the Iranians of the frontier zones had retained a military aristocracy, who had learned much from their contact with the warrior nomads of Central Asia, in terms of military techniques. In the cities, the tradition of certain "sporting" disciplines, such as archery and fencing, were practised in the zurkhanas, and Khurasanis continued to

play an important role in the armies of the Tahirids, Saffarids and Samanids.<sup>1</sup>

The tenth century also saw the rise of the futuwwa, and related groups, which, as Bulliet points out, present a puzzle whenever and wherever they are encountered. "Upon certain points there is agreement: the membership consisted of young men, usually celibate; special ritual and dress were involved; and there was some sort of connection with Sufism".<sup>2</sup> Cahen notes that the organisation was characterised by initiation rites and special insignia (including the "futuwwa trousers"), as well as a complex moral outlook.<sup>3</sup>

It also embodied the concept of javanmardi or chivalry, somewhat similar to the code of knighthood in medieval Europe, and in the east, probably traceable to Sasanian and Parthian times.<sup>4</sup> This sometimes took on a 'Robin Hood' style banditry, professedly for the common good, but the sources are not always very polite about them.<sup>5</sup> Apart from the relatively democratic fityan/javanmardan, there seem to have been unrelated groups of young cavaliers, and the distinction is not always clear.<sup>6</sup>

Alongside the image of the ideal young man - a convivial squire, as adept at extemporising an elegant ghazal as in feats of arms - there developed a Sufi based futuwwa literature, and two of the earliest known works on the subject were written by Nishapuris.<sup>7</sup>

Cohen points out, that on the Central Asian frontiers, there was some overlapping between the fityan and the ghazis, although he stresses that neither lost their identity because of this. Rather, it seems that it was the conversion of the Turks of Central Asia to Islam, and the conquest of northern India, which gradually made them redundant, and with the Turkish ascendancy, the old traditions became adapted by the new ruling elite, who carried them westwards on their own terms.<sup>1</sup>

At no stage, is there evidence for the membership of the futuwwa being limited by class or profession, but it seems that the eleventh century saw an increasingly important connection with the artisan groups and guilds.<sup>2</sup>

It is, perhaps, significant that in 1082, by way of advice to his wayward son, Kai-Ka'us ibn Iskandar, the Ziyarid ruler of Tabaristan and Gurgan, treated of "Javanmardi va tariq-i ahl-i tasawwuf va ahl-i san'at", in the same chapter of the Qabus-Nama.<sup>3</sup>

It would seem, therefore, that although the old social order had all but crumbled to dust, there were vivacious metiers, in tenth-century Nishapur, in which the images of knightly and gentlemanly pursuits would have been perfectly in place. Frye mentions the occurrence of the strange appellation "charpadavani", which he translates as "four-footed racer", attached to some Nishapuri names, as well as "javanmardi".<sup>4</sup>

I cannot prove a connection between the buff ware cavaliers and jack-booted wine-bibbers, and the fityan/javanmardan groups, about which so little is known at present, particularly, as I have found no description of their trousers. However, were it so, it would mean that they need no longer be regarded as debased, imperial Sasanian survivals, since in this context Sasanian iconography, which is notably absent, would have been quite out of place.

Certainly, there appear to have been pre-Islamic elements in the order of the javanmardan, as there were Zoroastrian in the development of Sufism,<sup>1</sup> but the futuwwa were as muslim as the ranks of the ghazis. Besides, w62 would make a striking Gawain of the eastern marches.

#### RELIGIOUS ASPECTS

The ninth century had seen the last efforts by the Zoroastrian priesthood to produce an apologetic literature, in an attempt to preserve the religious heritage, much as happened later in the century in the field of literature.<sup>2</sup> There had been mass conversion to Islam, and the last large-scale emigration of the Zoroastrian communities.<sup>3</sup>

The increasing urbanisation of Islamic Iran, undermined the influence of the Zoroastrian priesthood, for much the same reasons as it did that of the land-owning dihgans. Whereas Zoroastrianism had extolled the virtues of farming and herding, Islam favoured the urban society,<sup>4</sup> and although little is heard of rural life at this time, except for tax returns,<sup>5</sup> it is

clear, that as the cities expanded and prospered, they attracted a steady drift of dihqan and peasant off the land, and this hastened the final erosion of the old feudal influences.

The concomitant of this was a fast-growing city proletariat, still with strong rural connections,<sup>1</sup> who were not always best content with their lot.<sup>2</sup>

Khurasan and Nishapur became, not only a hotbed of heterodoxy and religious debate, but a breeder of uprisings, proclaiming various mixtures of Islamic and Zoroastrian beliefs, as the nominal basis for opposition to 'Abbasid rule.<sup>3</sup>

Frye considers them to have been more social or political than religious, but with their leaders increasingly anxious for their adherents to adopt, at least, a veneer of muslim religiosity.<sup>4</sup> That these uprisings, often labeled Zoroastrian, were seldom supported by the mobads, also points to the heterogeneous character.<sup>5</sup>

Even in pre-Islamic times, the eastern and Central Asian provinces had tended to follow Mazdeist cults, often incorporating pre-Zoroastrian Aryan beliefs, rather than the orthodox Sasanian variety.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the faster decline of the number of fire temples in the east, compared with the west,<sup>7</sup> does not necessarily indicate the withering of old beliefs and customs, albeit that the Buyids had an antiquarian penchant for their Zoroastrian past, and employed members of the minority communities in high office.<sup>8</sup> After all, the last surviving examples of Pahlavi used for inscriptions on monuments, are at Mil-i Radkan and Lajim, dated 1020/411 and 1022/413, the former in western Gurgan, and the latter in eastern Tabaristan.<sup>9</sup>

However, as Frye points out: "One always must be on guard not to confuse popular folk beliefs with organized religious dogmas. Thus it seems apparent that ancient Iranian celebrations, such as the new year noruz, the Mihragan ceremonies and others were accepted by Islam in Iran as not harmful to the Muslim faith. Many rationalizations or accommodations were obviously made to bridge the gap between Iranian folk beliefs and Islamic practices. Naturally the Zoroastrians did not have grave-shrines, since the bodies of the dead were exposed to vultures and not put in the earth. But the Zoroastrians of Iran did have shrines to various angels or deities (yazatas) and it was relatively easy to convert some of these to Muslim, or more especially Shi'ite, imamzades, reputed burial places of the children of Shi'ite imams. The name pir or 'old man, saint', was applied to these shrines by Zoroastrians, possibly to protect them from Muslim desecration, and this only made easier the transfer from a Zoroastrian to a Muslim shrine. The change of the famous Zoroastrian shrine Bibi Shahrbanu near Tehran to a Muslim shrine was made with the help of the Shi'ite tradition that the daughter of Yazdegird III, the last Sasanian ruler, had married Husain, son of the caliph 'Ali, and was the mother of the fourth imam Zain al-'Abidain. The probable story of the transformation of the shrine, which seems to have occurred in the tenth century, has been told by Mary Boyce, and can be paralleled by similar cases elsewhere in Iran."

Shahrbanu, the 'Lady of the Land', appears to derive from a cult-epithet of Anahita.<sup>2</sup>

Herzfeld mentions, that in his day pilgrimages were still being made to Kuhi Khwaja in Sistan, during the first fortnight of the Zoroastrian year; a shrine he connects with the Verethragna-Rustam tradition.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Ghirshman notes the continued tradition of lighting candles among the ruins of Masjed-i Sulayman, in the temples of Anahita and Mithra, and Verethragna.<sup>2</sup>

It would seem, therefore, that the tenth century in Iran was a crucial phase in the forging of an enduring Iran/<sup>Iran</sup>Zoroastrian-Arab/Islamic compromise.

However, apart from the process of rationalising the two philosophies, there was another excellent reason for the retention of some of the ancient practices, namely, it gave the people a chance to have a rattling good time. It also soothed old superstitions, too deep-seated to be dislodged by the fatwa of the most learned 'ulema.

According to a Pazand text on nauruz celebrations:

"... on the day 'Naoruz Khordadi' .... first they perform Izashni, then they make merriment, hold feasts and entertainments, then both men and women drink wine seven times, seven suits of new clothes are exchanged in succession and continuation, and they put them on in such a way that in putting on the seven suits of clothes the day is passed; ... and if women drink wine on any other day except this day they shall be punished".<sup>3</sup>

If we turn to al-Biruni, and his "Chronology of Ancient Nations",<sup>1</sup> completed in the year 1000, and dedicated to his patron of the time, Shams al-Ma'ali Qabus ibn Vushmgir, ruler of Tabaristan and Gurgan, we can glean something of the underlying myths and practices that still accompanied the "Feasts of the Persians", and others, in the tenth century. Alas, the text is incomplete; nonetheless, its mid-sentence opening sets the scene:

" ... and he divided the cup among his companions, and said, "O that we had Nauroz every day!"<sup>2</sup>

Following this isolated punch-line, al-Biruni gives an example of an Islamic overlay to the old traditions, in quoting a philosopher of the Hashwiyya-school, who relates the following Solomonic anecdote:

" ... when Solomon the son of David had lost his seal and his empire, but was reinstated after forty days, he at once regained his former majesty, the princes came before him, and the birds were busy in his service. Then the Persians said, "Nauroz amadh," i.e. the new day has come. Therefore that day was called Nauroz. Solomon ordered the wind to carry him, and so it did. Then a swallow met him, and said, "O king, I have got a nest with little eggs in it. Please, turn aside and do not smash them." So Solomon did, and when he again descended to earth the swallow came bringing some water in his beak, which he sprinkled before the king, and made him a present of the foot of a locust. This is the cause of the water-sprinkling and of the presents on Nauroz."<sup>3</sup>

The pots which first spring to mind, as possibly reflecting this tradition, are the pairs of long-tailed birds on the Nishapur black on white ware, such as the bowl in the David Collection, Plate 38.a. On this example, it would be nice to think that we also had the water drops. However, on the buff ware, little swallow-like birds with forked tails stand heraldically above the greenery-yallery twins on the Freer bowl, o20. Perhaps we have a very original worm's-eye view of skimming swallows on bowl ol6, rather than fishes, as suggested by Zick-Nissen.<sup>1</sup>

Al-Biruni speaks of other nauruz traditions, such as the presenting of spring and summer dress to the warriors of Khurasan.

The sixth of Farvardin was the feast of the "Great Nauruz"; the day on which God completed the creation, and then created Saturn; Zoroaster received his vision of God, and Jamshid and Kai-Khusrau made their respective celestial journeys.<sup>2</sup>

On the morning of that day, a silent person with a bundle of fragrant flowers in his hand, was supposed to be seen on the mountain Bushanj; visible for an hour, and then vanishing until the following year.<sup>3</sup>

On the tradition of washing and water-sprinkling at nauruz, he says that this day was sacred to Harudha, the angel of water, and also connects Jamshid with the bringing of rain, and doing battle with Iblis, who had brought a plague upon the land.<sup>4</sup>

With regard to the buff ware figures, certainly, there are warriors, but for their sartorial splendour I would not like to vouch. As already noted, there are no kingly figures, and, alas,

no celestial quadrigas. However, the figure holding a flowering wand, either alone or in company with others, occurs regularly, as on w66, o16, o18, o19, o20, o25 and o27. Grube has suggested that some of the images may reflect the celebration of the Zoroastrian spring festival,<sup>1</sup> and Shepherd has drawn attention to the thematic similarity between the Cleveland bowl, o25, and the wall-painting at Panjikent, as in Plate 44.a.<sup>2</sup>

The angel figure is more difficult to identify. It is tempting, but perhaps misleading, to interpret the bi-furcated scarf as wings, particularly as the visual conceptions of celestial beings varies so much from culture to culture.

Al-Biruni notes that for some people, the feast of mihragan, at the autumnal equinox, was preferred for the greatest celebrations of the year.<sup>3</sup> He is reticent as to its coincidence with the grape harvest, in a way in which the poets are not!

On the twenty-first of the month of mihra (Mithra), the vanquishing of Zahak by Faridun was commemorated, and it was a custom "in the houses of the kings, that at the time of dawn a valiant warrior was posted in the court of the palace, who called at the highest pitch of his voice" for the angels to come and drive out the divs and evil-doers from the world. Mihragan was associated with the resurrection and the end of the world, as nauruz was with the creation. Similarly, the warriors were given their winter garb.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps the buff ware warriors are off to do battle against the evil spirits, which would account for the game remaining unperturbed.

On the night of the sixteenth day, mih-ruz, of the month of dai, they celebrated the feast of athfiyan, in commemoration of the liberation of Iranshahr from the Turks, and the recapturing of their cows, which the Turanians had driven off. Feridun was attributed with releasing the cows of a certain Athfiyan, a man renowned for his generosity, and the people gave a feast in celebration, trusting for reward in their turn.

Also, Feridun was supposed to have been weaned on this day, and taken his first night ride on the ox which appears to drag the carriage of the moon. "It is an ox of light, with two golden horns and silver feet, which is visible for an hour and then disappears. The wish of him who looks at the ox when it is visible will be fulfilled in the same hour."<sup>1</sup>

The spectre of a white ox was also said to appear on the highest mountains, and bellow twice for a fertile year and once for a barren.<sup>2</sup>

This reads almost like an isnad for the survival in tenth-century, legendary form of one of the most enduring of fertility cults. Perhaps bowls o24, o36 and o37, might be viewed with this in mind.

There was also the feast of the Night of Alsadhak, when it had been the custom to light fires and drive wild beasts into the flames, while drinking and making merry. A performance rightly deplored by al-Biruni. Some of the images of animals on the bowls, certainly convey a sense of panic and turmoil, but that proves nothing. An example is w88.

However, in much pleasanter vein, there was the Riding of Alkausaj. "This day was the beginning of spring at the time of the Kisras. Then a thin-bearded (Kausaj) man used to ride about, fanning himself with a fan to express his rejoicing at the end of the cold season and the coming of the warm season. This custom is in Persis still kept up for fun. ... Besides, they say that he who tastes a quince and smells an orange in the morning of this day before speaking will be happy during the same year."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the popinjay on o9 was a contender?

It becomes clear, from reading al-Biruni, that, on the whole, the religious significance of the old feasts had given way to less controversial, historical-legendary associations, much as were being recorded, at about the same time, in the Shah-nama. For instance, the recapturing of the cows, must surely relate to the old Zoroastrian high feast of Ayathrima, the 'home-coming' of the herds from the pastures.<sup>2</sup>

However, the other aspects which seem to have endured, are those concerned with the fertility of the land, many of which were of pre-Zoroastrian origin, such as the primordial bull, and the deities concerned with water.

It is a shame, but perhaps significant, that most of the text for the month of aban, in which fell the celebrations of the goddess Anahita, are missing from the text. However, the feast of farvardagan has survived, which spanned the last five days of the month. These were the days of lamentation for the dead, when food and drink were put out for the souls of the

pious, who would return, in spirit, to their families at that time.<sup>1</sup>

The same ceremonies, in which they lamented the dead and "cut their faces", and laid out food for the departed, is mentioned by al-Biruni as being enacted among the Soghdians on the last day of their year, which did not coincide with that of the Persian nauruz, since they adhered to an older Zoroastrian calendar.<sup>2</sup>

Yarshater has pointed out that these feasts refer to the tradition of the mourning cult, with Siyavush at its centre, which continued in Transoxiana down to the tenth century.<sup>3</sup> Narshakhi relates, in his "History of Bukhara", that Siyavush was buried near the Ghurian Gate, and that each year, on New Year's day, the Zoroastrians would go to offer sacrifice and commemorate his death. Kashgari refers to their lamentations; and there was a series of chants, known as 'the weeping of the magi'.<sup>4</sup> The cult was also popular in Khwarazm.<sup>5</sup>

Yarshater also points out the identification of the mourning for Siyavush among the wall-paintings at Panjikent, and notes that the presence of Mithra and Anahita (locally, Nana), point to the divine nature of Siyavush, before his myth was transformed into the legend, as it survives in the epic poetry. He mentions similar scenes on a chest from Tok-Kala, in the extreme north of the Amu-Darya delta, and on a vase found at Marv.<sup>6</sup>

The concept of the divine being dying in order to regenerate life, is, of course, common to many cultures, but the correlation between the Siyavush and the Muharram ceremonies, which were first popularised in Baghdad under the Buyids, has now been established. Regarding this, Enayat also indicates the significance of drama in Iranian culture, as a way of merging folk culture with pre-Islamic myth.<sup>1</sup>

This example of cultural peregrination from east to west, and the Islamic acculturation at popular level of a semi-liturgical, animistic practice, though not itself directly applicable to the pots in question, could be seen as a tell-tale for the likely survival of other pre-Islamic ceremonies, albeit shorn of all but natural superstition and excuses for making merry.

There may not, after all, be much to choose between Nishapur at nauruz and Oxford on May morning. After all, in astrological geography Khurasan and Oxford both fall under the influence of Capricorn; along with Bosnia, the Orkneys and Port Said.<sup>2</sup>

There had been a Khurasani population in Baghdad since its founding by al-Mansur in 762, but this had expanded considerably in size and influence in the wake of the 'Abbasid Revolution. The Karkh district of the city had become "an abiding outpost of the land of their origin".<sup>3</sup>

The Arab-Iranian forces, which came west under the black flags, were by that time culturally integrated, to the extent that the Arabs wore trousers like the Iranians, drank wine,

celebrated the festival of the new year and mihragan, and the prominent ones among them assumed the airs of the marzbans. In Abu Muslim's army, even the Arabs spoke mostly Persian.<sup>1</sup>

It would not be surprising, therefore, to find survivals of eastern pre-Islamic customs, even at the heart of the caliphal domains.

There may be evidence for the survival of another pre-Islamic tradition in Baghdad, which, at least in its original form, had been lost to the east.

In Buyid Baghdad, at the time of 'Adud al-Daula, 949-983/338-372, it is noted that the inhabitants of the city celebrated traditional occasions without much hindrance. On the Mu'tadidi New Year's Day, the eleventh of June, the custom was to put decorated dolls "the size of a boy" on the roofs of their houses, and bring them out "splendidly arrayed with ornaments like those of a bride and before which they flourish(ed) drums and plates and light(ed) fires."<sup>2</sup>

Al-Biruni mentions that the Persians used to make models of human figures from paste or clay, and post them at the gateways. This had been a feast of the common people, not indulged in by the upper echelons of society. He adds, that this custom had been abolished because it smacked of idolatry, and resembled heathen practices.<sup>3</sup>

However, even if the modelling of human figures had ceased in the eastern Iranian context, among some of the Turkic and Mongol peoples of Central Asia, the presence and importance of figures made of felt, is attested at least into the seventeenth century.<sup>4</sup>

Bidder quotes a Chinese annalist, as recording that the Tu-chueh, (Turkish peoples), cut out felt figures and put them in a bag.<sup>1</sup> Plano Carpini, when Ambassador to the Mongols in the 1240s, described the idols of felt, in the image of a man, placed on either side of the entrance to dwellings, with felt teats hung above them to insure the productivity of their horses.<sup>2</sup>

Bowls decorated with stylised female breasts, were found by Wilkinson among the yellow-staining black ware group at Nishapur, in contexts not earlier than the tenth century. He also notes, that this ware appears to have a distribution area stretching from Gurgan into Transoxiana.<sup>3</sup>

William of Rubruck, reporting on his trip to Mongolia, in 1253-55, says:

"And over the head of the master is always the image of felt like a doll or statuette, which they call the brother of the master, another similar one above the head of the mistress which they call the brother of the mistress, and they are attached to the wall. And higher up between the two of them is a little lark, one who is as it were, the guardian of the whole dwelling."<sup>4</sup>

He also noted that they made images of their dead in felt, and it was customary to offer them, or sprinkle them, with food.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, we have another neighbouring source of figural imagery to tap, which I will return to when discussing the style of the buff ware personae.

That there was also a Nestorian Christian community in Nishapur, is well attested in the sources, and the evidence has been gathered and presented by Wilkinson, in his article, "Christian Remains from Nishapur",<sup>1</sup> with bowls w48, w49, o55, o56 and o57, as material evidence. Bowl o54 was not mentioned by him, and is unusual among the buff ware for its extensive use of tomato red, filling the spaces between the arms of the cross. Mikami Tsugio also mentions, in his description of it, the superior quality of the potting.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from bowl o55, with its Syriac inscription: "God show mercy unto me, a sinner",<sup>3</sup> Keene has drawn attention to another buff ware bowl inscribed with a maxim, in the Arabic script: "Every people has a book, and every act has its reckoning."<sup>4</sup> The occurrence of maxims on the buff ware is very rare, and Keene suggests, in general, a strong Christian connection.<sup>5</sup> I would have thought this proverb, like barakeh, was religiously ambiguous enough to have applied, at least, to any of the People of the Book, including Zoroastrians.

Bosworth notes that the Christian communities of Khwarazm seem to have been Orthodox or Jacobite, rather than Nestorian; probably a reflection of their trade connections with the Byzantine and Slav west. Al-Biruni describes them as observing certain western religious festivals.<sup>6</sup>

Kohzad, quoting Pelliot, mentions a letter in Syriac, dated 1009, in which an archbishop of Marv asks a Nestorian Patriarch for tolerance towards the new Kerait Turkish converts, on matters regarding fasting.<sup>7</sup>

Wilkinson draws attention to Christian crosses, found in the decoration of the white plaster framing to apertures, filled with glass. They were excavated by the Metropolitan expedition, in the area of Tepe Madrasedh, near buildings of distinction.<sup>1</sup>

The Jewish community in Khurasan at places such as Marv and Balkh, are mentioned in the Islamic sources from the ninth century onwards, and they were comparatively numerous in certain Persian towns. They also figured significantly throughout Khwarazm and Transoxiana in the distribution of merchandise from the Eurasian steppe to the Islamic lands.<sup>2</sup>

#### COMMERCIAL ASPECTS

"The geographers describe Nishapur in the latter half of the tenth century as an international trade centre, the resort of merchants from Iraq and Egypt, the depot for Khwarazm, Ray and Gurgan and the entrepot for Fars, Sind and Kirman, and as having inhabitants who were the richest in Khurasan."<sup>3</sup>

There was, of course, the trade with China, and by various routes through to the Indian sub-continent, but Bosworth emphasises the well established commerce with southern Russia, via Merv, which was largely in Khwarazmian hands. There was a caravan route across the Oghuz steppe to Atil, the Khazar capital on the Volga delta, and Ibn Fadlan wrote of his journey, made in 922, to the land of the Bulgars on the middle Volga. He travelled in the company of an annual caravan from Khwarazm, which on that occasion numbered 5,000 men and 3,000 horses. In 1946, Tolstov found clearly defined traces of splendid caravanserais and wells, along the route between Gurganj and the lower Emba.<sup>4</sup>

In his list of the contemporary exports from Central Asia, Muqaddasi mentions, among other things, the Bulghari precious furs, amber, weapons and armour, walrus ivory, falcons, slaves and fish glue, which were transported thither and beyond by the Khwarazmian middle-men. Khwarazm itself, exported grapes and raisins, as well as many fabrics, including satin for royal gifts.<sup>1</sup>

Barthold says, that the greatest advantage from the trade with the nomads was derived by the Khwarazmians, encouraging the considerable development in the production of woollen and cotton fabrics for barter purposes. From Gurganj, caravans travelled south to Khurasan and west to the Khazars. Gardizi speaks of another road along the western shore of the Aral Sea, across the steppe to the country of the Pechenegs. Drawing on Istakhri, Gardizi and Muqaddasi, Barthold says the Khwarazmians became the chief representatives of the trading class in Khurasan, and there were large communities of them to be found in every city, distinguished from the local inhabitants by their high fur hats. They became property owners, and were also to be encountered among the intellectual elite;<sup>2</sup> Al-Biruni was one of their number.

The ancient dynasty of the Afrighid Khwarazm-Shahs, retained power until nearly the close of the tenth century, 995/383; alone among the old native rulers, to survive almost three centuries after the Arab invasions. However, according to Bosworth, the vandalism of the forces of Qutaiba ibn Muslim had set in

motion a gradual cultural and economic decline, particularly of urban life, though the rich agrarian society endured for longer, based on large estates which were fortified against the increasing pressure of the Turkish steppe peoples.<sup>1</sup>

It would appear, therefore, that there is a very interesting comparison to be drawn, between the reaction/adaptation of Khwarazm to the coming of the Arabs and Islam, and that of Khurasan, as previously outlined.

Ethnically and culturally, the Khwarazmians were an Iranian people, with a distinctive language, now dead, related to Soghdian and, to a lesser extent, Ossetian.<sup>2</sup> It was written in Arabic with special diacritical marks, and probably survived in spoken form until the fourteenth century. However, "as a peninsula of advanced cultural and economic life jutting out into the Turkish steppe", it was vulnerable, and eventually succumbed to ethnic, political and linguistic pressure.<sup>3</sup>

A characteristic of the last part of Samanid rule, was the increasing Turkish ascendancy.<sup>4</sup> There had been Turks in Khurasan at the time of the Arab conquests, where they continued as town and village dwellers as well as merchants and nomads. Nishapur was thoroughly familiar with them before the coming of the Saljuqs.<sup>5</sup>

Under the Samanids, they rose to power through the slave system, and as ex-mamluks, became governors and landowners.<sup>6</sup>

In the third quarter of the tenth century, one such family, the Simjurids, as hereditary governors of Kuhistan, extended their jurisdiction to include Nishapur.<sup>1</sup> In their semi-independent role, they played pig-in-the-middle politics, along with Tabaristan, between the waning power of the sunni Samanids in the east, and the expansionist policies of the shi'ite Buyids in the west.<sup>2</sup>

At the other end of the social scale, Ibn Fadlan had noted, earlier in the century, that the Oghuz of the Central Asian steppe were still practising horse burials, and erecting effigies of men to attend their dead rulers in the next world.<sup>3</sup> (These balbals have been discussed by Otto Dorn, with reference to the carvings on the Church at Aght'amar, and the figure of the seated Caliph.)<sup>4</sup> Ibn Fadlan also mentions the reverence for water and springs, among the Turkish nomads in general, and the role of the qams or shamans among the Bulgars, who were still only partially Islamicised.<sup>5</sup>

However, it was primarily as soldiers that the Turks were known in Khurasan, but they also passed through Nishapur on educational journeys and commercial enterprises. In terms of the economy, the nomads provided a rich source of livestock, particularly sheep.<sup>6</sup>

A glance at Muqaddasi's list of merchandise exported from Central Asia, speaks of prodigious industry, especially in textiles of every kind.<sup>7</sup> In this Nishapur seems to have been

no exception, and according to Bosworth, the clothiers were the highest in wealth and prestige - their warehouses accommodated merchants from almost every region of the Islamic world.<sup>1</sup> However, he also says that all industry in Khurasan was organised on a small scale local basis.<sup>2</sup>

The city is mentioned in the sources in connection with mining silver, copper, lead, iron and turquoises, and also in the less likely business of exporting edible clay.<sup>3</sup>

However, Cahen has pointed out that despite its importance, it never approached the magnitude of Baghdad or Cairo,<sup>4</sup> while Bulliet reminds us that despite its international flavour, the attention of most people was focused on the same general set of occupations and procedures, where "difference between fabrics, arms, pots and so forth that now make up the lore of antiquarians were then signal and vital," to a very local identity.<sup>5</sup>

It is true, that looking at patterns of trade gives something of a muezzin's-eye view to east, west, south and north across the mole runs of bazaars and caravansarais of medieval Nishapur, but it is a good vantage point from which to scan for possible origins and influences in the buff ware figural style.

However, first I shall cast my eyes to heaven, and consider the possible astrological implications of the pots.

CELESTIAL ASPECTS

The only theory to have been put forward in any detail, as to the significance of the images on the animate buff ware, is that expounded by Zick-Nissen, on a number of occasions.<sup>1</sup> She sees the positioning of the figures on the bowls, in relation to each other, as corresponding to that of the constellations as they appear on the globes, in the interpretation of the sphaera barbarica of late antiquity.<sup>2</sup>

The isnad for the survival of these images rests to a large extent, on the text and illustrations of "The Book of the Fixed Stars", of 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Umar al-Sufi, 903-986, who was working in Baghdad as friend and teacher of the Buyid Sultan 'Adud al-Da'ula. The earliest surviving manuscript, copied by his son, is dated 1009-10/400; (Marsh 144) in the Bodleian Library.

In it, al-Sufi, on the authority of Ptolemy, refers to the Pahlavi translation of Teucros the Babylonian's sphaera barbarica being made in 542. There were also the ninth and early tenth century writings of Ibn Wahshiyya and Abu Ma'shar, who listed the groups of paranatellonta, or configurations of stars rising together, as listed by the classical authors. A source to temper the classical imagery, was provided by the 'anwa, or traditional astral poetry of the bedouin Arabs. Zick-Nissen also notes that the type of Arab astronomic illustration can be traced through the medieval European copies of such works as

a twelfth century copy of the Phenomena of Aratos by Germanicus, and repeated in the Sternatlas of Hevelius of 1686.<sup>1</sup>

I am in no position to enter the lists in opposition to arguments based on a knowledge of the classical authors, their mythology, their Arab translators and the visual interpretation of celestial images contrived in the western lands of the Caliphate, in the tenth century. However, at the risk of appearing perverse, I shall turn devil's advocate, donning a metaphorical wig and gown in defence of the survival on these eastern Iranian pots of memories of the gods and heroes of the ancient and eastern Iranian world.

As witness for the defence, may I once again call upon al-Biruni, who, when writing of the Khwarazmian relation of the lunar stations to the zodiac, says:

"They used to distribute these stations over the twelve signs of the Zodiac, for which they also had special names in their language. They knew them (the signs of Zodiac) even better than the Arabs, as you learn by the fact that their nomenclature of them agrees with the names given to them by the original designer of their figures, whilst the names of the Arabs do not agree, and they represent these signs as quite different figures.

For instance, they count Aljauza among the number of the Zodiacal signs instead of Gemini, whilst Aljauza is the figure of Orion. The people of Khwarizm call this sign (Gemini) Adhupackarik, i.e. having two figures, which means the same as Gemini.

.....

If you, likewise, inquire into the names of the Arabs for the fixed stars, you will see that they were very far from an accurate knowledge of the Zodiacal signs and the star-figures, although 'Abu-Muhammad 'Abdallah b. Muslim b. Kutaiba Aljabali used to make a great to-do and be very verbose in all his books, and specially in his book on the superiority of the Arabs over the Persians, maintaining that the Arabs were the best-informed nation regarding the stars and the times of their rising and setting. I do not know whether he was really ignorant, or only pretended to be ignorant, of what the agriculturalists and peasants in every place and district have got in the way of knowledge regarding the beginning of the agricultural works and other things, and of knowledge of the proper times for similar subjects. For he whose roof is heaven, who has no other cover, over whom the stars continually rise and set in one and the same course, makes the beginnings of his affairs and his knowledge of time depend upon them."<sup>1</sup>

From this Biruni-barrage, it would seem that there were other traditional figures still being read into the heavens, and their connections with the agricultural round were still being taken for granted. A feature which may, rather naturally, have remained stronger in the provinces than in the metropolis of Baghdad.

Zick-Nissen says that the occurrence on the pots of confronted figures, and sometimes one figure upside down, reflects the new type of illustration in tenth-century Iranian manuscripts of the constellations, where the images are depicted twice, once as seen in the sky and again as seen on the globe.<sup>1</sup> Al-Sufi is certainly specific as to his intentions in using the double images.<sup>2</sup> Zick-Nissen also relates what she terms the "clock-wise" movement of figures round the bowls, as corresponding to the direction in which the heavens appear to turn.<sup>3</sup> I imagine this is a slip of the pen, since both the heavens and the pots appear to reel anti-clockwise.

The suggestion is made that o19 may be related to w59 and o13, as representing Virgo, holding her ear of corn, and accompanied by the bird Corvus, al-Ghurab, as depicted on the globe.<sup>4</sup>

As to o13, the poor quality of the reproduction makes it difficult to be sure what is happening, apart from the fact that some of the creatures appear to be doing a conga out through the pseudo-Kufic border.

With regard to o19, I would like to consider it along with the bowls I have designated "Figures in Pairs", o21 excepted, since it does not conform to the mirror-image format. The quotation from al-Biruni affords one suggestion, that there may have been a Khwarazmian image for their Gemini, or Adhupackarik.

An alternative lies in the twin archangels in the Zoroastrian "Heavenly Host", Haurvatat and Ameretat. The former encompassed the abstract idea of wholeness and completion, and the latter, that of immortality. They were the prototypes for vigour and endurance, and were given special care over water and plants, being particularly active against hunger and thirst.<sup>1</sup>

This could be seen to account for the strong vegetal element in both ol8 and o20, and the less luxuriant flowery wands in the hands of the ol9 figures, which occur on other bowls as well.

Although Anahita was an androgenous figure,<sup>2</sup> this doughty pair were female. The masculine figures on ol8, may have suffered the same fate as Cassiopeia, at the hands of Abu Ma'shar, as reported by Zick-Nissen: "a young man, called Cassiopeia, he is seated on a throne

With regard to w59, the goddess figure flanked by birds is known from silverware,<sup>4</sup> and seems to have travelled with the steppe peoples, as the phalera from Rumania, Plate 41.b, would seem to suggest, hung from their horse trappings, as on Plate 42.a.

The early Kushan temple, in eastern Bactria, of Surkh Kotal, appears to have had a stone bench-altar adorned by two great birds.<sup>5</sup>

In the sidereal field, there may be another possibility. Herzfeld notes that the nike on gold Kushan coins of the first century AD, was depicted as a winged figure, holding a wreath with ribbons in one hand and a cornucopia in the other. This figure was given the name of canindo, vanand, meaning 'victorious

superiority'.<sup>1</sup> Vanand, was the name given to one of the stars connected with nauruz.<sup>2</sup>

Herzfeld also records a late-Sasanian carving of a goddess on a pillar in Isfahan, Plate 46.b. She is nimbed and, he suggests, helmeted and carries a victory wreath and an amphora. He traces this image to some rare gold and silver coins struck to commemorate the victories of Khusrau Parviz, between 610 and 626. She appears also on the reverse of Hephthalite coins, which were countermarked with the boar's head of Khusrau II, hence they were the tribute paid by them to the Sasanian monarch. He considers the identity of the goddess to be an allegory of the Xvarasan Xvarrah, the Tyche or Glory of Khurasan, the East, 'in the shape of a beautiful maiden'.<sup>3</sup>

Although none of these images fit the Metropolitan bowl figure with exactitude, the association of a winged nike with nauruz, holding a cornucopia for the fertility of the coming year, at least extends the sources for possible iconography. Similarly, the Isfahani/Hephthalite figure of victory, in her cloak with large clasps, her right arm bent, and holding a wreath in one hand and an amphora in the other, may have been stowed away in the Nishapur 'dressing-up box' of images. The wreath is held by the jokers on the rear end of Ettinghausen's pantomime horse, and one of the cross-legged figures on o25, holds what could well be a small amphora.

Another racey goddess from the Central Asian marches was the Khwarazmian Mina, the patroness of viniculture. Tolstov

suggests that the figurine, Plate 49.e, of a lady in a long-sleeved gown and holding a cup and amphora, which was found at Qoy-Qrylgan-Qala, may represent her. The figure on Plate 49.d, he suggests may be Anahita, the goddess of springs and water.<sup>1</sup> This little terracotta in particular, bears some facial likeness to w59.

Al-Biruni recounts that Mina was one of the ancient queens of Khwarazm, or perhaps a chieftan's wife, who "left her castle intoxicated, dressed in a silk dress, at spring time. She fell down outside the castle and lost all self-control; she fell asleep, was smitten by the cold of the night, and died. Now people were astonished that the cold had killed a human being about this time in spring. So they used it as an epoch for something miraculous, extraordinary, that does not happen at its proper time."<sup>2</sup> Perhaps she is celebrated, or celebrating, on the fragment o10.

Zick-Nissen says that "Similar to Virgo, but because always shown in a seated position and so not to be confused with her, is the figure of the Greek Cassiopeia, the dat-al-kursi, " ... the woman sitting for a thousand years on her foot", as Ibn Wahshiyya says, giving her name as Hilat 'iya ... or as as-Sufi confirms " ... on a seat with feet, like a chair and a cushion ...".<sup>3</sup> This figure she associates with o15, and with o20 in the mirror-image format, for which I have already offered an alternative.

The seated figure on a stool, holding a plant or bird, is known from seals, such as the one on Plate 41.c, found with the Oxus Treasure. Dalton suggests she is Arahita, and that doves and the lotus flower were among her attributes.<sup>1</sup> A similar type of figure is to be found on a bronze situla from Luristan, of the ninth century B.C., Plate 41.f, on which even the punched, circular decoration on the clothing bears some similarity.

The legs and feet of the stool on o15 are quaint, but those on the stools on o25, bear a remarkable resemblance to the stylised bull legs, applied to furniture in antiquity. Such a stool is depicted on the Hasanlu Bowl,<sup>2</sup> and the table before the figure on the situla referred to above also has them. There are examples of its survival, in Mithraic ritual, well into the first centuries of the Christian era.<sup>3</sup>

Near Cassiopeia on the globe is her husband, Cepheus, as Zick-Nissen says, he is usually bearded, with a hat and with extended and bent arms, but in oriental illustrations, as always running with bent knees.<sup>4</sup> She indicates that the Pole Star is indicated by a flower or a rosette on his left leg, as on o16, and the fact that he is seated, accords with a description of Abu Ma'shar.<sup>5</sup> She uses Cepheus to explain the image on o24, as follows: "The interior shows three riders moving counter clockwise, a bull three times, two animals of prey and in the center three birds, a fish and small animals. The first rider on a horse can be explained as Cepheus because of his form, the big point on his left leg, the nearby fish

and perhaps the panther, 'anak al-ard. The second rider on a lionlike animal, holding a double-axe and with a marked point on his upper leg would be Böotes, al-'awwa or haris al-sama', with the star Arcturus on the nearby lion. In Greek mythology he is the herdsman of cattle; this must be reflected by the appearance of the three cows before the figure, because the Arabs call, as as-Sufi says, the row of stars in Cetus "the cows", and behind him should be either ad-dib al-akbar or al-kalb al-akhar. The crowd of animals in the centre of the bowl gives the key to the whole. ....The ensemble now can be identified as the two wolves, al-dibain (so-called by Abu Hanifa) or al-garwain, the two small dogs and al-'avhakain, the two ravens; which as-Sufi gives as the Arab names for the stars near Heracles and Drago."<sup>1</sup> How about Feridun and the cows of Athfiyan?

Zick-Nissen suggests that ol4 should be interpreted as Heracles, in his mythical activity of killing the serpent, with the upside-down bird as representing the star or constellation an-nasr al-waqi, the falling eagle.<sup>2</sup>

There are two particularly **valorous** fighting men in the Zoroastrian pantheon, the god Tishtrya, who fights the demon of drought, and Verethragna, the god of victory.

Tishtrya is also the star Sirius, since it is connected with the hot days just before the rains come. In his yasht, or act of worship dedicated to him, the emphasis is always upon fertility, for example, the eighth verse runs:

"We sacrifice to Tishtrya, the bright and glorious star, whose rising is watched by men who live on the fruits of the year, by the chiefs of deep understanding; by the wild beasts in the mountains, by the tame beasts that run in the plains; they watch him, as he comes up to the country for a bad year, or for a good year, (thinking in themselves): 'How shall the Aryan countries be fertile?'"<sup>1</sup>

He is said to appear in three forms, that of a man of fifteen - the ideal age in Persian thought, as a bull and as a horse.<sup>2</sup>

Verethragna has an even more varied existences. He appears as a strong wind, a bull with yellow ears and golden horns, a white horse with golden trappings, a burden-bearing camel, a sharp-toothed boar, a youth of fifteen, a swift bird, a wild ram, a fighting buck, and a man holding a sword with a golden blade.<sup>3</sup> An extract from his yasht runs:

"We sacrifice unto Verethragna, made by Ahura. Zarathustra asked Ahura Mazda: 'Ahura Mazda, most beneficent Spirit, Maker of the material world, thou Holy One! Who is the best-armed of the heavenly gods?'

Ahura Mazda answered: 'It is Verethragna, made by Ahura, O Spitama Zarathustra!'

Verethragna, made by Ahura, came to him the tenth time, running in the shape of a man, bright and beautiful, made by Mazda: he held a sword with a golden blade, inlaid with all sorts of ornaments.

Thus did Verethragna come, bearing the good Glory made by Mazda, the Glory made by Mazda ..."<sup>4</sup>

The overlap with Tishtrya in three of the avatars, is apparent. Hinnels says that Verethragna lies behind the figure of Heracles at Commagene, he is Vahagn in Armenia, Varlagn among the Saka, Vasaga in Soghdia and Artagn in Khwarazm. He sometimes appears as a raven or a boar accompanying Mithra.<sup>1</sup> The Sasanians loved him.

It might not be too surprising to see him pop up on a Nishapur pot.

When it comes to the interpretation of animal and bird figures, I know I am on treacherous ground. The zoology of the bowls is not precise. However, I do agree with Zick-Nissen, that the beast on Plate 36.b does seem to conform to the image of the Babylonian goat-fish, or Capricorn.

However, I feel more hesitant about the interpretation of rosettes on the body of an animal as representing stars, in the light of such objects as the Scythian bronze mount, from the Caucasus, dated around the fifth century B.C., and illustrated on Plate 45.d. Such pieces bear several of the characteristics found on Nishapur pots. Not only is there the ring decoration on the fore- and hindquarters of the beast, but the neck decoration recalls the use of the chevron on horned quadrupeds; also there is a familiar above and a little bird beneath, plus the odd swastika for good measure.

I wonder also, if it is necessary to assume that the decorator of the pots was so obtuse ornithologically as to use a peacock when he intended an eagle or a swan?

For example, on o50 Zick-Nissen suggests that the central bird is Cygnus, with a stylised lyre before it to represent the star Lyra, and that the four birds rotating round it represent Aquila, as it processes through the four quarters of the heavens.<sup>1</sup> All the birds on this bowl look to me like peacocks, and almost blocked out from the same stencil. Also, when seen as one of a group, as gathered under "K" of my ordering, it is less easy to believe that such a specific celestial connotation was intended, even with the little lyre among the background decoration. Or is it the cloud jar of Tishtrya?<sup>2</sup>

On the subject of peacocks, Fehérvári has discussed their significance in the north eastern provinces and Turkestan, at this and in earlier times.<sup>3</sup> Evidently it was also known to the Sasanians, probably as a symbol of the sun, and appeared as decoration on textiles and metalware. It was the companion of a goddess figure, probably Anahita, and Wellhausen records a temple full of them in Bukhara at the time of the Arab invasions.<sup>4</sup>

Zick-Nissen notes that in an Arabic translation of Ptolemy, the eagle and the peacock become confused;<sup>5</sup> but should this be applied to pots made in the Iranian heartlands, where the mythological connotations of the bird are attested? Is a sun symbol, or the companion of the goddess of streams and watercourses, the peacock fits well into the iconographic theme of fertility, which many of the figures on the bowls can be seen to bring with them.

I realise that I have been toying with a 'Host of Heaven' who had passed through millenia of redefinition, before reaching the desanctified status of legendary heroes in the Shah-nama. It was done in order to conjure an alternative to the constellation theory. With due respect, I do not think that either of them fit exactly; neither Zick-Nissen's, based on a scientific interpretation, nor mine, chasing folk-lore and fairy tale, has quite fathomed the mind's eye of a decorator of these pots. To a considerable degree they retain their inscrutability.

## CHAPTER 3

### COMPARATIVE CERAMICS

In seeking for stylistic relationships between the animate buff ware and other contemporary ceramic productions, I have tried not to confuse "theme" and "style". Both can reflect a common heritage, sometimes very ancient, but a sense of a thematic link does not necessarily argue for a contemporary stylistic one. The subject of Garrus ware is still very vexed, and since it is more on thematic than on stylistic grounds, that I would see points of comparison with Nishapur, and as far as I know there have been no examples of it found there, I do not intend to consider it here.

Rather, I will pursue the style and theme dichotomy through the most important wares to be found in Nishapur itself during the tenth century, in order to see whether any relationships can be established.

In the wake of Arnold, Sarre and others, Ettinghausen has emphasised the important role of tradition in Iranian Art, and traced the anthropomorphic vessels from the second millenium BC through to o17 and w72.<sup>1</sup> He has also interpreted the designs of revolving birds and animals as derivatives of the animal wheel, an old solar symbol.<sup>2</sup> These are well represented on the buff ware, as shown in divisions K, L, and M of my ordering, but there are also two archetypal animal wheels to be seen on w60 and w61, where horned beasts are used.

Anna Roes has plumbed the depths of this symbolic device. Her first example is a prehistoric bowl from Samarra, Plate 46.c, which shares the chequerboard central square with w61.<sup>1</sup> The use of black on white, leads us back to the Nishapur use of this most stark of contrasts, that of the Samanid epigraphic ware, produced also in Transoxiana.

Wilkinson has noted the double aesthetic of the cluttered buff ware compositions and the restrained, calligraphic formality of the black on white, which were current in the city at the same time.<sup>2</sup>

However, the animal wheel and the stark aesthetic join on at least one piece from Nishapur, Wilkinson's no.26 of that category, Plate 39.c. He notes the survival of the swastika as a decorative element into Islamic decoration,<sup>3</sup> but here it has still retained the stylised heads of the animal wheel. The development of calligraphy as bowl decoration, surely owes much to the abstraction of animal figures. This had already taken place in the fourth millenium BC, without the incentive of the Arabic script, as evidenced by the Susa I style beaker, Plate 45.a. The step from the band of long necked water birds to a repetitive kufic border, was not a long one, surely, for a decorator with such images in his "collective unconscious"?

The close affinity between bird, beast and calligraphy that was being forged at this time, can, perhaps, be seen some three hundred years later in the zig-zag kufic above the clashing ibex horns, in the Morgan Bestiary.

It is interesting to see how the calligraphy gradually encroaches on the preserves of the old order, for example on o45, and then appears in an even more abstracted and compounded form on the imitation lustre piece, Plate 39.a, Wilkinson's no.50 of that category. It seems that the oldest themes were enduring, but disguised à la mode.

It is the search for the source of the figural 'Abbasid lustre style, which has prompted some discussion as to the origin of the buff ware images. Lane favoured a connection between the two styles.<sup>1</sup> Otto Dorn has suggested that Nishapur was the easternmost expression of early 'Abbasid art, as expressed in the wall-paintings at Samarra;<sup>2</sup> Grube points out the surprising lack of figure decoration on ceramics, in the early 'Abbasid period, despite the vigorous painting tradition they seem to represent.<sup>3</sup> However, he sees the lustre painting tradition as having possible associations with Samanid Central Asia or Coptic Egypt, but adds that the latter cannot be argued on authenticated pieces from there, so the Nishapur sources most probably lie to the east.<sup>4</sup> At this point I will just refer to Barthold, who says Egypt had some influence on the development of 'artistic fabrics' by the name of Dabiqi, which were manufactured throughout Khorazmia.<sup>5</sup>

Philon sees both the lustre and the buff ware figures as representing a style developed outside court circles, and so drawing on multifarious popular traditions. She does not

discount some possible cross currents, and relates the lustre fragment depicted on Plate 40.e, to the "shaman" figure and his hare on w65.<sup>1</sup>

Wilkinson considers the drawing of human figures on the Nishapur buff ware to be conspicuously different from the lustre style, particularly in the poses and the headdresses.<sup>2</sup> His catalogue provides a good parallel for comparison, between w59 and Plate 39.d, which was imported into Nishapur. Both stand holding a drinking vessel; the bifurcated veil of the one contrasts with the single fall of material from the head of the other; the one stands fossilised in a frontal pose, while the other has been caught momentarily as it scuttles across the dish; the stencilled geometricised facial features of the one contrasts with the swift brush strokes of the other, and so on.

It is in the conception of the bowl design as a whole that a fundamental difference lies. The buff ware I have described in Chapter 1; here I draw attention to the lustre ware art of the silhouette, in which the figures are blocked out in solid colour, with only a relieving line for definition of form, or perhaps a cartouche for an inscription. The backgrounds are an all-over stipple, never the shower of animal and plant life, and miniscule geometric confetti that surrounds the buff ware figures; nor is there the nervous patchwork of variegated patterning on the figures themselves.

The lustre designs are abstract in conception, and it is the rhythm and volumetric quality of the composition which strikes the beholder before the quaint and idiosyncratic quality of the images themselves catches the eye. With the Nishapur, it tends to be the peculiarity of the figures which transfixes, and any compositonal structure tends to remain obscure. At its best, the undulating Iraqi line sweeps the eye round the dish in a way never matched even on the best of Nishapur. For example, on Wilkinson's cavalier, the eye is soon brought up short against angles and spikes.<sup>1</sup>

It is, however, the art of the brush which clearly differentiates the lustre painter from the Nishapuri, who appears as the wielder of a fine quill or a scalpel; more in the tradition of the cut-out than the painting.

Certainly there is a certain overlap of short-hand forms for facial features. Wilkinson notes the trefoil nose,<sup>2</sup> but there is not the stiff and laboured quality so prevalent in the buff ware. For example, compare the lutenist o22, with the well-known Freer musician, alas not included in my Plates.<sup>3</sup> He has the Nishapur nose, with small projecting diagonals, but they have been extended to indicate the most immaculately waxed moustachios, which, above the neatest of goatees, creates the image of an effete habitue of the pleasure domes, perhaps melifluously entoning an 'Abu Nuwas. Plate 40.a. shows a more legubrious version, but this element of wit is a quality I have not found among the Nishapur dramatis personae.

Themes are something which these pots do share. There are the lute players, the flower and flagon men, the cavaliers, but also women; or at least characters more female than the frequently indeterminate persons of the buff ware. Perhaps a comparison with the 'plaited' lady on the Tabaristan silver dish, Plate 42.b, wearing a dress falling in almost tubular folds, is a closer relation to lustre figures such as that on the ex-Kelekian bowl, referred to by Fehérvári,<sup>1</sup> than to any of the Nishapur stalwarts. Indeed it is interesting to note that the lustre style was imitated in Nishapur, only in abstract or animal designs, and never, apparently, with figures.<sup>2</sup> The 'Abbasid figural pieces which were found in the city, Wilkinson says were imported. His expedition found only one.<sup>3</sup> That does not speak for a great dependence on the metropolis for inspiration in this respect.

There are also animals of various kinds on the lustre, and with familiars. The bull with floral growth's sprouting, is evidence for the survival of ancient images among this group as well as further east. The Nihavand goblet bull,<sup>4</sup> Plate 46.a, must surely be an ancestor of both the Egyptian lustre steer on 40.d and o36.

The negative evidence on the question of common themes, is that there are no flag wavers and no pointed hats in Nishapur.

As regards ceramic figural styles to the east, the Marv jar, Plate 36.a. is the main clue to some pre-Islamic Khurasanian tradition. It is certainly closer to the Nishapur, than the lustre seems to be; as is the single contemporary example of a complete figure from the polychrome on white group, Plate 37.a., excavated by Wilkinson. In both, however, the art of the brush is evident.

Wilkinson includes an interesting hybrid piece, Plate 39.b,<sup>1</sup> on which the buff ware bird and animal type are used on an imitation lustre bowl. Already, the influence of the softer line seems to have turned the bird and buck into portly metropolitans, compared with their spare, provincial cousins. The bird is developing the more fantastic plumage of the type known from the imitation lustre of Afrasiyab, with the exaggerated calligraphic leaf in its beak, and peacock eyes on its wings. The little buck is "all buttons and bows".

Seeing these figures in a state of transition, heightens the sense of the individuality of the originals. But they too must have had antecedents of some kind. Where are they to be sought?

### STYLE SPOTTING

This section is a scan, first of the wall paintings, at Nishapur itself and then Dandan Öilüq and Panjikent, since these have been referred to by others as being in the ancestry of the buff ware style.<sup>2</sup>

For succinctness, I shall ask three questions of each: what, if any, correspondence lies between them and the buff ware in 1. Theme, 2. Style and 3. Costume. Theme includes compositional aspects, and style focuses on the method of depiction.

Nishapur

There are at least three types of wall painting in Nishapur, as described by Wilkinson,<sup>1</sup> and illustrated on Plate 50a.b.c.

Type a.

Theme: the hunting scene is comparable.

Style: the delicate curvilinear style and fine draughtsmanship is in contrast.

Costume: similarity of boots, otherwise different, e.g. the long riding coat, the belt with thongs, the curved sword.

Type b.

Theme: the figure is obviously female, and was part of a large figural scene, not able to be reconstructed. The nearest attempt at a large group composition, is the cavaliera bowl, otherwise figures in ones, two or threes.

Style: soft line brush work, not the buff ware knife edge drawing.

Costume: the woman is veiled over her hair, and with soft curls on the brow, not found on the buff ware. Compare the wirey curls of Wilkinson's cavalier, w62.

Type c.

Theme: the hand and eye motif, together with the demon figures<sup>2</sup> found, indicate a demonic element. There is little sense of the demonic in the buff ware; though it is sometimes hard to choose between crude drawing and horror, as with the cavaliera, oll. The horny hand of the figure on w65 is the nearest equivalent to the dado theme. Ackerman, quoting Herzfeld, regarding Kushan-Sasanian coins, mentions that the Hephthalite kings had a pair of hands on crown.<sup>3</sup>

Dandan Öilüq, Khotan

The Bodhisattva, Plate 43.a, known as the "Iranian Bodhisattva", a wooden Votive Tablet, probably seventh century AD.

- Theme: no obvious Buddhist symbolism, or nimbed figures, on the buff ware. The figure seated cross-legged is in common.
- Style: delicate, curvilinear, and with fine definition of form, in strong contrast to the buff ware, also the comparatively uncluttered background.
- Costume: for similarities, see o16 and o26. Here are the boots again, but there are no such elaborate headdresses on the buff ware figures. There may be a greater likeness to the unglazed ware, for example the mold, Wilkinson, no.191, with its figure seated on a cushion. There are no narrow floating scarves worn by buff ware figures.

The wooden Votive Tablet, known as the "Silk Princess", Bussagli p.56.

- Theme: in general as above. There is a disembodied hand with an elongated finger, pointing, and long fingered hands occur on the buff ware, e.g. o20 and o21.
- Style: as above. Loose, softly waved, shoulder length curls are in sharp contrast to the stiff, protruding hair roll of many buff ware figures.

The wooden Votive Tablets of horsemen with accompanying birds, Bussagli, p.50, and Stein, Plate LXII.

- Theme: is comparable, but there is a very different relationship as to size. The little bird flies alone, and the background is otherwise empty. The fragment o10 may be carrying a

beaker, but otherwise Nishapur horsemen tend to carry arms or polo-sticks, not bows. Both ride spotted horses, as on o5.

Stein's carved wood panel from a dwelling at Niya, Khotan, is of a horned animal, with chevrons carved into its neck; it is illustrated on his Plate LXVIII.

Panjikent, Soghdia

Noblemen sitting at a feast, Plate 44.a

Theme: the cross-legged figure with bowl or flowery wand in hand, parallels the Nishapur figures.

Style: is very different. There is a long, elegant and sinuous line at Panjikent, which is in stark contrast to the straight, staccato lines of Nishapur; I note particularly the canopy.

Costume: of the seated figures is very different, as are the facial types; I note particularly, the headdress, shoulder patches and straight trousers.

Horseman killing a dragon, Plate 44.b

Theme: the horseman is comparable, but there are no dragons in Nishapur. The horse type is similar, but the head is not in reserve. The horse trappings are similar, also the stirrup is circular, but the riders of Nishapur do not carry quivers. Perhaps the cavaliera, oll, owes something to the Soghdian amazons, mentioned by Azarpay.<sup>1</sup>

Style: very different, as above. This is an epic painting style, so bound to be so in some respects, but nonetheless, the bold blocks of colour and design are in contrast to the busy patches of infill on the buff ware.

Costume: there is a shared elegance of boot, but otherwise the horseman's garb is of a different cut, without being entirely remote from the buff ware wardrobe.

It is, perhaps, worth noting that the slashed and bound sleeves of the goddess, depicted in a drawing of another of the wall paintings,<sup>1</sup> occurs on the dress of some of the buff ware figures, for example, w62.

It would seem, therefore, that although there is some correspondence of theme and costume, there is almost none of style. I do not lay a great deal of importance on such similarities as styles of riding boot, when dealing with tracts of continent where a high proportion of the population are horsemen, involved in comparable life styles. Similarly, the cross-legged sitting position, is by far the most comfortable one to adopt at floor level.

Since the wall paintings do not provide the convincing parallels, I shall follow up some of the clues gleaned from Chapter 2.

#### The Mazdean Thread

Ghirshman has suggested that the Oxus Treasure came from a famous temple of the goddess Anahita, known to have stood near the left bank of the Oxus, at Bactra. It was probably destroyed by Alexander or by Seleucus, soon after.<sup>2</sup>

Among the items recovered from the horde, are a series of gold plaques, on which figures are embossed or engraved. Plate 47.b

and Plate 48c.d.e.f, are a selection from them. They show signs of having been folded, and it has been suggested that they were votive offerings to tuck into some receptacle or niche in the temple.<sup>1</sup>

Several features are reminiscent of the buff ware figures: the angularity of the profiles, the static poses, the elongated eye, as on Plate 48.c, the shoulder length hair roll, and the warrior's pose of both arms raised, which is a feature of most of the horsemen in the "o" group.

The two male heads, hollow and of gold, may have been the finials to helmets.<sup>2</sup> Plate 48.a shows the large and elongated eye, and 48.b is very like the Nishapuri squint. The horizontal hair line is also similar.

The Mazdean thread may be followed into Khwarazm, and the figurines, already mentioned, which Tolstov suggests are Anahita and Mina,<sup>3</sup> Plate 49, d.e. Stylistically, the broad squarish face, and the staring eyes are not unlike w59. Another example of the figural sculpture from that area, is the Hephthalite head from Varakhsha, Plate 49.a. This shows a knife-edge profile and the elongated eye and small mouth beneath. The eye appears again on the wall painting from Toprak Kala, as illustrated by Bussagli, page 124.1.

### Woven Threads

Muqaddasi's list of exports from the Central Asian lands was rich in textiles.<sup>3</sup> Plate 51 shows three examples. The stylised beasts with button eyes, heads in reserve and stiffly arched necks are reminiscent of w86, even without its head. The bull, o36, although with a different eye, shares something of the "concertina'd" figure style. They share the dividing line between neck and body with the buff ware.

The St. Josse silk, Plate 51.b, with its dedication to a Turkish general, Abu Mansur Bukhtigin, who died in 961, shows small mythological animals beneath the elephants. This is reminiscent of the recumbent birds beneath the buff ware horsemen. Also, the little twig feet of many of the buff ware animals, for example on Plates 11 and 12, are here seen on the elephants, albeit in a more developed, if not more naturalistic form.

The Ram Silk, Plate 51.c, has been discussed by Shepherd, as one of the textiles to be associated with Zandani ji cloth, famous in medieval times, and which took its name from a village near Bokhara, although it was made over a wider area.<sup>1</sup>

They too have the head in reserve, the band across the neck, which recalls the Sasanian pearl necklace, but also the neck bands and chevrons of the Nishapur buff ware. The small "wattle" on the neck, is similar in conception to the Nishapuri pot-hook, w73. Although the colouring of this particular silk is green, white, rose red, orange and coral, seven out of the group of ten, which Shepherd assigns to the Zandani ji group, are largely of tan, with green to blue.<sup>2</sup> The colour scheme is similar to the animate buff ware, although the heraldic, solid animal type relates to the style only in incidental motifs.

#### Matted Threads

Dalton has pointed out the cardinal role which the steppes played in the history of Bactria and its sister provinces.<sup>3</sup> This endured into the tenth century and beyond, with the infiltration of the Turkish peoples, and also the trade, already referred to.

He also draws attention to the frontier region of the northern provinces of Iran as having been where the culture of Inner Asia and that of Iran and Turan mingled, and the zone of their confluence was coloured by the qualities of both. He also emphasises the remarkable artistic and cultural unity of the peoples of Inner Asia, whatever their ethnic origins, and within that framework, the predominance of Ural-Altai influence.<sup>1</sup>

Bearing this in mind, it seems permissible to cast the net wide, within the zone of the steppe peoples.

Plate 52, the felt rug from Noin Ula, dating from the first century AD onwards, shows the head of the reindeer with its body inhabited by a scrolling form. On the buff ware, there are the scrolling stems, which twine within the horses and bulls.

The Altai material from the frozen tombs at Pazyryk, dated to the fifth century BC, provides some interesting comparisons; Plate 53.

The so-called Great Goddess, is seated on a chair with turned-wood legs, very similar to that on the Oxus Treasure seal, Plate 41.c, which, as I have already mentioned, Dalton connects with the figure of Anahita. This formidable goddess of the steppe holds a flowering branch in her hand. It is more luxuriant than the wands in the hands of the figures on ol6 and ol9, but bears some resemblance.

The technique of cut felt appliqué, leads to a certain angularity of form, and the sharply bent elbow of the goddess and the rider, recall the sword arm of Wilkinson's cavalier, w62. The stepped, indented profiles, common from Nishapur, appear also on the

saddle cover, probably of Middle Eastern origin.<sup>1</sup> The square-cut hair line and the thick curl, or hair roll, has been seen on the Oxus plaques, with which they were roughly contemporary, in terms of the estimated age of the graves. However, it is also the coiffeur of o5, o14, w62 and others.

The horse depicted in Plate 53.a., does not have its head in reserve, but in the tomb of the chieftan, were horses with elaborate felt masks.<sup>2</sup> It could be that some of the Nishapur horses are wearing simpler forms of this headgear, for example w62 and o5. The device of the head in reserve, however, is attested from such felts as the saddle cover, on Plate 53.d.

The Nishapur pot-hook, may be related to the convention as seen on Plate 53.c.e, where there is a line in contrasting colour issuing into the lion's torso from the shoulder. It is also on the flanks of the reindeer on the carpet, Plate 53.b. These three items were most probably imports from the Iranian world.<sup>3</sup>

It would seem that motifs and stylistic idiosyncracies from antiquity in the steppe lands of Inner Asia, may be traced on the buff ware pots, in much the same way as those from Luristan or Nihavand. However, it is hard to believe that such a complex patchwork of archaizing was consciously done.

There would appear to be an interesting parallel to be seen in some of the metalwork, found during the Metropolitan Museum's excavations and catalogued and described by Allan. He considers that a series of bronze and gilded bronze belt fittings, found at Tepe Madraseh, "display styles that are neither purely Islamic nor of obvious and immediate Altaic descent. Certain of these have

designs that could probably be traced back to Pazyryk art forms. ... but (they have) come a long way from that design".<sup>1</sup> Could not the same be said of the buff ware pots, many of which also came from Tepe Madraseh, as shown on Table B?

Although this ceramic ware has proved a fascinating example of the enduring qualities of certain images, themes and motifs, the place it held in the society of medieval Nishapur remains as obscure as ever.

Whereas it is easy to imagine a broad platter of Samanid epigraphic ware, laden with sweetmeats and embellished with some witty or improving maxim, being set before the qadi; who were being entertained by the characters and menagerie of the buff ware world? Were they filled with shirini for nauruz, or offerings to nourish the wakeful spirits on their return at farvardagan? Did they amuse at a futuwa picnic? Or perhaps they were the children's story bowls. Did they ward off the evil eye, or conjure good fortune through the propitious stars? Some qualities of ambiguity they seem to share with a charm against scorpion bites, quoted by al-Biruni:

"In the name of God the gracious, the merciful - Isfandarmadhmah and Isfandarmadhroz - I have bound (by the charm) the going and coming - below and above - except the cows - in the name of the Yazatas and in the name of Jam and Fredun - in the name of God - (I swear) by Adam and Eve, God alone is sufficient unto me!"<sup>2</sup>

I have not been able to crack their code; for me they have not dropped their masks, and remain, for the time being, as commedia dell'arte figures in the "Iranian Intermezzo."

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**APPENDIX**

TABLE A: ALPHABETICAL INDEX TO CLASSIFICATION BY THEME/SUBJECTGroup

A	Solo Cavaliers
	(a) sword in hand
	(b) polo-stick in hand
	(c) bird in hand
	(d) unidentified object in hand
	(e) the 'cavaliera'
B	Solo Figures
	(a) standing
	(b) moving
C	Solo Seated Figures
D	Figures in Pairs
E	Musicians
F	Cavaliers in Groups <sup>*</sup>
G	Seated Figures in Groups
H	Solo Creatures
	(a) bird
	(b) ibex
	(c) others
I	Bovids
J	Creatures with a Familiar
K	Birds Only
L	Ibex Only
M	Mixed Groups of Creatures
N	Christian Symbols

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\* Bowl F/1 includes bovids

TABLE B: MEASUREMENTSGroup "w"

<u>Theme/Subject reference no.</u>	<u>Diameter in mm</u>	<u>Height in mm</u>	<u>Site where found</u>
Group A: Solo Cavaliers			
<u>w62</u>	380	112	Tepe Madrased
Group B: Solo Figures			
<u>w59</u>	300	92	not precisely known
Group C: Solo Seated Figures			
<u>w64</u>	225	65	Tepe Madrased
<u>w66</u>	160	65	Tepe Madrased
no examples of Groups D, E, F or G i.e. Figures in Pairs, Musicians, Cavaliers in Groups, Seated Figures in Groups			
Group H: Solo Creatures			
<u>w73</u>	215	83	Sabz Pushan
no examples of Group I i.e. Bovids no measurements for Group J i.e. Creatures with a Familiar			
Group K: Birds Only			
<u>w76</u>	245	60	Tepe Madrased
<u>w78</u>	210	90	Tepe Madrased
Group L: Ibex Only			
<u>w60</u>	190 approx.	66	Sabz Pushan
<u>w61</u>	177	66	Tepe Madrased

Table B: Measurements, continued

<u>Theme/Subject</u> <u>reference no.</u>	<u>Diameter</u> <u>in mm</u>	<u>Height</u> <u>in mm</u>	<u>Site where</u> <u>found</u>
Group M: Mixed Groups of Creatures			
<u>w63</u>	373	102	Tepe Madrased
<u>w74</u>	230	90	Tepe Madrased
<u>w77</u>	185	70	Tepe Madrased
<u>w88</u>	300	136	Tepe Madrased

no comparable measurements for the objects  
in Group N  
i.e. Christian Symbols

TABLE B: MEASUREMENTSGroup "o"

<u>Theme/Subject</u> <u>reference no.</u>	<u>Diameter</u> <u>in mm</u>	<u>Height</u> <u>in mm</u>	<u>Sites where found</u> <u>not verifiable</u>
Group A: Solo Cavaliers			
(a) <u>o1</u>	310	120	-
(a) <u>o2</u>	220	-	-
(a) <u>o3</u>	210	-	-
(b) <u>o6</u>	222	95	-
(b) <u>o7</u>	215	-	-
(c) <u>o8</u>	205	-	-
(c) <u>o9</u>	220	-	-
(d) <u>o11</u>	356	120	-

no measurements for Groups B and C  
i.e. Solo Figures (a) standing, (b) moving  
and Solo Seated Figures

## Group D: Figures in Pairs

<u>o20</u>	269	106	-
<u>o21</u>	194	60	-

## Group E: Musicians

<u>o22</u>	335	57	-
<u>o23</u>	326	-	-

no measurements for Group F  
i.e. Cavaliers in Groups

## Group G: Seated Figures in Groups

<u>o25</u>	355	-	-
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## Group H: Solo Creatures

(a) <u>o28</u>	222	83	-
(a) <u>o29</u>	211	58	-
(a) <u>o30</u>	118	52	-

Table B: Measurements, continued

<u>Theme/Subject</u> <u>reference no.</u>	<u>Diameter</u> <u>in mm</u>	<u>Height</u> <u>in mm</u>	<u>Sites where found</u> <u>not verifiable</u>
Group H: Solo Creatures, continued			
(b) <u>o32</u>	387	-	-
(b) <u>o33</u>	162	-	-
(b) <u>o34</u>	154	-	-
(c) <u>o35</u>	233	-	-
Group I: Bovids			
<u>o36</u>	212	95	-
Group J: Creatures with a Familiar			
(a) <u>o38</u>	203	-	-
(a) <u>o39</u>	210	79	-
(a) <u>o40</u>	179	80	-
(a) <u>o41</u>	213	64	-
(a) <u>o42</u>	216	-	-
(b) <u>o43</u>	340	-	-
(b) <u>o44</u>	220	41	-
Group K: Birds Only			
<u>o45</u>	188	-	-
<u>o46</u>	193	78	-
<u>o47</u>	223	68	-
<u>o48</u>	178	-	-
<u>o50</u>	206	57	-
Group L: Ibex Only			
<u>o51</u>	197	-	-
Group M: Mixed Groups of Creatures			
<u>o53</u>	216	82	-
Group N: Christian Symbols			
<u>o54</u>	232	87	-

ABBREVIATIONS OF MUSEUMS AND ART GALLERIES

BM	British Museum
BMFA	Boston Museum of Fine Arts
CMA	Cleveland Museum of Fine Art
FGA	Freer Gallery of Art
Hermitage	The Hermitage Museum, Leningrad
H-MD	Hetjens-Museum, Düsseldorf
Louvre	Musée du Louvre, Paris
MdAdH	Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva
MIB	Iran Bastan Museum, Tehran
MIK	Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin
MKG	Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg
MMA	Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
V&AM	Victoria and Albert Museum, London

FOOTNOTESPage

2. 1. Wilkinson (1), p.xxiii
2. Le Strange, p.382-3
3. Wilkinson (1), p.xxviii
3. 1. Wilkinson (1), p.xxiii-xxiv
2. Wilkinson (1), p.xiv
4. 1. Wilkinson (1), p.xxiv-v, p.4
2. Wilkinson (1), p.xl
3. Wilkinson (1), p.3
4. Wilkinson (1), p.xxiv, p.xlii
5. 1. Wilkinson (1), p.xxv-xxvi
2. Wilkinson (1), p.3
3. Wilkinson (1), p.xli
4. Wilkinson (1), p.xli
6. 1. Wilkinson (6), p.107
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o35, City Art Museum, St. Louis; after Nagel, p.116, fig.3
- 29 o36, Coll. Shinsui Ito, Kanagawa, Japan; after Tsugio (2), no.19  
o37, after Papadopoulo, no.418
- 30 o38, Art Market; after Sotheby (2), lot 186  
o39, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan; after MdAdH (1981), p.16, no.17  
o40, Coll. Kazuo Kurimoto, Kanagawa, Japan; after Tsugio (2), plate 3

PLATE

- 31 o41, Coll Shuichi Taji, Tokyo; after Tsugio (2), no.20  
o42, The Hon. Robert Erskine; after V&AM (1969), p.19, no.44  
o43, Private Coll.; after H-MD (1973), no.60  
o44, Coll. Sazo Idemitsu, Tokyo; after Tsugio (2), no.22
- 32 o45, Art Market; after Sotheby (3), lot 69  
o46, MIB; after The World's Great Collections, Vol.4, no.114  
o47, Coll. Yasuo Takada, Osaka, Japan; after Tsugio (2), no.19
- 33 o48, The Rt.Hon. Malcolm MacDonald; after V&AM (1969), p.19, no.42  
o49, Berlin Museum; after Erdmann p.164  
o50, Coll. Sazo Idemitsu, Tokyo; after Zick-Nissen (3), p.361, fig.5.c
- 34 o51, Private Coll.; after H-MD (1973), no.57  
o52, MIB; after The World's Great Collections, Vol.4, no.115  
o53, Coll. Shuichi Taji, Tokyo; after Tsugio (2), no.16
- 35 o54, Coll. Toshio Ogawa, Tokyo; after Tsugio (2), no.15  
o55, MIB; after Wilkinson (8), p.82, fig.4  
o56, Coll. Wilkinson; after Wilkinson (8), p.82, fig.3  
o57, Bezalel Museum, Jerusalem; after Wilkinson (8), p.83, fig.5

PLATES 36-54: COMPARATIVE MATERIAL

- 36 a. Vase, painted pottery, Marv, 5th/6th century;  
after Pugachenkova, fig.67
- b. Bowl, polychrome on white, Nishapur, 9th/10th century; MIK;  
after Zick-Nissen (2), fig.1
- 37 a. Bowl, polychrome on white, Nishapur, 9th/10th century; MMA;  
after Wilkinson (1), p.155, no.48
- b. Bowl fragment, polychrome on white, Nishapur, 9th/10th century;  
MMA; after Wilkinson (1), p.157, no.59
- 38 a. Bowl, black on white, Nishapur, 9th 10th century; David Coll.  
Copenhagen; after Leth, p.24
- b. Bowl, black on white, Nishapur, 9th 10th century; MMA;  
after Wilkinson (1), p.113, no.13
- c. Bowl, black on white, Nishapur, 9th 10th century; MMA;  
after Wilkinson (1), p.113, no.14

PLATE

- 39 a. Bowl, imitation bichrome lustre, Nishapur, 9th/10th century; MMA after Wilkinson (1), p.204, no.50
- b. Bowl, imitation monochrome lustre, Nishapur, 9th/10th century; MMA after Wilkinson (1), p.192, no.47 and p.202
- c. Bowl fragment, black on white, Nishapur, 9th/10th century; MMA; after Wilkinson (1), p.118, no.26
- d. Bowl, monochrome lustre, Iraq, 9th/10th century; MMA; after Wilkinson (1), p.200, no.34
- 40 a. Bowl, monochrome lustre, Iraq/Mesopotamia, 10th century; Keir Coll.; after V&AM (1969), p.14, no.22
- b. Bowl, monochrome lustre, Iraq/Mesopotamia, 10th century; Keir Coll.; after Grube, p.75, no.37
- c. Bowl, monochrome lustre, Iraq/Mesopotamia, 10th century; Keir Coll.; after Grube, p.73, no.36
- d. Bowl, monochrome lustre, Iraq/Egypt, 10th/11th century; Keir Coll.; after Grube, p.72, no.41
- e. Bowl fragment, monochrome lustre, Iraq/Egypt, 10th/11th century; Benaki Coll.; after Philon, p.158, fig.354
- 41 a. Plate, silver-gilt, goddess riding a fantastic animal, c. 8th century, Iranian world; MMA; after Harper (2), p.155
- b. Phalera, silver-gilt, goddess with birds, Galicbe, c. 5th century; National Museum, Sofia; after Phillips, p.106, no.125
- c. Signet ring, gold, flat oval bezel engraved in intaglio, seated female figure, flower in right hand, wreath in left, crowned, with long plait down her back, c. 5th century BC, Oxus Treasure; BM; after Dalton, plate XV, no.103
- d. Seal of the moon god Mah, Sasanian; after Herzfeld, plate CXXXI
- e. Seal of the moon god Mah, Sasanian; Staatliche Munzsammlung, Munich; after Harper (1), p.149, no.74
- f. Situla, bronze, Luristan, c. 9th century BC; Palais des Arts, Lyons; after Survey VII, p.72, D.
- 42 a. Plate, silver-gilt, mounted archer hunting, c. 8th/9th century, Iranian world (?); Hermitage; after Harper (2), p.157, fig.2
- b. Plate, silver, festal scene, c. 7th/8th century, found in Mazandaran (Tabaristan); BM; after Dalton, plate XXVI, no.190
- c. Gold medallion, Buyid, 10th century; FGA; after Frye (2), ill. no.
- 43 a. Wall-painting, Bodhisattva, c. 7th century, Dandan Öilüq, Khotan; BM; after Bussagli, p.57

PLATE

- 43 b. Shield, painted leather on wood, from Mt. Mug, Soghdia, c. 8th century; Hermitage; after Talbot Rice (2), p.96, fig.78
- 44 a. Wall-painting, Panjikent, c. 7th century; Hermitage; after Talbot Rice (2), p.107, fig.89
- 45 a. Beaker, painted pottery, Susa I style, second half 4th millenium BC; Louvre; after Survey Vol.VII, plate 1,C
- b. Spouted pot, painted pottery, Siyalk, c.1100-1000 BC; after Herzfeld, p.111, fig.218
- c. Whetstone, bronze, Luristan, 2nd/1st millenium BC; after Herzfeld, p.169, fig.286, and Survey Vol.VII, plate 53.F
- d. Openwork mount, bronze, Caucasus, Scythian, c. 5th century BC; BM; after postcard, BM40
- 46 a. Footed goblet, painted pottery, Nihavand, end 2nd millenium BC; BMFA; after Survey Vol.VII, plate 6.A
- b. Stone carving on pillar capital, goddess figure, late Sasanian; Isfahan; after Herzfeld, p.330, fig. 413
- c. Bowl, painted pottery, Samarra, 4th millenium BC; after Roes, p.85, fig.1
- 47 a. Plate, silver, warriors in single combat, found Kulagysh, Urals, c. 7th century or later; Hermitage; after Talbot Rice (2), p.40, fig.31
- b. Crowned figure of a man, embossed from thin gold plate, Oxus Treasure, c. 5th century BC; BM; after Dalton, plate XII, fig.:
- 48 a. Head of a man, gold, hollow, Oxus Treasure, c. 5th century BC; BM; after Dalton, plate III, no.5
- b. Head of a man, gold, hollow, Oxus Treasure, c. 5th century BC; BM; after Dalton, plate II, no.6
- c-f. Gold plaques, small, with marks from having been folded, Oxus Treasure, c. 5th century BC; BM; after Dalton, plate XIV, nos. 69, 70, 84, 89
- 49 a. Sculpture, Hephthalite, from Varakhsha, Soghdia, 5th century; Samarqand Museum; after Hrbas, p.13, fig.III
- b. Coin, Hephthalite Kingdom of Soghdiana, c.480; after Mitchener, plate VII, no.65a
- c. Silver coin, Khwarazmian, inscribed al-Fadl, c.795; after Mitchener, plate VIII, no.71a

PLATE

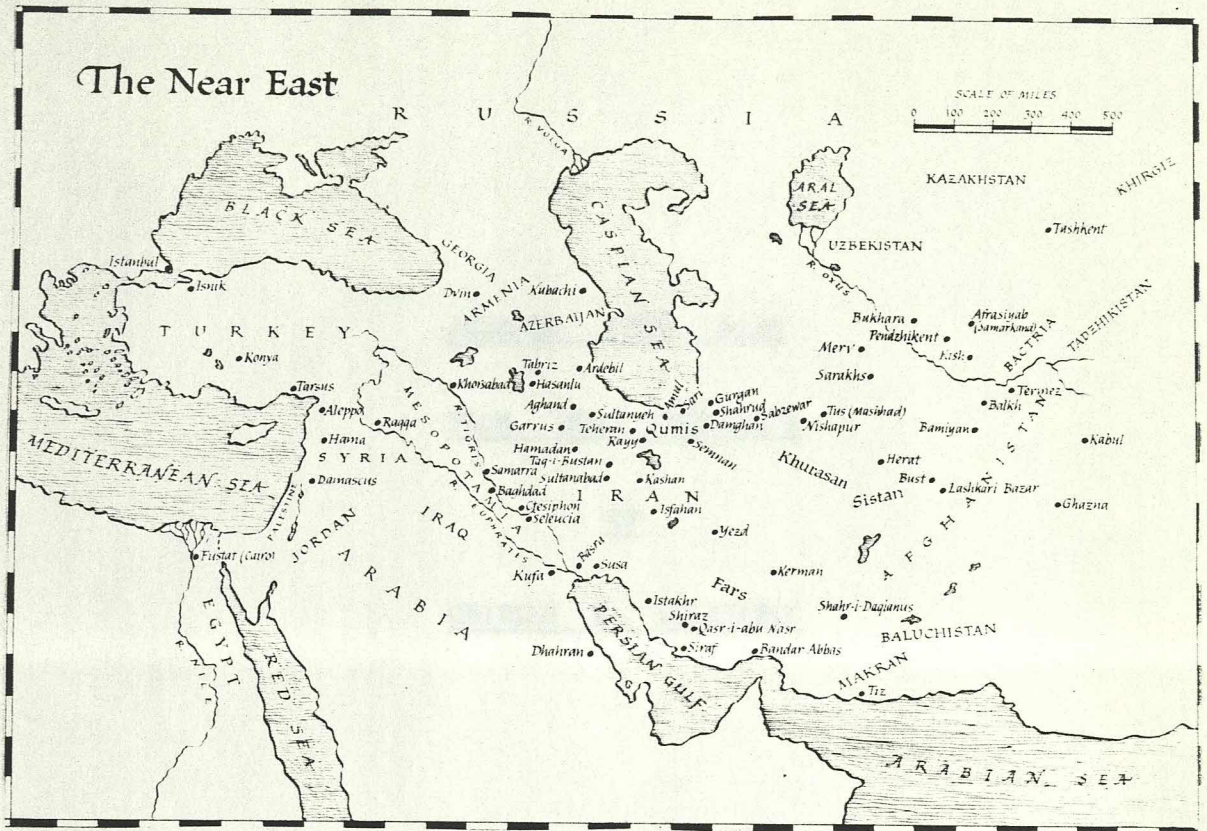
- 49 d. Figurine, terracotta, possibly the goddess Anahita, from Qoy-Qrylgan-Qala, Khwarazm, c. 4th century BC/1st century AD; after Tolstov, p.50, fig.2
- e. Figurine, terracotta, possibly the goddess Mina, from Qoy-Qrylgan-Qala, Khwarazm, c. 4th century BC/1st century AD; after Tolstov, p.50, fig.1
- 50 a. Wall-painting, a huntsman, from Nishapur, Vineyard Tepe; early 9th century; MIB; after Wilkinson (3), p.118, fig.45
- b. Wall-painting, head of a woman, from Nishapur, Sabz Pushan, 9th century; MMA; after Wilkinson (5), p.65
- c. Wall-painting, Nishapur, Tepe Madrasedh, 9th century; MMA; after Wilkinson (5), p.66
- 51 a. Silk twill, East Persian, 8th/9th century; MMA; after Day, p.110
- b. The St. Josse Silk, inscribed to a Turkish General, Abu Mansur Bukhtigin (d.961), after Grabar, Cambridge History of Iran, Vol.4, plate 24
- c. Silk twill, found Ch'ien-fo-tung, probably Soghdian, c. 8th century; BM; after Talbot Rice (2), p.110, fig.94
- 52 Rug, woven wool on fine leather, with coloured felt applique and embroidery, from Noin Ula, 1st century onwards; Hermitage; after Talbot Rice, p.47, fig.37
- 53 a. Hanging, felt applique, probably of the Great Goddess in audience, Pazyryk, 5th century BC; Hermitage; after Talbot Rice (2), p.39, fig.30
- b. Carpet, knotted wool, of Middle Eastern origin, Pazyryk, 5th century BC; Hermitage; scheme of composition after Jettmar, p.121, fig.103
- c. Horse's chest strap, a strip of Iranian woollen tapestry on felt, plus fur and gold ornament, Pazyryk, 5th century BC; Hermitage; after Frozen Tombs, p.51, no.40
- d. Saddle-cover, felt applique on leather, plus fur, hair and gold ornament, Pazyryk, 5th century BC; Hermitage; after Phillips, p.84, fig.91
- e. Saddle-cloth, woollen tapestry weave of Middle Eastern origin, Pazyryk, 5th century BC; Hermitage; after Frozen Tombs, p.26
- 54 Felt figure of a swan, probably from ceremonial canopy, Pazyryk, 5th century BC; Hermitage; after Burkett, p.22, fig.8, and Frozen Tombs, p.49, no.34, 35.

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Maps opposite p.29: a. after McEvedy, p.51

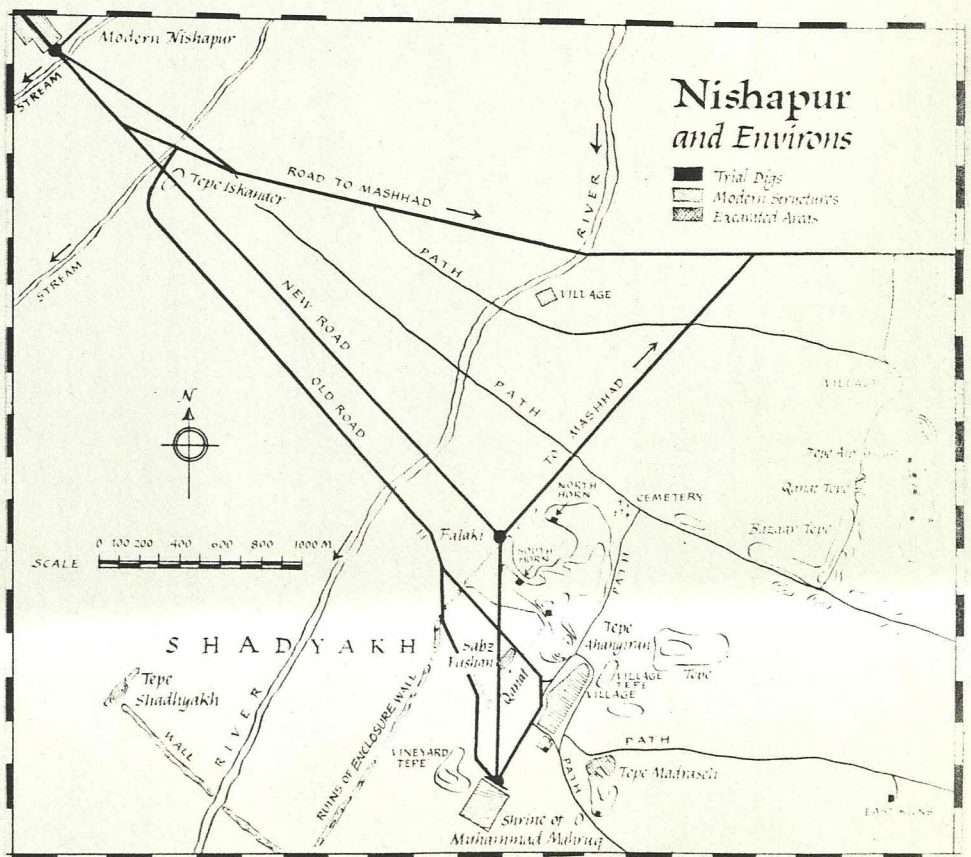
b. after Cambridge History of Iran, Vol.V, Map I, p.2

PLATES



a

b



ANIMATE BUFF WARE

FROM THE CATALOGUE

OF

CHARLES K. WILKINSON



در کار گره کوزه گرسه بوم دوشش  
 دیدم دو هزار کوزه گویا و نموش  
 هر کس بزبان مال با من گفتند  
 کو کوزه گرد کوزه نرد کوزه فرزندش

w48  
N/1f



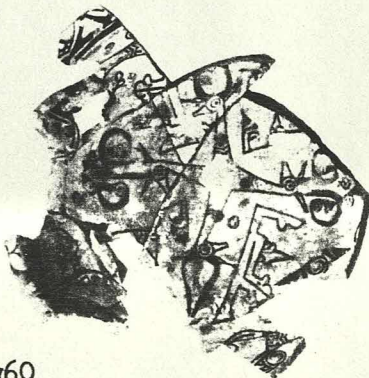
w49  
N/2



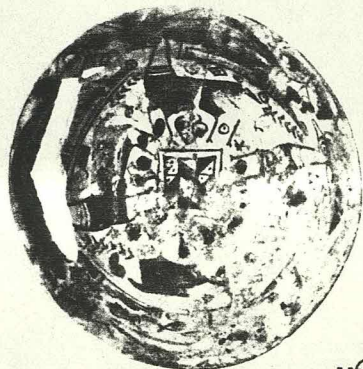
w58  
H(a)/2f



w59  
B(a)/1

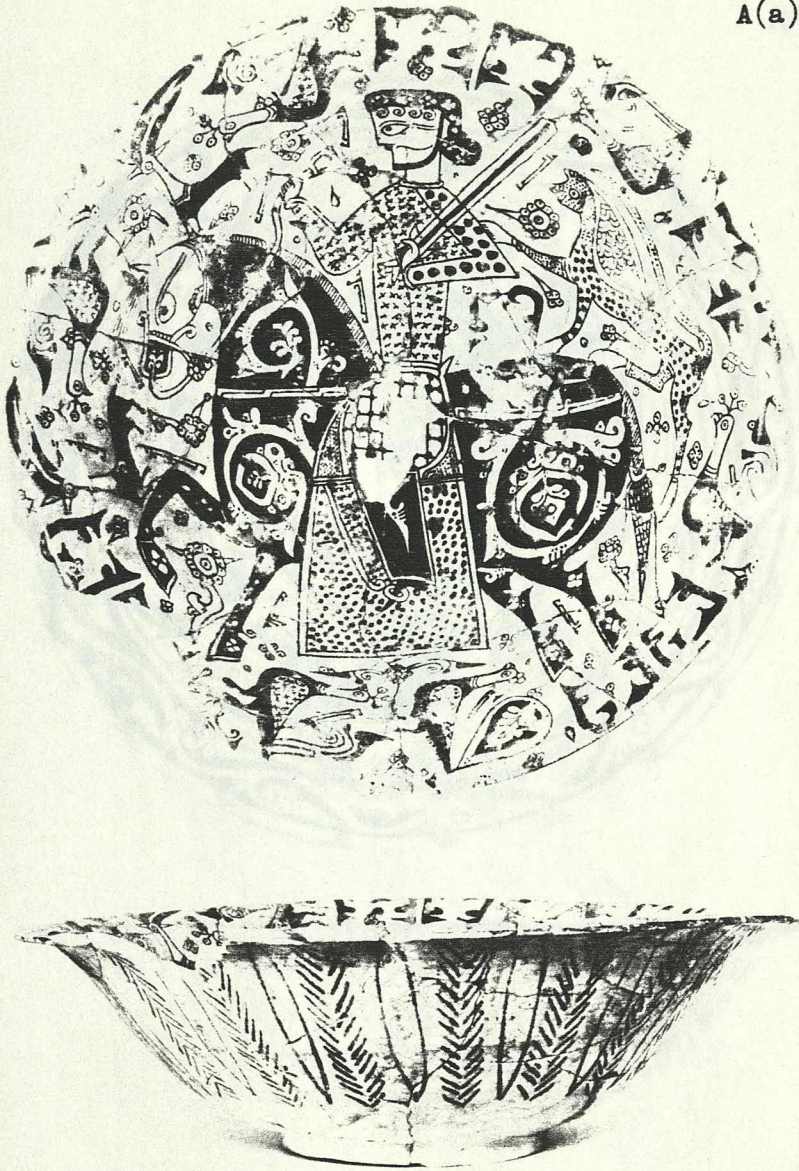


w60  
L/1f



w61  
L/2

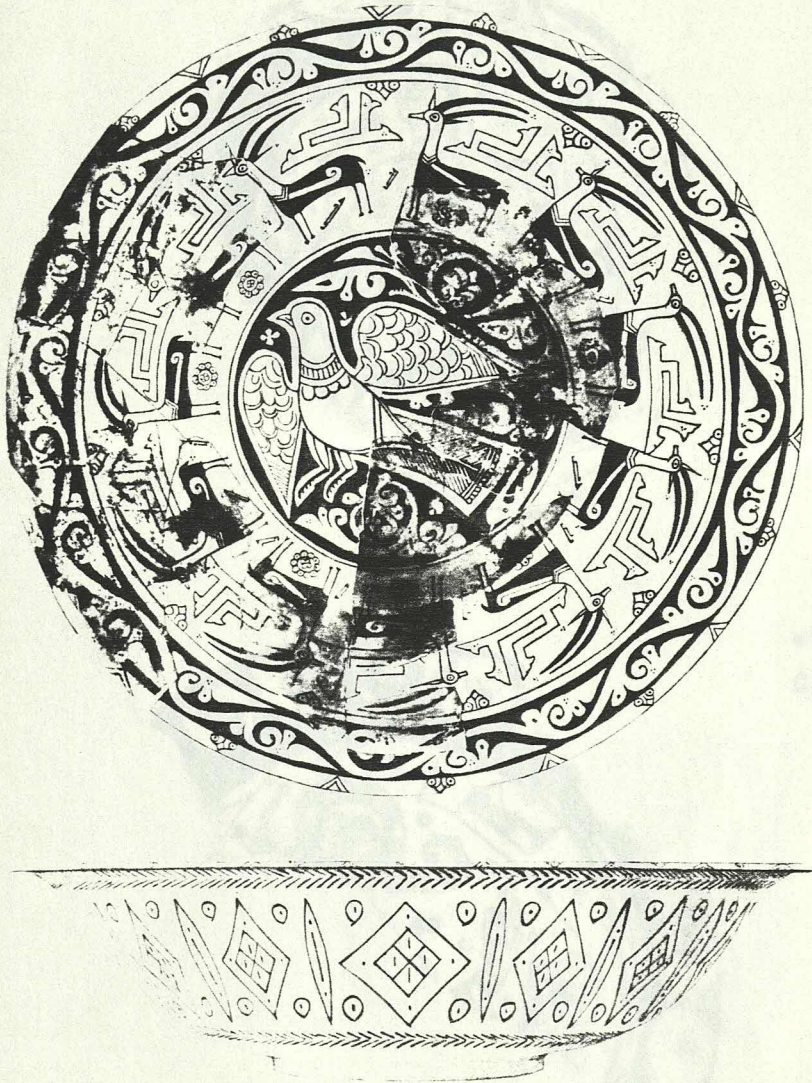
w62  
A(a)/1



16

w63

M/1



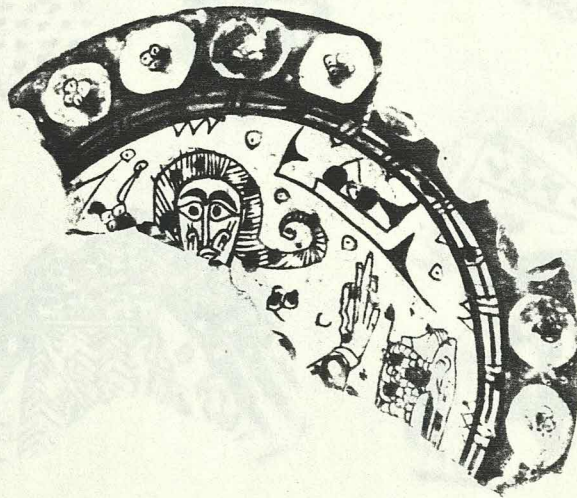
64

w64  
c/1



65

w65  
c/3f



w67  
c(a)/27

w68  
c/41

w69  
c/27

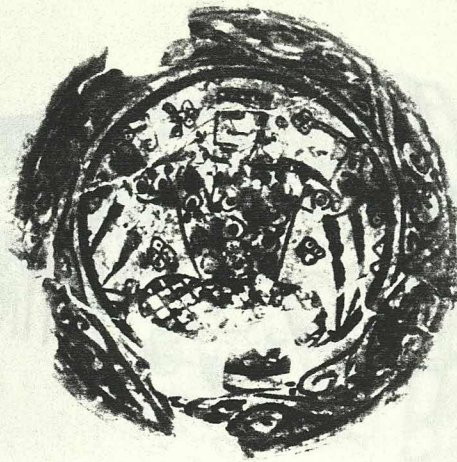
w70  
c(a)/27

w71  
c(a)/31

48

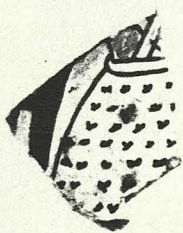
66

w66  
C/2



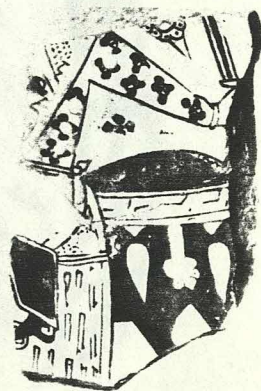
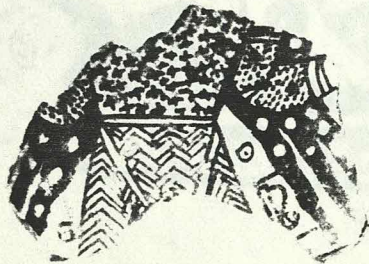
67.68

6



7

70



w67  
B(a)/2f

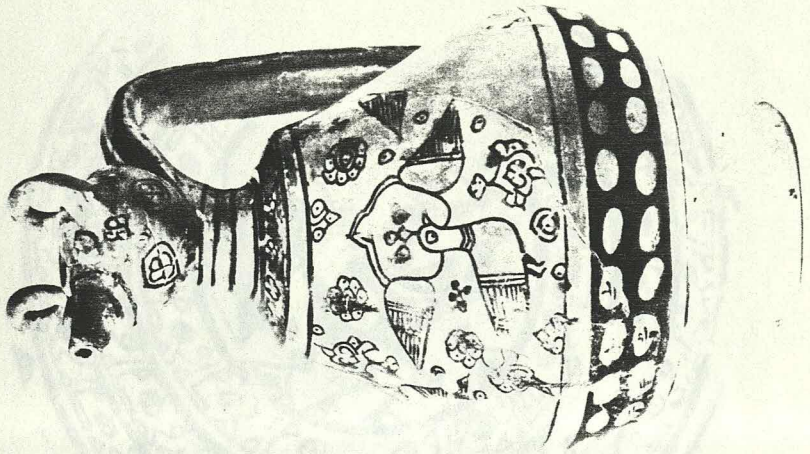
w68  
B/4f

w69  
B/5f

w70  
B(a)/3f

w71  
A(a)/2f

w72  
K/1

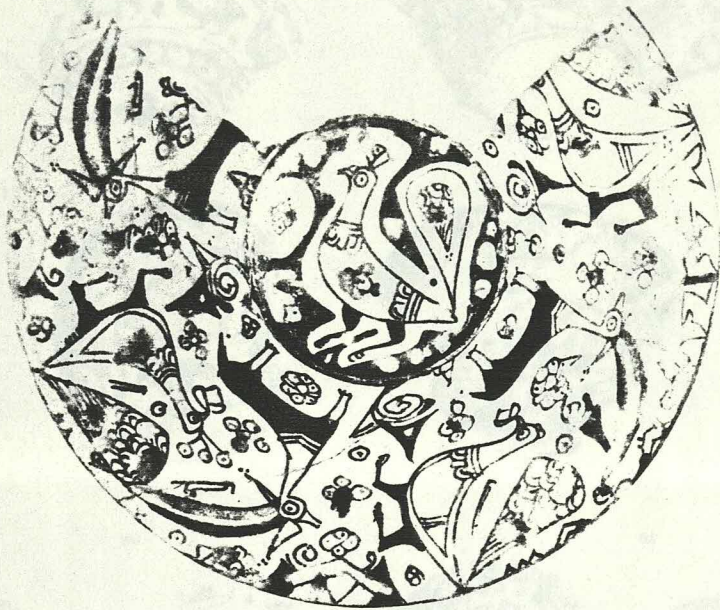


w73  
H(a)/1



w74

M/2



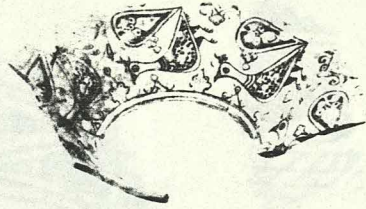
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75



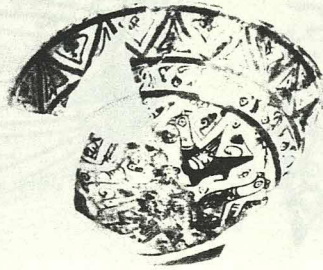
76



77



78



79



80



81



82



83



84



85



w75  
K/5f

w76  
K/2f

w77  
M/3

w78  
K/3f

w79  
M/6f

w80  
H(c)/6f

w81  
M/4f

w82  
H(a)3f

w83  
J(b)1f

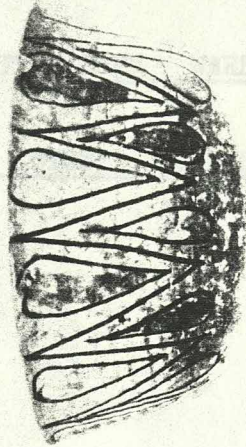
w84  
K/6f

w85  
K/4f

Buff Ware



88a



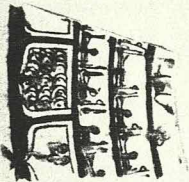
88b



89a



89b



87a



87b



89



86a



86b



90

w88  
M/5

w91  
H(a)/5f

w87  
H(a)/4f

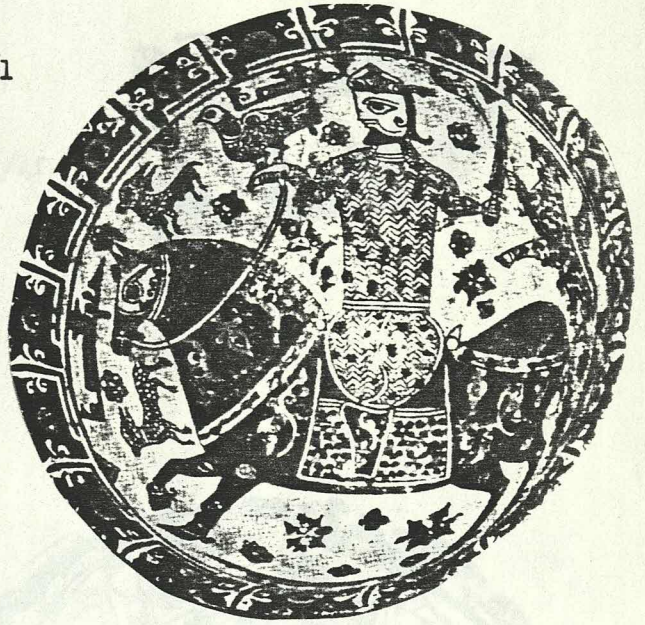
w86  
J(a)/1f

w90  
M/7f

ANIMATE BUFF WARE

FROM OTHER SOURCES

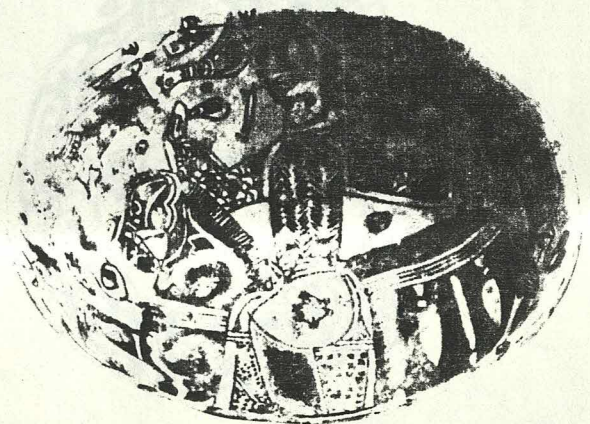
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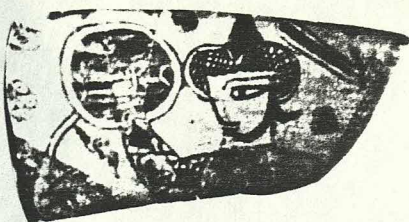
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A/(a)/2



o3  
A(a)/3



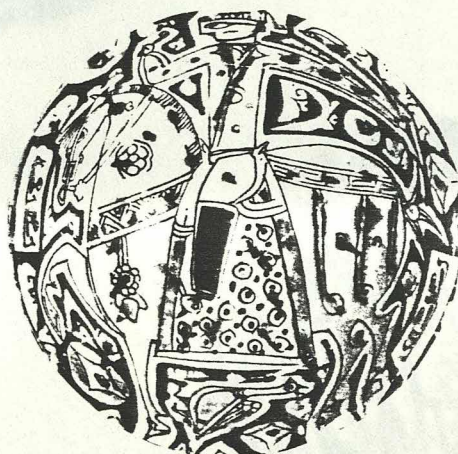
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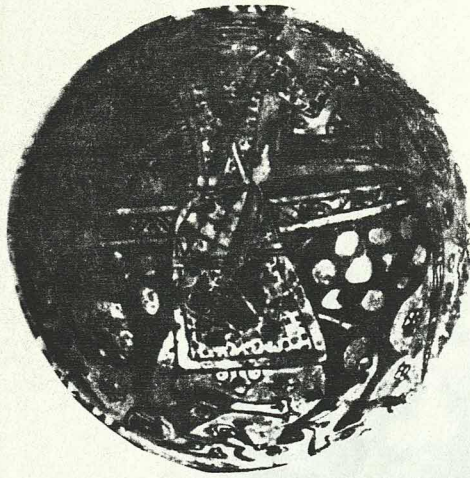


o5  
A(b)/1



o6  
A(b)/2

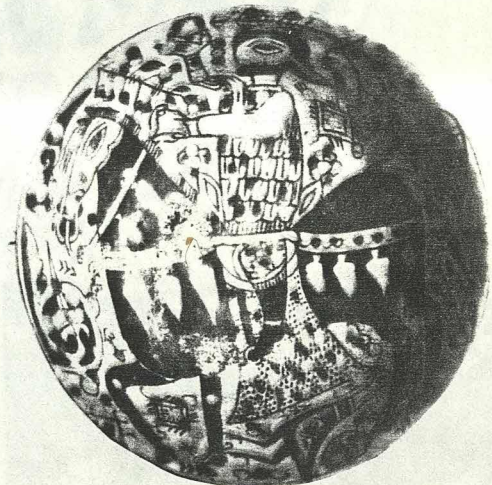




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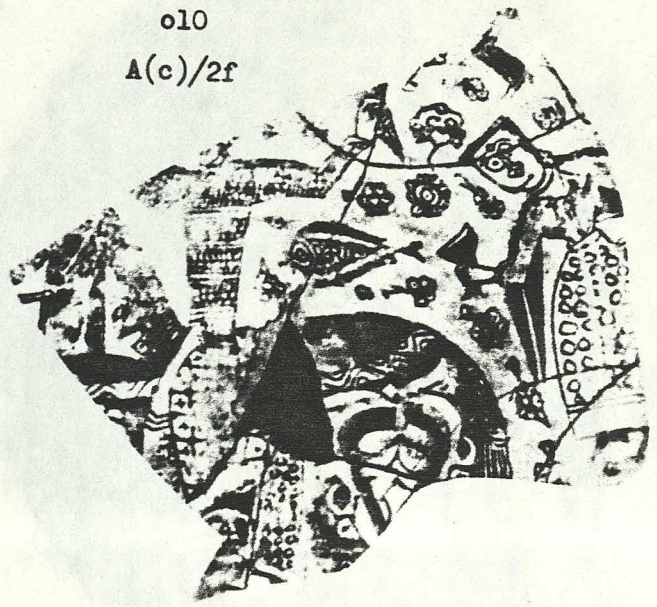


o8  
A(c)/1



o9  
A(d)/1

o10  
A(c)/2f



o11  
A(d)/1



o12  
B(a)/1



o13  
B(a)/2



o14  
B(b)/1



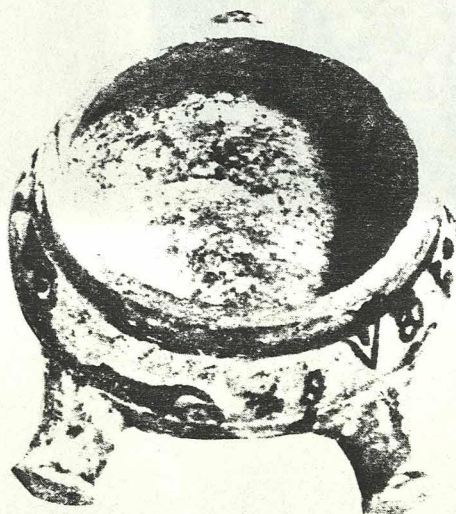
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c/1

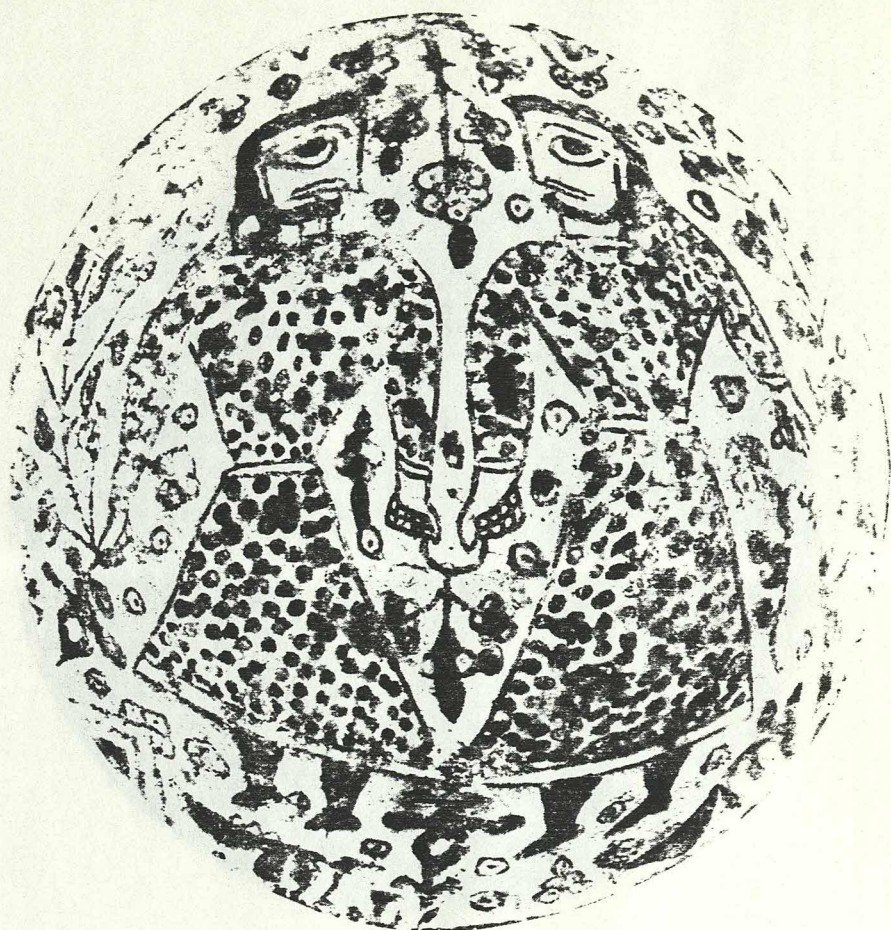


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c/2

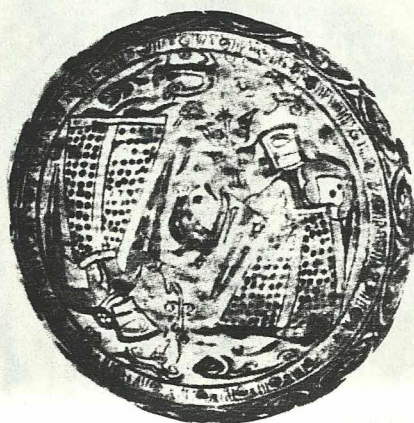


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D/1





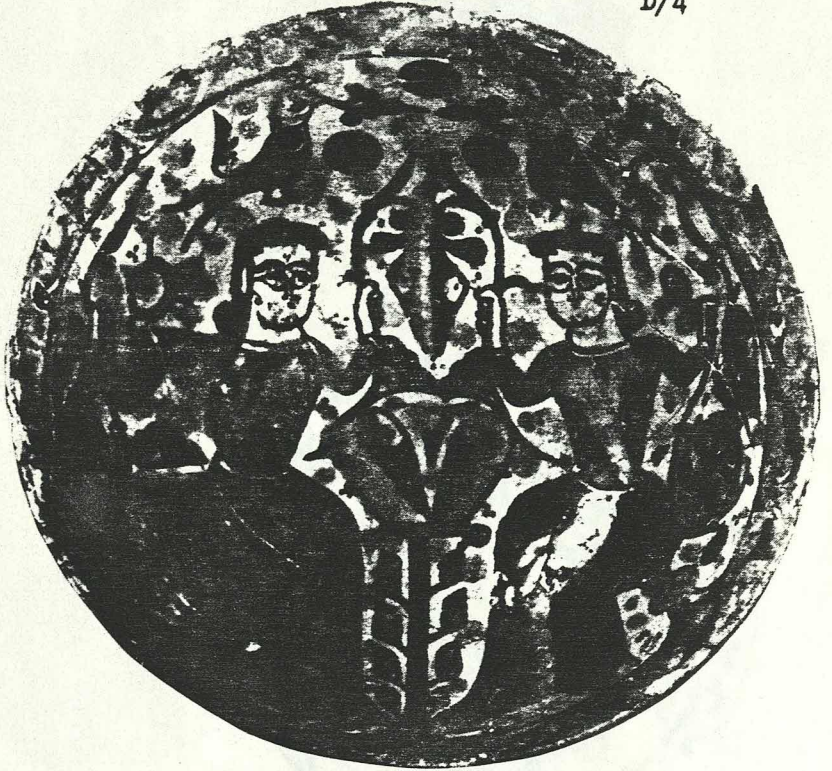
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o19  
D/3

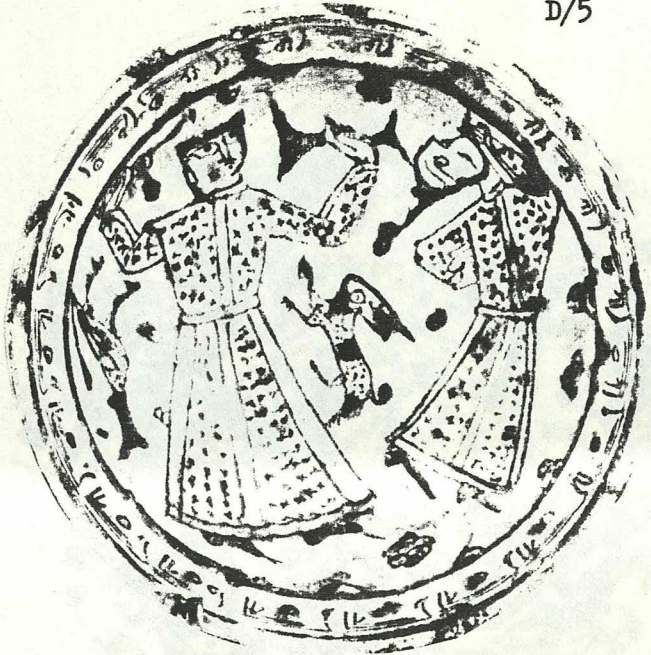
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D/4



o21

D/5



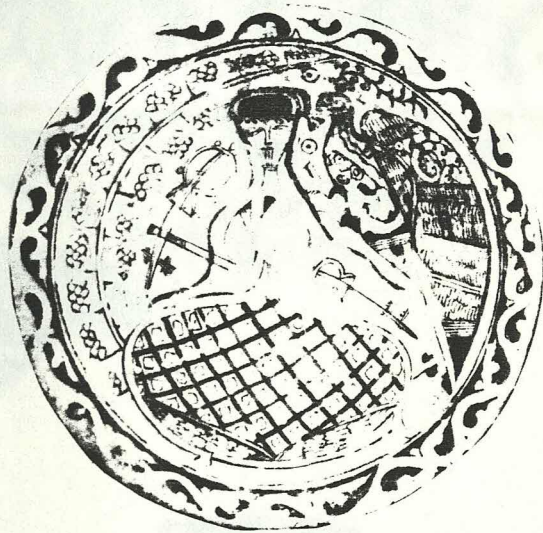
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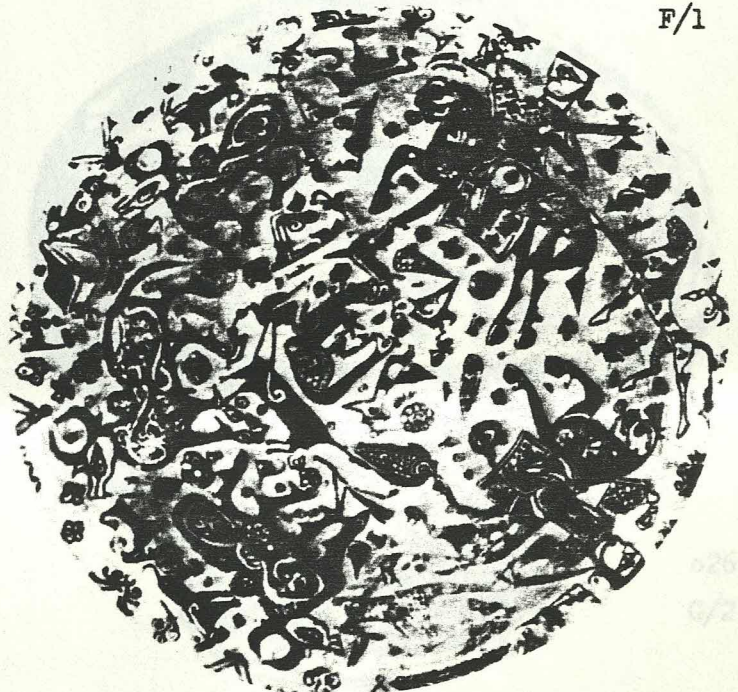
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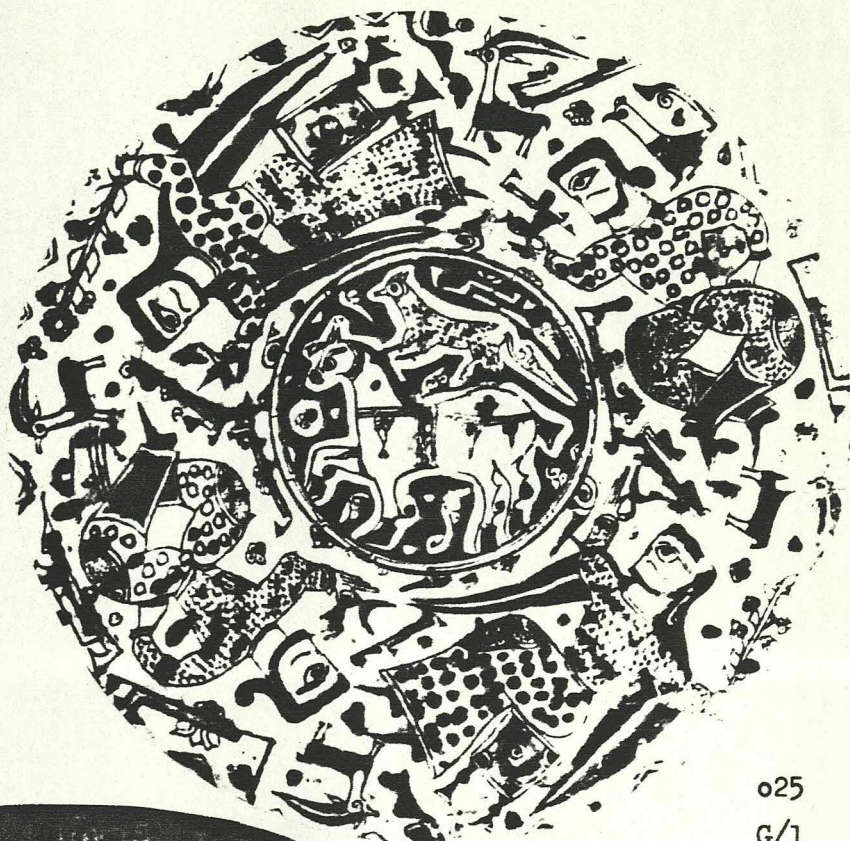
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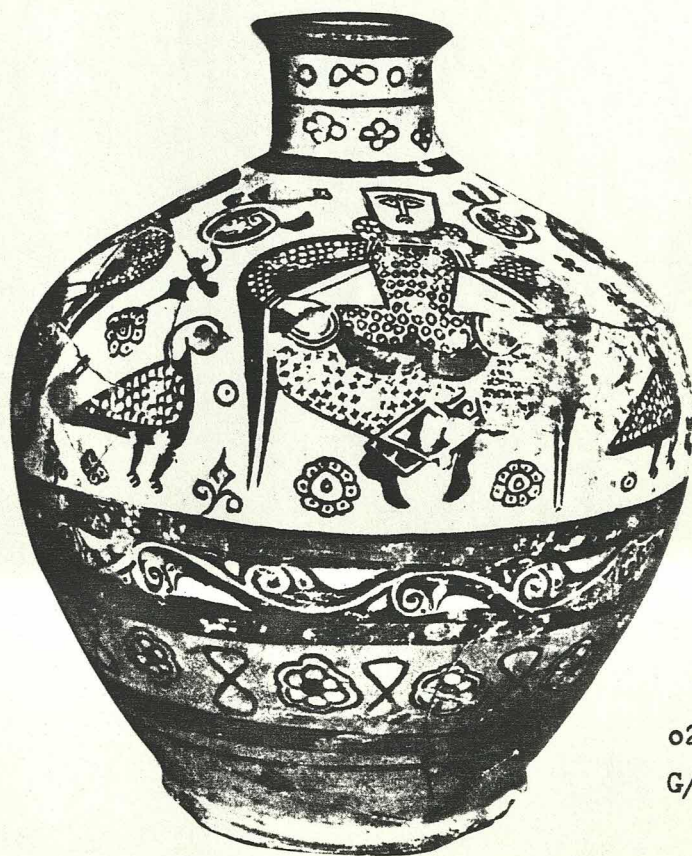
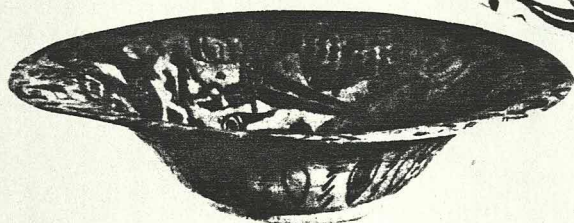
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o25

G/1



o26

G/2

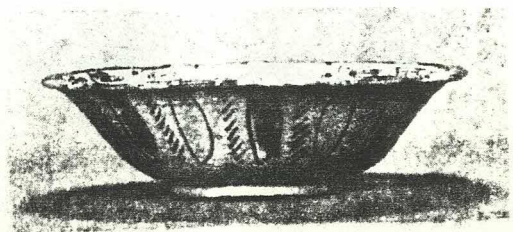
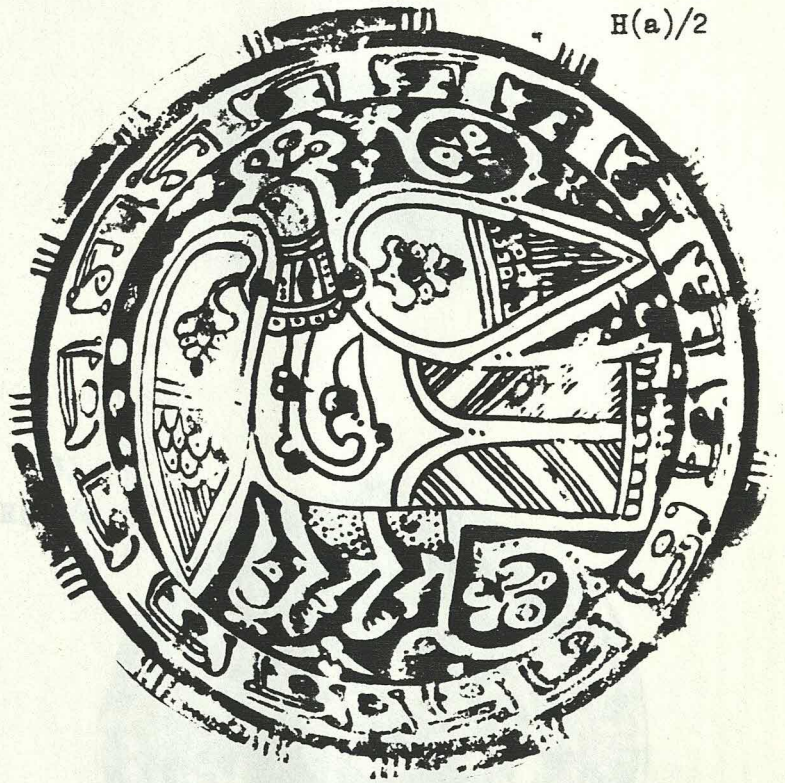
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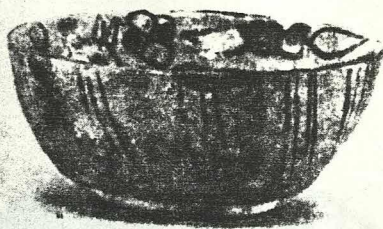
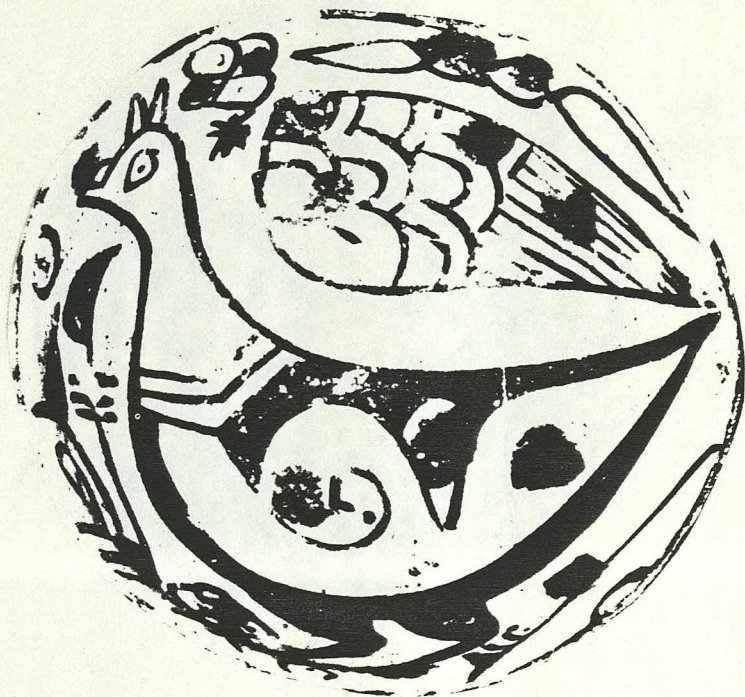
o28  
H(a)/1



o29  
H(a)/2



o30  
H(a)/3



o31  
H(a)/4



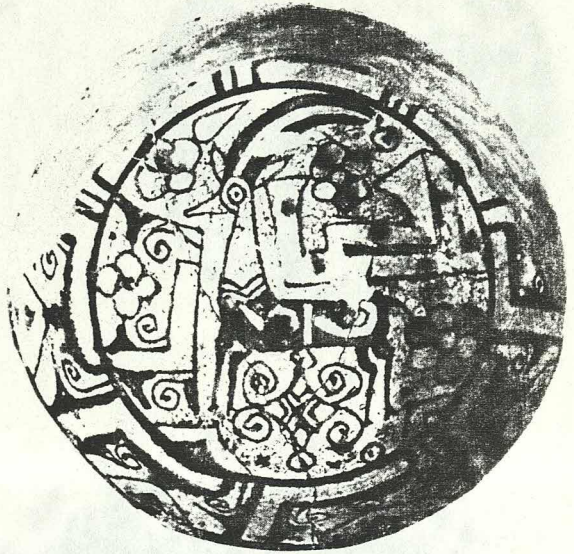


o32  
H(b)/1



o33  
H(b)/2

o34  
H(b)/3



o24  
B/1

o35  
H(c)/1



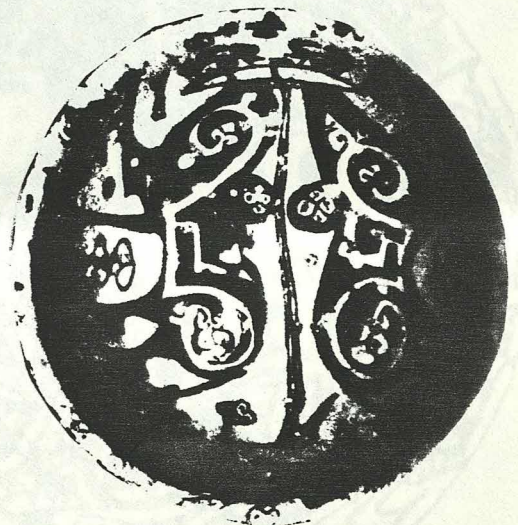
o36  
I/1



o24  
F/1



o37  
I/2



o38  
J(a)/1



o39  
J(a)/5



o39  
J(a)/2

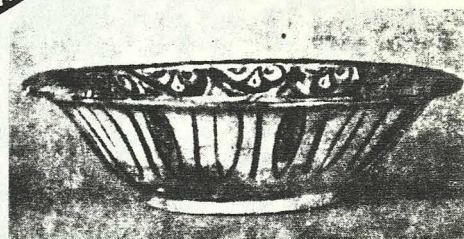
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o41  
J(a)/4

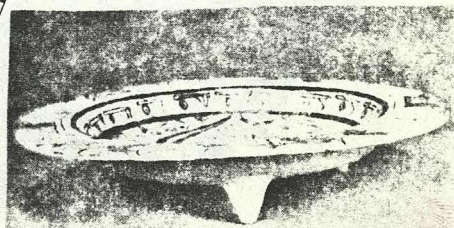
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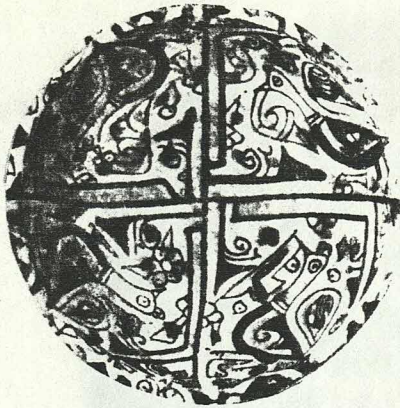


o43  
J(b)/1



o44  
J(b)/2





o45  
K/1



o46  
K/2



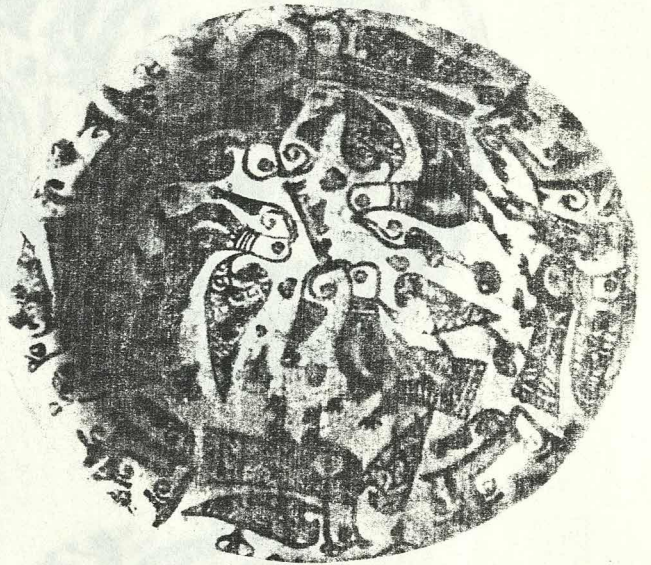
o47  
K/3



048  
K/4



049  
K/5

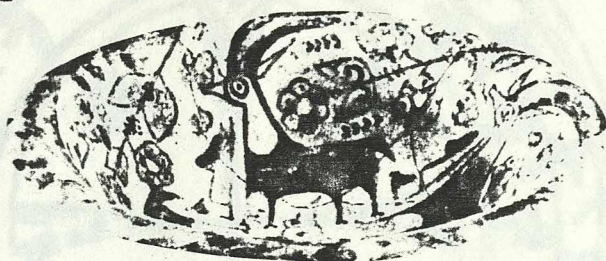


050  
K/6



o51

L/1



o52

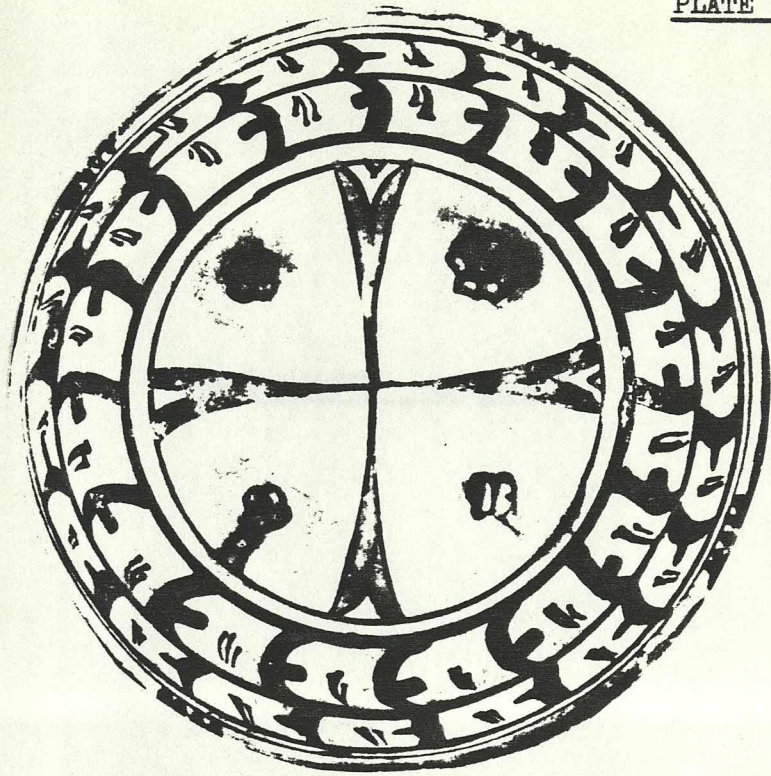
M/1



o53

M/2



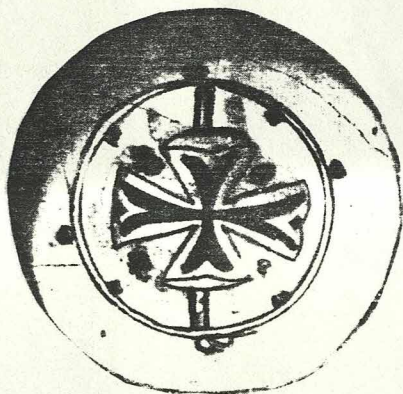
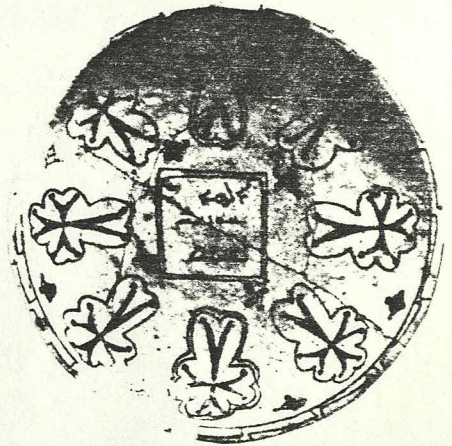
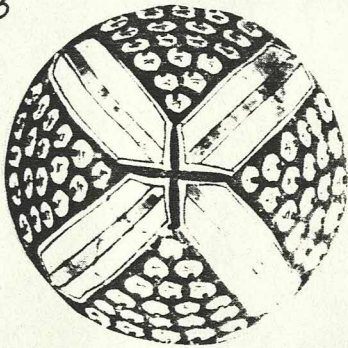


o54  
N/1

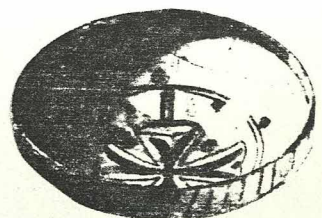


o55  
N/2

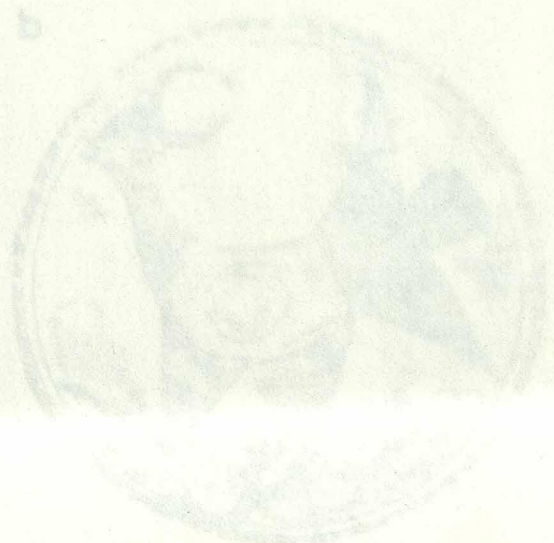
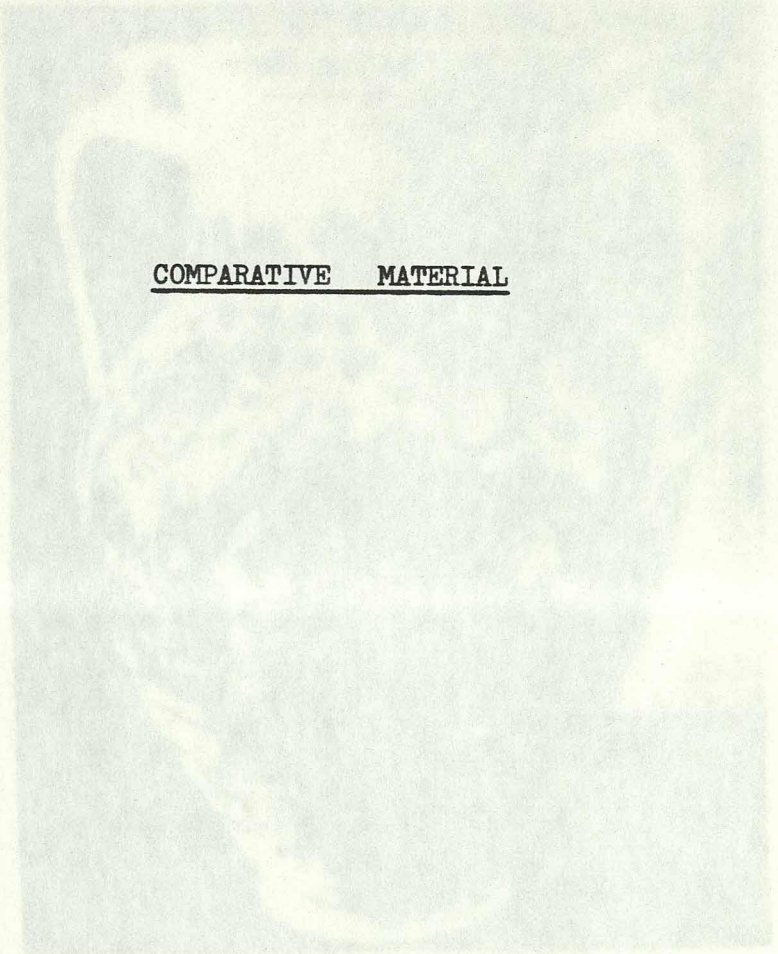
o56  
N/3



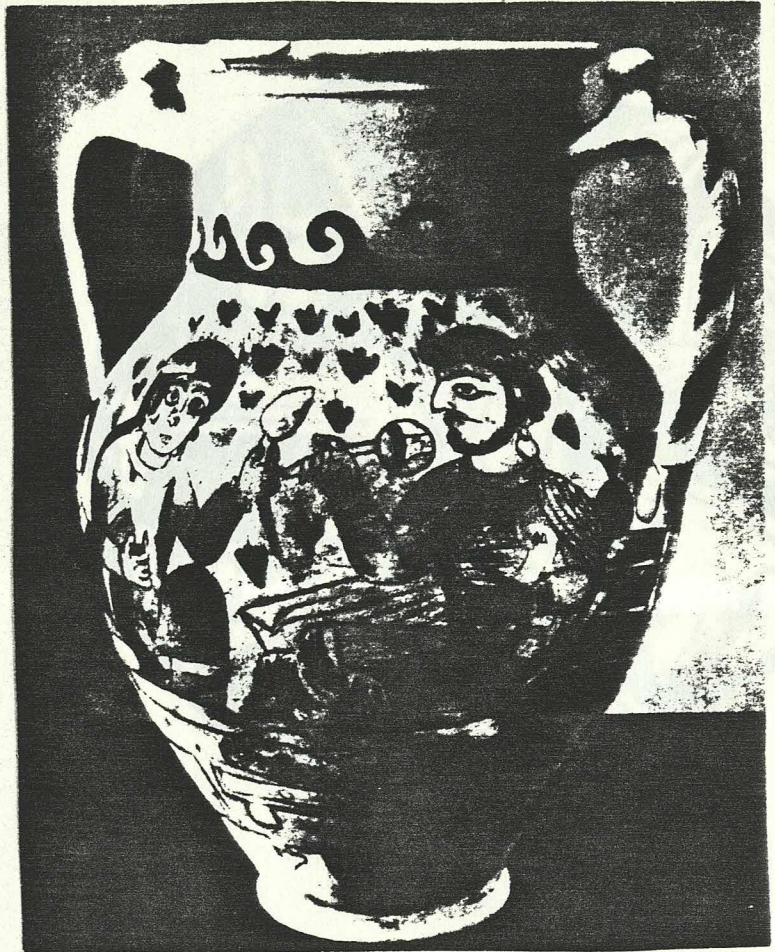
o57  
N/4



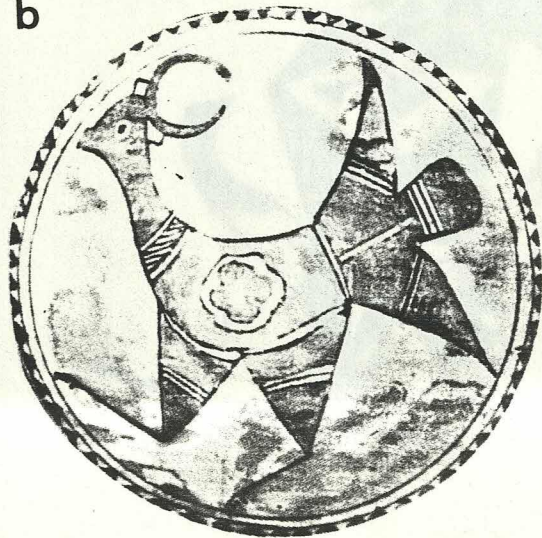
COMPARATIVE MATERIAL



a



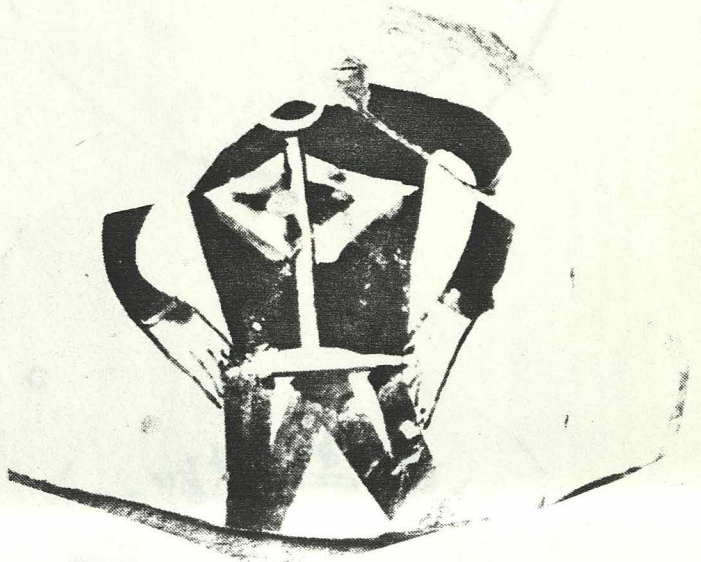
b



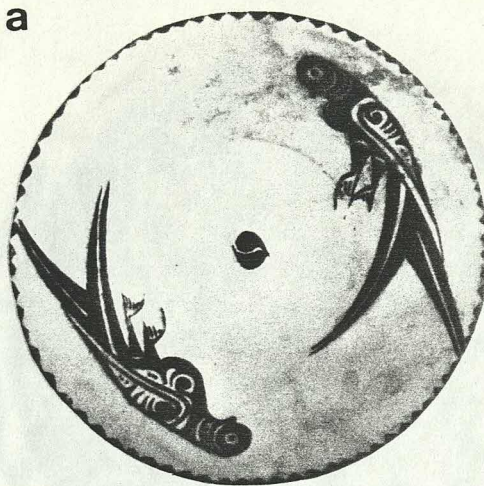
a



b



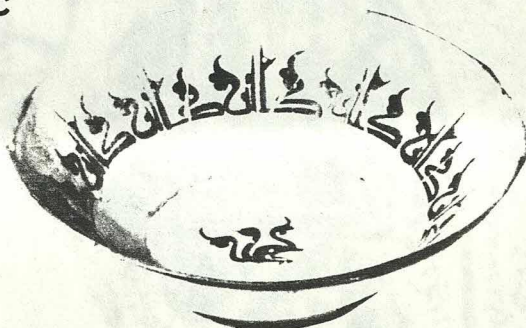
a



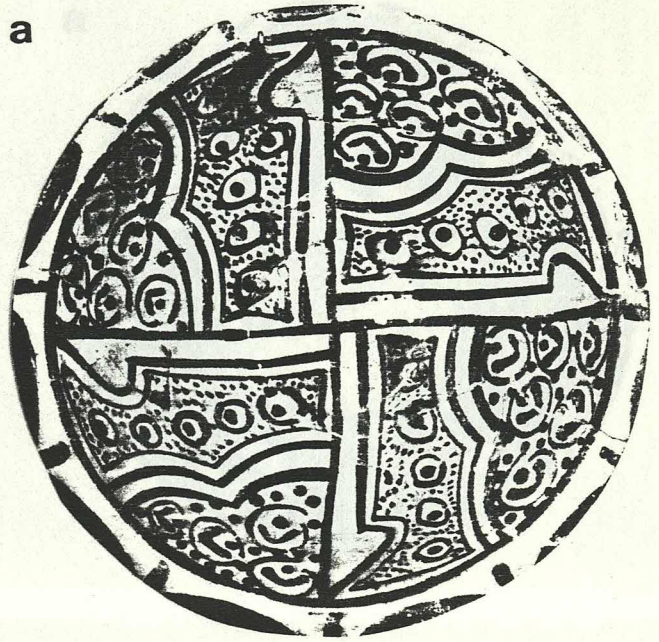
b



c



a

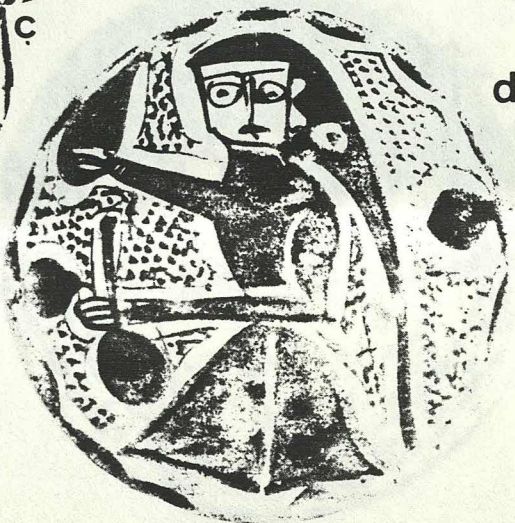


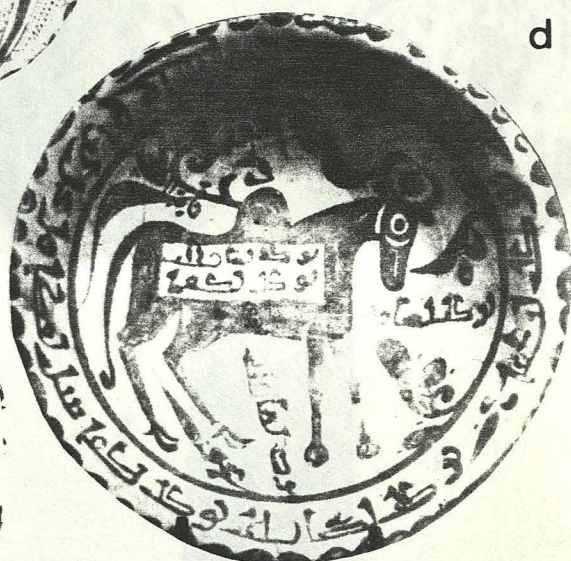
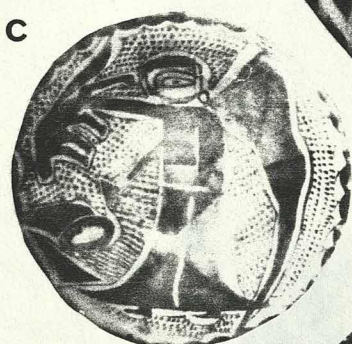
b



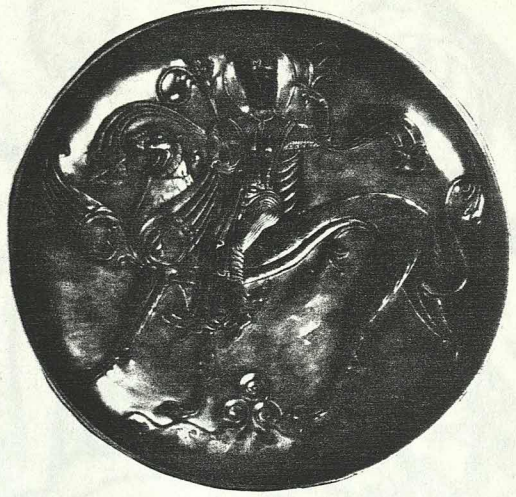
c

d





a



b



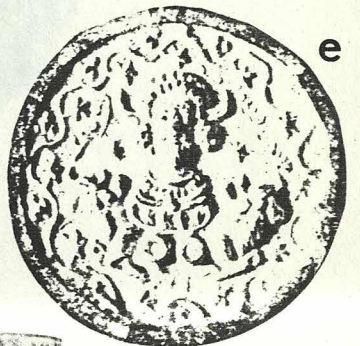
c



d



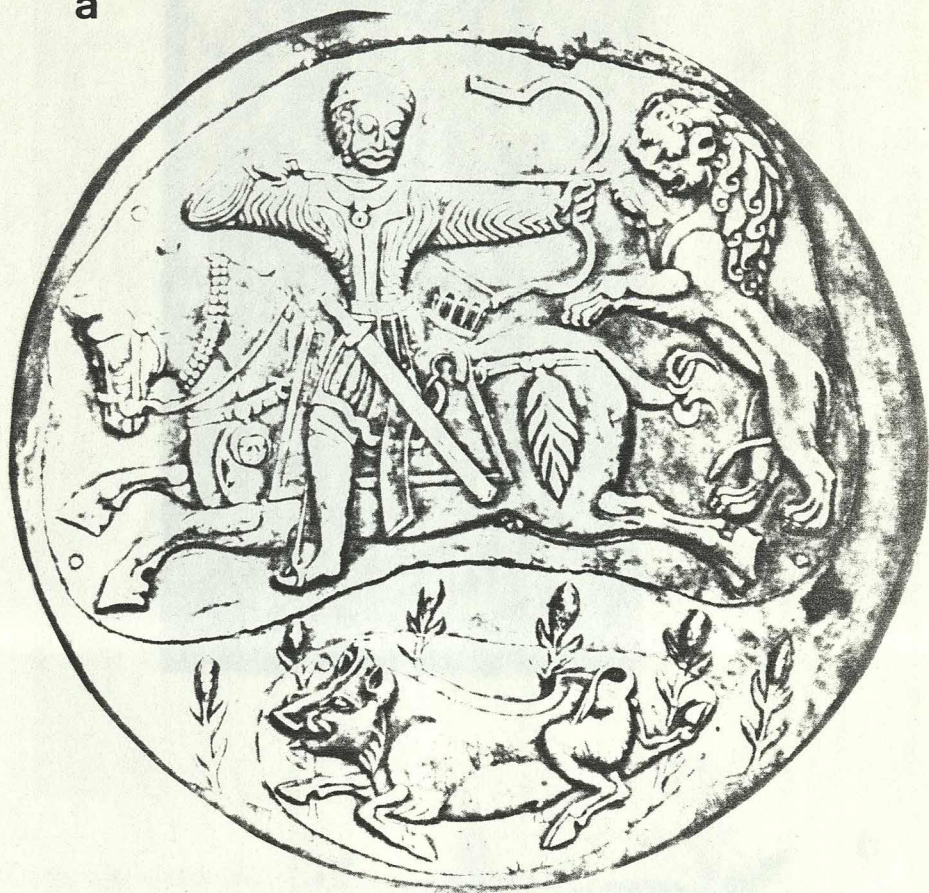
e



f



a

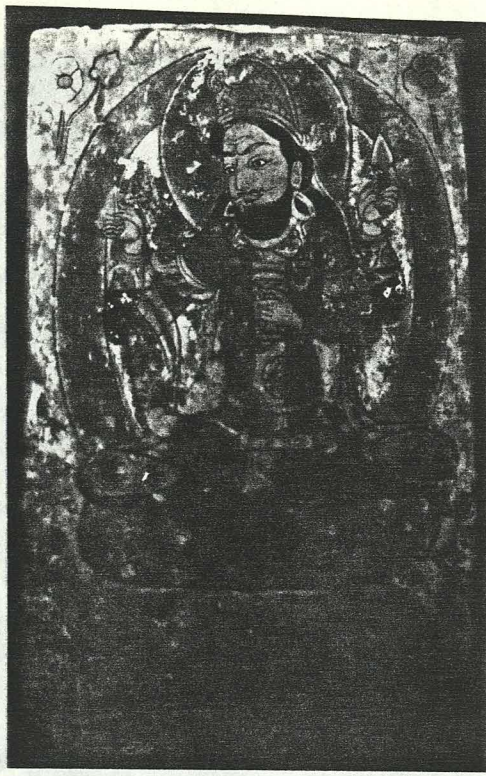


b

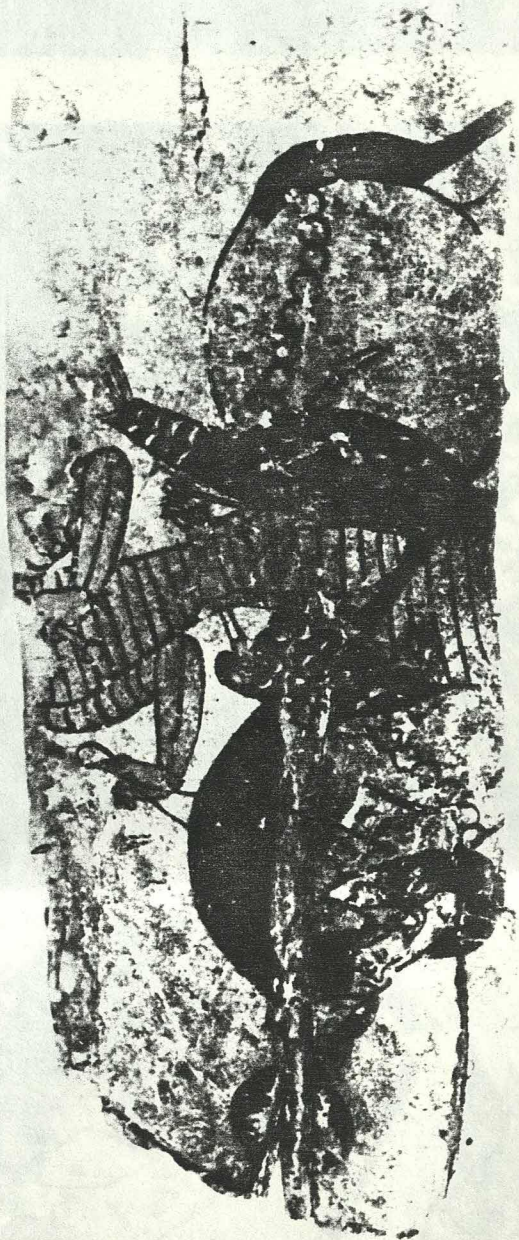


c





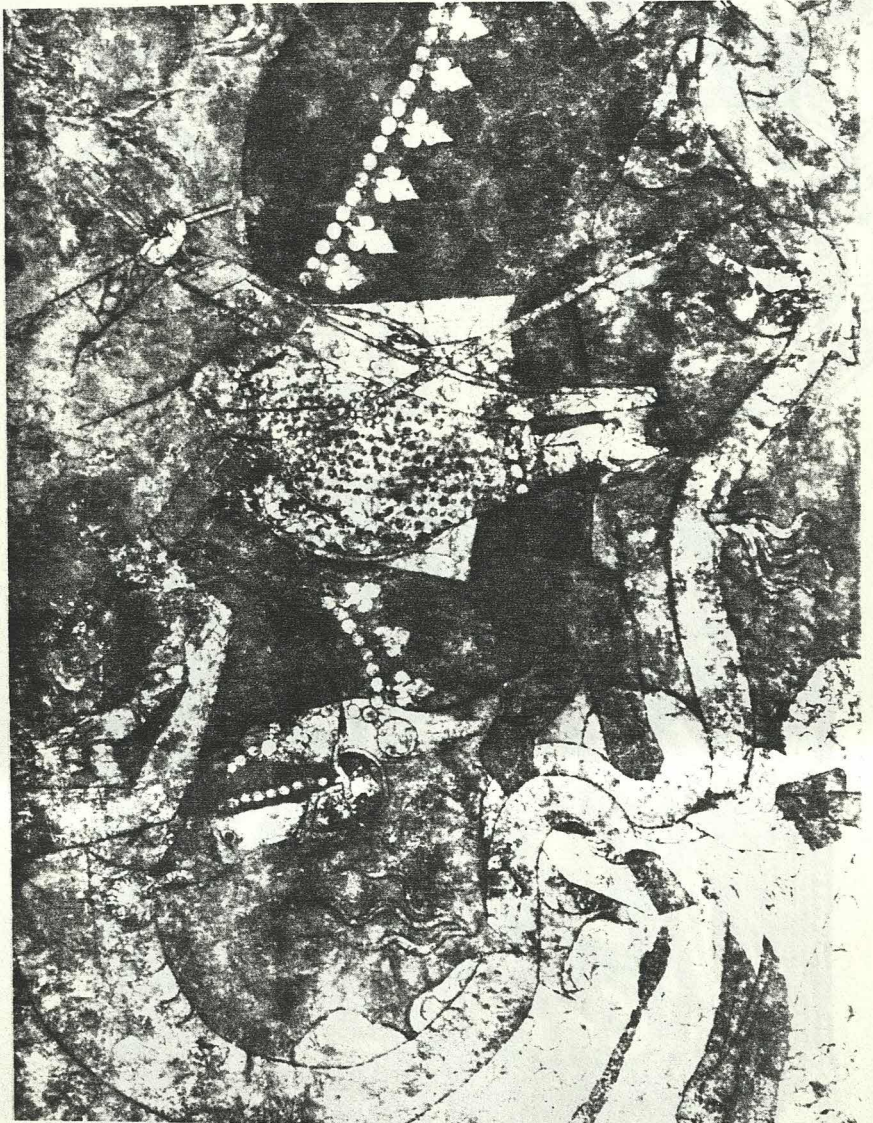
a



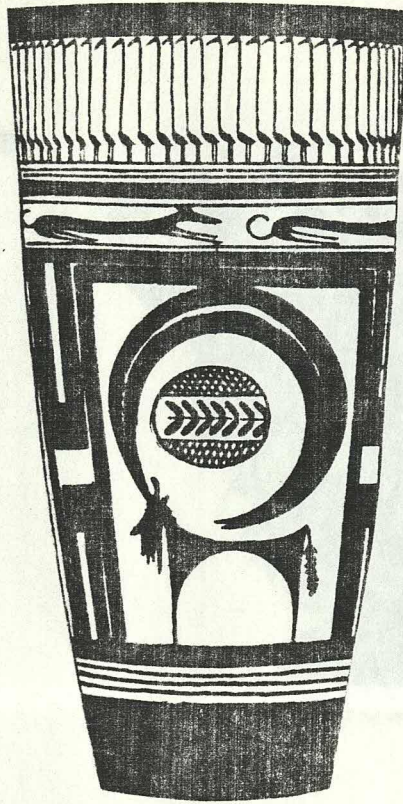
b



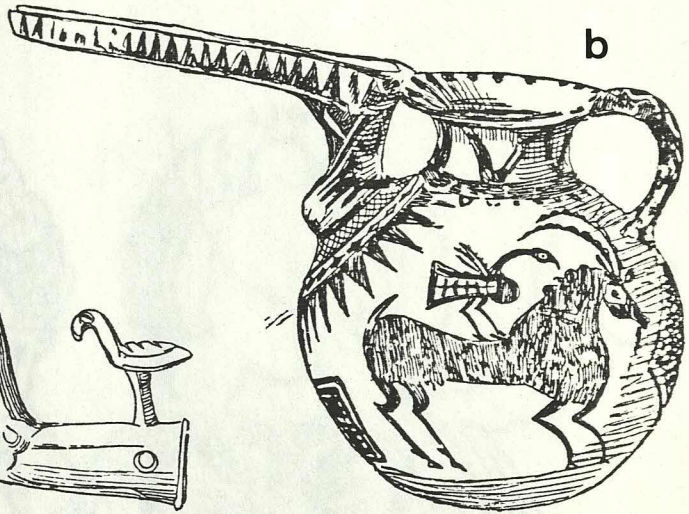
b



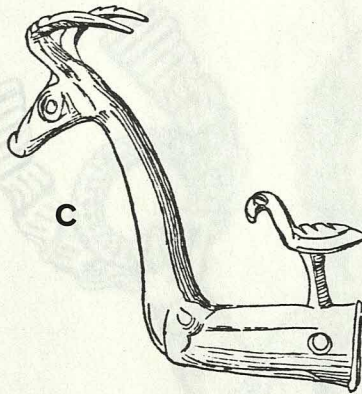
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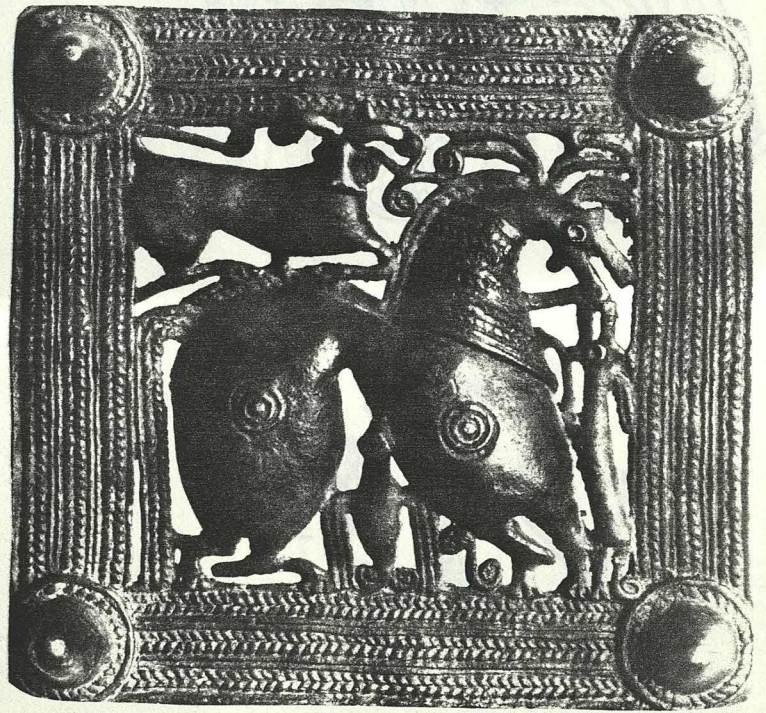
b



c



d

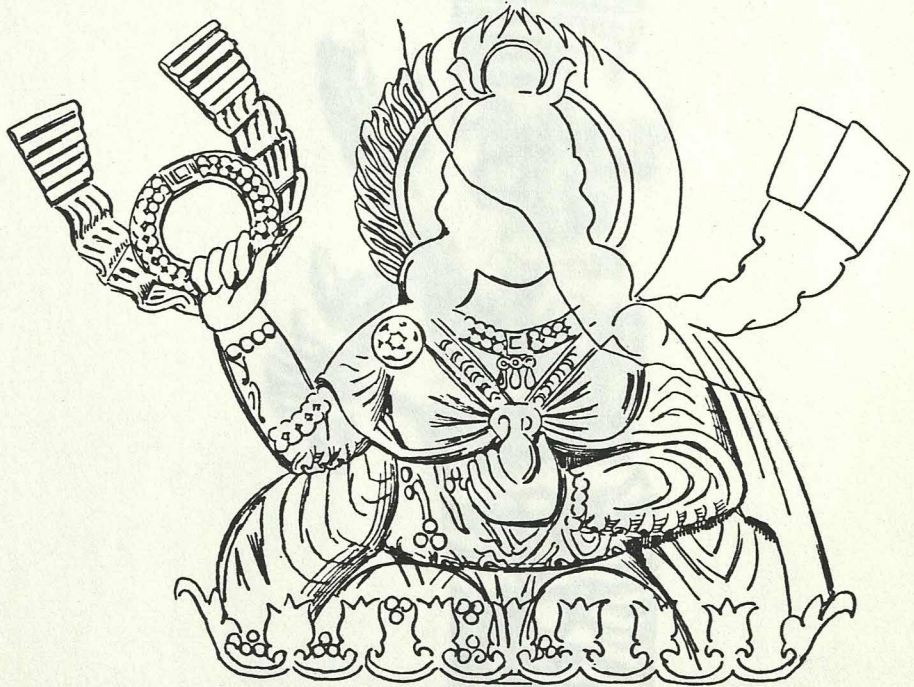


a

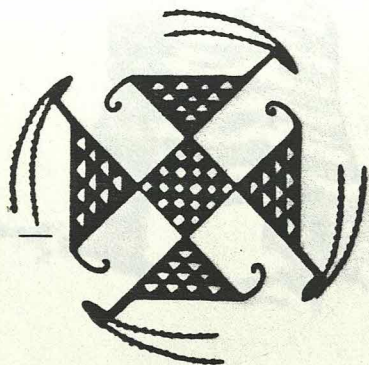


A. Found goblet. H. 74 in. (18.5 cm.)

b



c



a



b



a



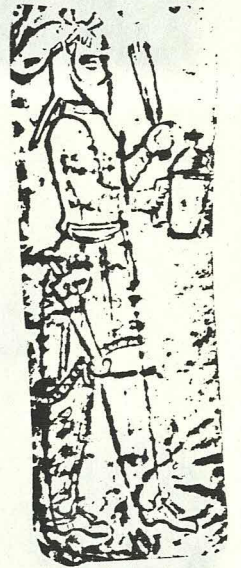
b



c



d



e



f



a



b



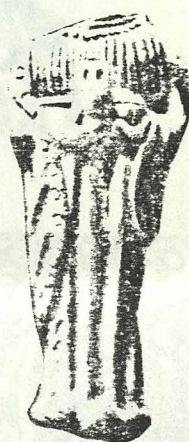
c

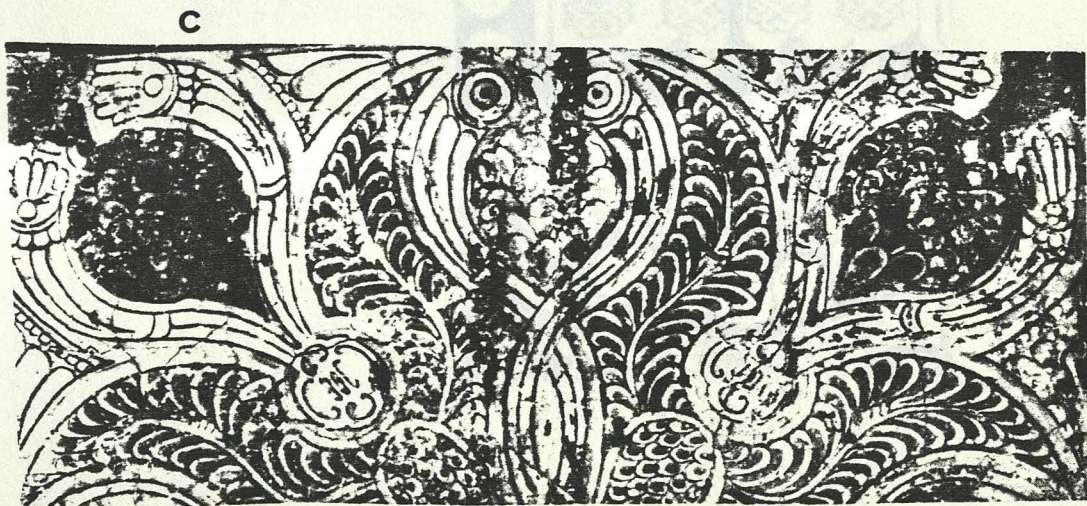
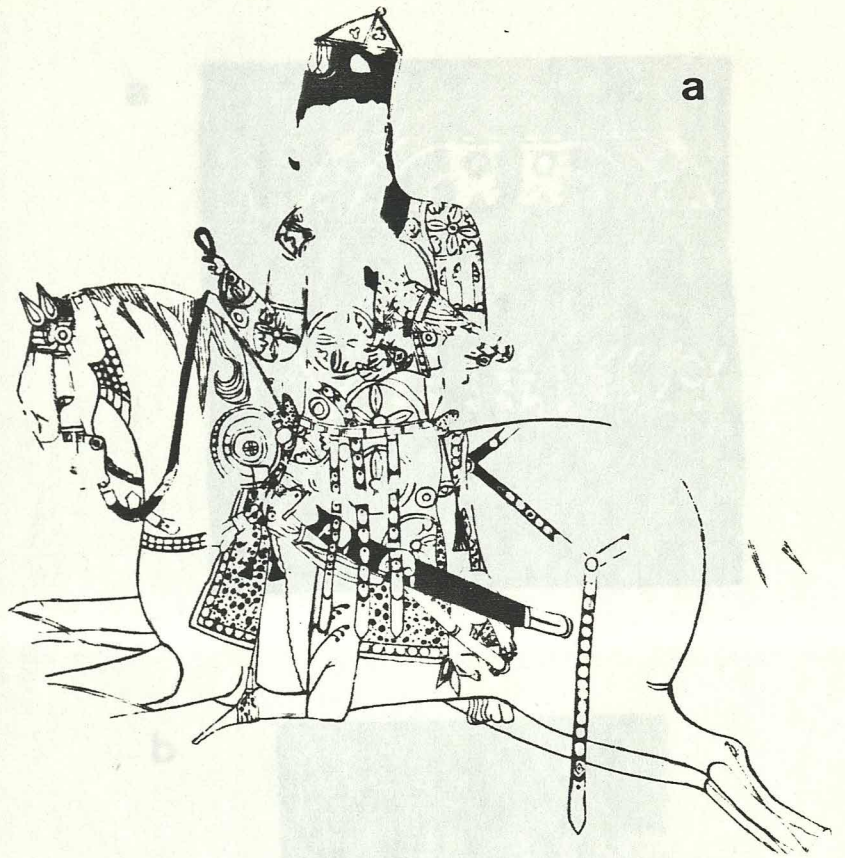


d

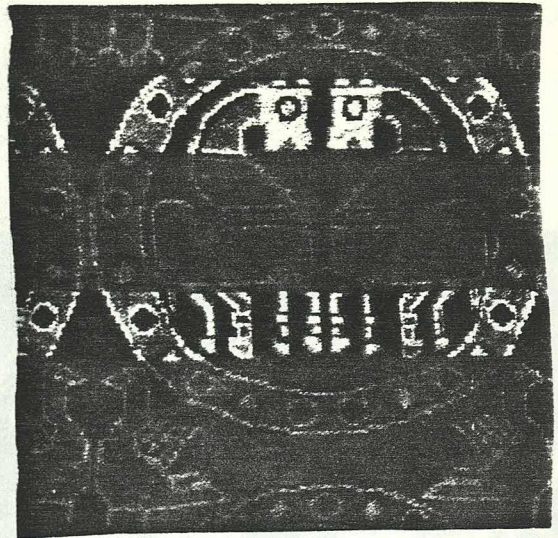


e

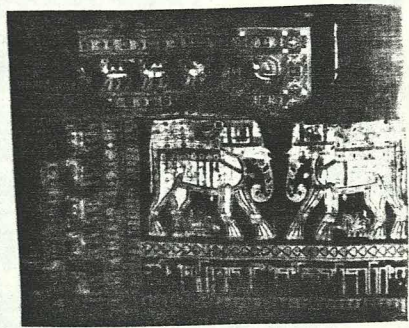




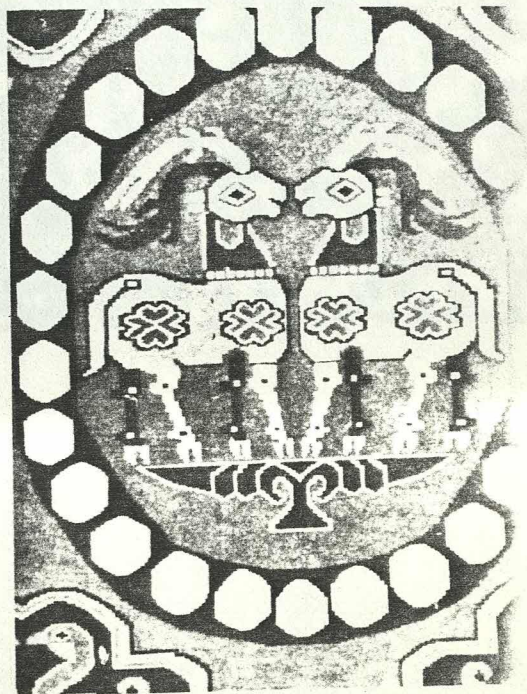
a



b

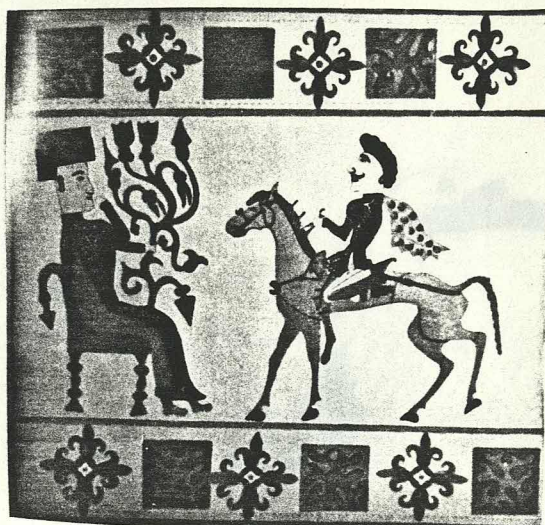


c

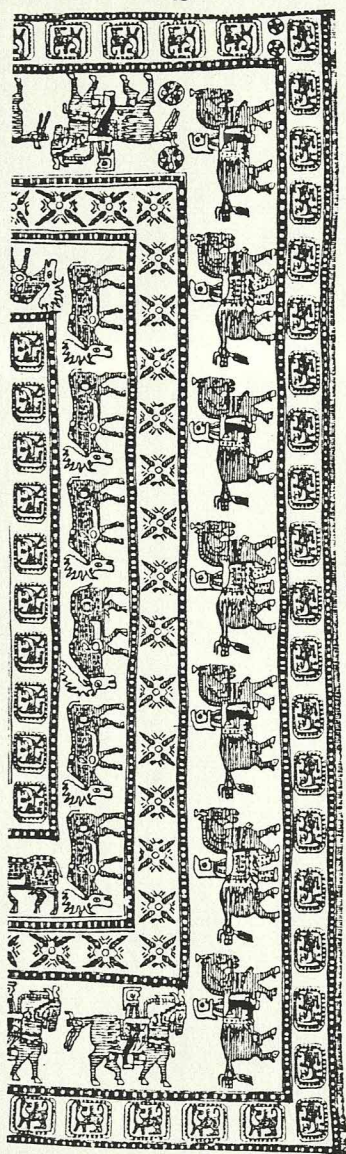




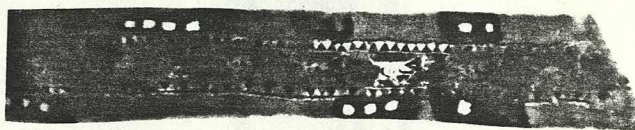
a



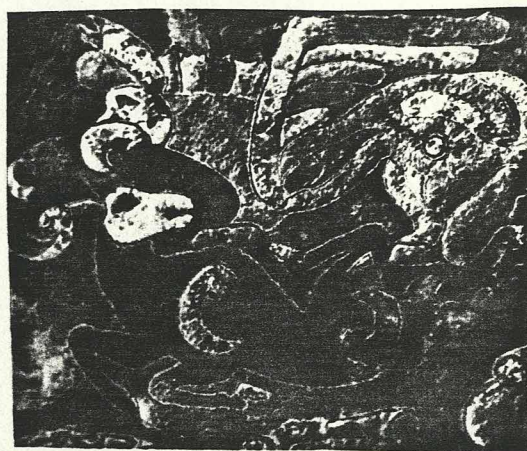
b



c



d



e

