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## Persian Metalwork in Bosnia: a Brief Introduction to the Objects and History of the Collection of the Regional Museum, Sarajevo

Metalwork produced outside Europe plays but a marginal role in the artistic heritage of the Balkan Peninsula. The researching of it is complicated by several factors. Leaving aside the most immediate impediment, namely the limited number of identified and published artefacts from the region, the principal difficulty is the general absence of solid categories in which to accommodate with authoritative certainty local, Persian, Anatolian, Indian, and other types of metal objects. There are also the issues of interaction and imitation. It needs, therefore, to be stated at the outset that this study will use the term 'Persian metalwork' in a rather broad sense, without aiming to define it succinctly, acknowledging also that many metal object types from different periods are still debated within Persian art scholarship.<sup>2</sup> Of course, the farther we are from Iran when trying to trace back an artefact, the more ambiguous the provenance of that artefact becomes. There are several Islamic metalwork groups which have not yet been clearly assigned a place of manufacture; and the question as to whether a locally attested type is the result of import, imitation, or influence has to be raised again and again. Even the very notion of 'Persian' demands caution, as it is by no means a stable category; rather, it reflects the changing character of Persia and the ebb and flow of Iranian cultural influence through history.<sup>2</sup> Still, the pulsating presence or absence in Southeast Europe of supposedly Iranian/Central Asian objects in different periods makes research activity rewarding.

### The Regional Background

In earlier studies by the present author, attempts were made to show that Near Eastern metalwork not only exerted an influence across the Balkans, but was physically present there also, both before and after the Muslim conquest, despite

the fact that Southeast Europe has itself always been an important centre of metallurgy (Szántó 2011; Szántó 2010a; Szántó 2010b). After offering a brief overall survey of the region as a whole, this essay will limit itself to discussing Persian/Central Asian metalwork on the one hand and the Western Balkans on the other. Little research has been conducted on the artistic contacts between the areas in question, but from the wider regional evidence and sporadic local remains, including numismatic finds, it seems that contacts did exist. However, examples of ancient Persian metalwork have been recovered only from the eastern areas of the Balkan Peninsula.

The close affinity between ancient Iranian metalwork and a considerable amount of Thracian goldsmiths' and silversmiths' work has been subject to intense investigation, yet there is very little evidence regarding the geographical origins of the items from Thrace. The splendid hoards from Rogozen, Duvanli, and Borovo in Bulgaria all reveal various degrees of Achaemenid inspiration, as does the treasure from Agighiol in Romania, so much so that certain pieces have been attributed to Iranian workshops (Nieling and Rehm 2010). Examples include the amphora and rhyta from Duvanli mentioned as examples of Achaemenid satrapal art or assigned to Iranian court workshops.<sup>3</sup>

Notwithstanding its much-debated attribution, the Thracian metalwork heritage of Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece leaves little doubt regarding lively contacts between Achaemenid Iran and ancient Southeast Europe unparalleled in later history. Never again would Southeast European metalwork come as close to the art of Western Asia as it did during the Old Persian period when, from approximately the late 6th to at least the mid-5th century B.C.E., the two areas were united in an ecumene. Although with the decline of the Achaemenid Empire this common artistic language dissipated once and for all, the circulation of goldsmiths' and silversmiths' works did not cease, even if contacts were on a lower level during the Parthian, Sasanian, and Early Islamic periods. Sporadic finds show that the difficulties in ascribing these late antique and early medieval objects to a particular locale remain the same,<sup>4</sup> and this ambiguity continues well into the Islamic period.<sup>5</sup>

With the disintegration of mediaeval Iranian statehood in the 1220s, the subsequent emergence of the Mamluk and Ottoman sultanates, and the increasing economic independence of Central and Southern Europe, direct contacts began to decline. From the late 14th century, the Ottoman Empire came to be the equivalent of the Achaemenid Empire in terms of trans-regional trade, although it effectively blocked trading contacts with Iran itself. From then on up to the modern period, Balkan metalwork received a strong Ottoman imprint (and a less pronounced Mamluk one): again, the analogy with the Achaemenid

period is instructive.<sup>6</sup> One significant difference is that now a great number of objects bore workshop marks and dates which were far more accurate than those on ancient metalwork, thus providing a more convenient basis for regional attribution. Serbian, Bosnian, and Bulgarian mines and metalworking centres can now be associated with objects, and there is little doubt that some of these centres were already active back in the Achaemenid period (Avdev 2005: 23–70). Nevertheless, our present knowledge does not permit the establishing of long chronological sequences of extant objects which originate from the same centre. At the same time, the active presence of Greek, Armenian, and Georgian<sup>7</sup> metalworkers throughout the Balkan Peninsula, Anatolia, and even Persia contributed to the spread of similar technologies and a unified formal language; this led to new ambiguities.<sup>8</sup>

During the 19th century, a fresh surge in collecting activity could be seen throughout the region. Islamic metal objects, Persian ones included, constituted an important facet of newly-established museums of applied arts. In the late 19th century, the main impetus for the collecting of Islamic artworks came from industrial development on the one hand and the appearance of social sciences, including anthropology and ethnography, on the other. This was reflected in the establishment of arts and crafts museums and ethnographic collections in Vienna, Budapest, Zagreb, Belgrade, and elsewhere.<sup>9</sup>

In the 1890s, late medieval and modern Persian metalwork was acquired in great quantity by various museums in Vienna and Budapest; some of this was later distributed in regional centres from Prague to Sarajevo. Private collectors and institutions in Vienna, Budapest, Prague, and Brno created appreciable assemblages of Iranian brass, copper, and steel artefacts which can be now conveniently examined in recent catalogues or books (Karl 2011; Szántó and Sahranavard 2010; Szántó 2012; Dvořáková 2011). In Zagreb, the Museum of Ethnography and the Museum of Arts and Crafts possess small collections of Islamic metalwork that have yet to be written up; the Perso-Islamic metal objects at the privately-owned Mimara Museum were catalogued not long ago (Japundžić and Čukman-Nikolić 2011). In Romania, rich Phanariot families began collecting Islamic metalwork in the late 18th century and artefacts they acquired form the basis of the Islamic section at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Bucharest (the section was founded in 1954). This still lacks a complete catalogue and there are indeed other collections outside the Romanian capital which preserve examples of Persian metalwork.<sup>10</sup> As for Serbia, the only significant location where Iranian metalwork can be found is the Museum of Applied Arts in Belgrade. Compared to similar museums in Austria–Hungary, the Zagreb one included, this institution is a latecomer, having been founded in 1950. Even



**Fig. 1.** Large tinned copper cauldron, Eastern Iran, 17th century, Regional Museum, Sarajevo, 7980/III. (Photograph by Iván Szántó, with the permission of the Regional Museum)



**Fig. 2.** Copper jug with inlaid and engraved decoration, Iran, 16th century, Regional Museum, Sarajevo, 7018/III. (Photograph by Iván Szántó, with the permission of the Regional Museum)

so, its interesting Persian metal collection warrants further investigation in relation to our subject, as some of the material may have come from Bosnia.<sup>11</sup>

Some countries, including Croatia, Serbia, and Romania, adopted a West European collecting policy whereby Islamic art was collected on grounds of interest in the cultural heritage of the East at the time of the latter's gradual integration into the West. Islamic objects in these countries served to remind the viewer that displayer and displayed belonged to entirely different levels of social development. In the case of Bosnia, however, a forced 'reorientation' took place which was driven through by the Austro-Hungarian colonisers of the country.<sup>12</sup> Whereas Serbia and Romania, through their museums, displayed their return to the European fold, the administration in Bosnia, at least during the late 19th century, aimed only to de-Ottomanise the country without de-Islamising it. Contemporary ideologists attempted to re-create Bosnia as a society that was predominantly Muslim but not Ottoman, and in this process Persian art – then the most highly valued branch of Islamic art – was given a leading role (Szántó 2013).<sup>13</sup>

There is no space here to delve into the contemporary debates about Persian influence on local art (Szántó 2013), but in light of these we should not be surprised to find in Bosnia-Herzegovina the most significant collection of Persian and Central Asian metalwork in the entire Balkans outside Greece.<sup>14</sup> In

what follows, a few interesting and virtually unknown examples will be singled out from the collection of the Regional Museum of Sarajevo, after which a brief account of their provenance will be given.<sup>15</sup>

### Selected Objects from the Collection

Perhaps the most monumental vessel is a large tinned copper cauldron with engraved and inlaid decoration (fig. 1).<sup>16</sup> Similar but undecorated cauldrons are still in use today in Central Asia and Pakistan as cooking vessels. The globular body displays an alternating pattern made of vertical strokes with two kinds of design; these and the subsidiary decorations are distributed in horizontal bands. The neck features intersecting medallions, while the upper face of the rim contains a Persian quatrain (about the boiling tears of tormented love) and an owner's mark (of Abu'l-Qasim b. Muhammad Qasim) written in *nasta'liq*.<sup>17</sup>

A related object is a tinned copper bowl likewise displaying Persian poetry, written in cartouches below the rim.<sup>18</sup> The body is densely covered by foliage against a hatched background. Neither of the two objects is dated, but both can be assigned to the 18th century. Another undated, but certainly earlier, vessel is a cast and turned jug with engraved and inlaid decoration; its lid is lost (fig. 2).<sup>19</sup> This badly worn object contains poetic inscriptions on the neck and body, interwoven with an overall floral pattern. The type belongs to a group which was popular throughout the Timurid period until the early Safavids. Its inscription in *thulth* script, promising eternal life to whoever drinks from the jug, can be

**Fig. 3.** Copper tray with inlaid and engraved decoration, Iran, 19th century, Regional Museum, Sarajevo, 6977/III. (Photograph by Iván Szántó, with the permission of the Regional Museum)





Fig. 4. Copper ewer with inlaid and engraved decoration, Iran, 19th century, Regional Museum, Sarajevo, 7556/III. (Photograph by Iván Szántó, with the permission of the Regional Museum)

partially identified on at least one similar vessel, a piece preserved in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.<sup>20</sup>

A special category of later Persian metalwork consists of brass wares with figural engravings (figs. 3 and 4). The Persian term for this technique is *hakkaki*. Usually, the decoration of these objects fills the entire available space with sharply drawn figures which seem to emerge straight from the metalworker's imagination and not from any literary source. In Sarajevo, we find, among other artefacts, a quatrefoil-shaped tray (*khwan*) with a procession of beasts around the rim. Twelve roundels in the centre contain hunting scenes and combat images between fabulous creatures.<sup>21</sup> At least three more items, among them a globular-shaped lidded container (*quti*)<sup>22</sup> and two copper ewers (*aftabe*), belong to the same category, although in technical perfection the pieces specified are unequal.

The container and the first of the ewers display profuse decoration consisting of huntsmen and beasts amidst flowers and polygons, while the second ewer presents a rather coarse series of demons and monsters.<sup>23</sup>

Lastly, an inlaid copper box (*dorj*) with etched relief work may be mentioned to demonstrate the rich variety of Persian metal artefacts in Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>24</sup>

## The Collectors

According to the handwritten inventory of the Regional Museum of Sarajevo, the majority of these objects were supplied by partner institutions in Vienna and Budapest. Chief among the contributors was the Office for Affairs of Cottage Industry and Craftsmanship in Bosnia-Herzegovina (*Büro für die Angelegenheiten des Haus-, und Kunstgewerbes in Bosnien und Herzegovina*), which donated a total of approximately fifty objects, including Timurid, Safavid, and Qajar vessels, between the 1890s and the outbreak of the First World War. At least a dozen additional items were acquired from Budapest at the end of 1896 follow-

ing the closure of Hungary's Millennial Exposition. As shown above, these artefacts mainly consisted of copperware which could have originated from anywhere between Iran and the Deccan. Although, as we have seen, Timurid and Safavid items occur in the collection, the vast majority of the objects represent more recent times (the 18th and 19th centuries); also, it seems that historical value played no role in their inclusion: quality and variety were the criteria when the collection was formed. It also appears that local collectors and dealers – among them Avdaga Bojadžić – played a very limited role in the creation of the collection.<sup>25</sup>

Baron Béla Rakovszky (1860–1916), a Hungarian, can be identified as the collector of what might be the largest group of objects. While Rakovszky's name does not appear in the inventories, his role can be established, since it is known that the Bosnian administration sent him to Persia and Central Asia in 1894 to collect works of art (Szántó 2013). Unfortunately, he neglected to provide sufficient details of his collecting activity. In many cases, it is impossible to ascertain the exact place of acquisition of an object collected by him; indeed, we often cannot verify whether the collector of a given object was Rakovszky or someone else. Thus, while most, if not all, of the objects from Budapest may have been collected by him, no metalwork of Viennese provenance can be safely linked to Rakovszky. Possibly most of the last-mentioned group of artefacts was given out from the reserve collection of the Museum für Kunst und Industrie, although it may well be that ultimately some of these objects came from the Central Asian expedition undertaken by Rakovszky between the summer of 1894 and October 1895.

A career diplomat, Béla Rakovszky had worked in the Austro-Hungarian consular service since 1885.<sup>26</sup> Between 1888 and 1892, he was at the Tehran consulate as vice-consul and *chargé d'affaires*, before being appointed in 1892 to the Bosnian administration under Benjámín Kállay (1839–1903). Some of his reports from Tehran have survived (those that are extant are from the period 1888–1890), but the files of the consulate are, to the best of my knowledge, now lost. Although we cannot say whether he started collecting during his time in Tehran, it is clear that his compatriot Albert Eperjessy, the Austro-Hungarian consul in 1895, amassed a small Persian collection, some items of which have survived.<sup>27</sup> It appears, furthermore, that Rakovszky was in Sarajevo for about a year, from late 1892 (Szántó 2013). It was because of his local expertise regarding the Near East that Benjámín Kállay, the governor and chief ideologist of Bosnia, selected him to lead a scientific expedition to Central Asia and Persia in 1895. Kállay envisaged the putting together of a study collection of Islamic art specially designed to foster Bosnian craftsmanship. He believed that Oriental arts and crafts were needed to set the skills of Bosnian craftspeople in motion

on the long road towards national industry. Persian art – an idealised and mystified concept in the late 19th century – was seen as the natural starting point for the visual re-positioning of Bosnian identity. Accordingly, a workshop was set up whose products would appear on the Austro-Hungarian market with success. Photographs in the Regional Museum show this workshop in operation with Islamic metalwork displayed as models to emulate, although the objects featuring cannot be identified among Rakovszky's acquisitions.<sup>28</sup> Instead, we can recognise Ottoman vessels, implying that the desired Persian inspiration was more of an abstract idea than a practical goal in an era when the concepts of Persian, Turkish, and Arabic art were still fluid. Before long, the fall of the Austro-Hungarian administration put an end to the entire project and apparently no copy inspired by the Persian originals has survived, at least not in the Regional Museum.

When the collection was born, the now-famous treasures of Agighiol (1931), Borovo (1974), and Rogozen (1985) were still underground and nobody knew that the Balkans had experienced an earlier and much more profound encounter with Persian metalwork during the Achaemenid period. While the collectors' main concern was the quality of the new acquisitions rather than their specified geographic origin, the colonial ideologists of Bosnia instinctively foretold the 20th-century discoveries when they started to import Persian objects, following in the footsteps of the Thracian kings, their predecessors by two thousand years.

*This study was supported by the János Bolyai Research Scholarship Fund of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.*

## Notes

1. For a recent summary of Islamic metalwork, see Allan 2002; for an example of such disputes, see n. 11 below.
2. In this study, 'Persian' is understood as a geographic reference to areas which can be regarded as the core lands of the former Persian or Persianate Empires, e.g. Iran, Iraq, Eastern Anatolia, the Southern Caucasus, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan. In this sense, 'Central Asian' can at times be used synonymously with 'Persian'. Thus, 'Persian' in this discussion is not an ethnic or linguistic marker, but a purely regional one. Conversely, metal objects which were made by Iranian people outside the cultural orbit of Persia are not included in this discussion despite the fact that such objects, e.g. the metalwork of the nomadic Scythians, Sarmatians, and Iazyges, have a continuous presence in East-Central Europe between the 7th century B.C.E. and at least the 4th century C.E. For a historiographical survey of the term 'Persian art', see Kadoi and Szántó 2013: Introduction.



3. See, for instance, Rehm 2010. We may add that Achaemenid metalwork as such has not yet been linked to any particular place of manufacture with certainty. Some Thracian objects, such as rhyta with horse or bovine protome (Nieling and Rehm 2010: 71–74), have their closest parallels from the North Pontic area and Transoxiana. Significantly, all these find-locations, especially Thrace and the Western Pamirs, exhibited significant mining and metallurgical activity, making the attribution of these objects to any one region premature. Furthermore, it should be noted that the different delegations of tribute-bearers on Persepolitan reliefs carry almost invariably ‘Achaemenid-style’ objects regardless of their homeland: this may point to the existence of an international standard which all regional metalworking schools strove to move towards. For the possible Achaemenid usage of metal vessels as bullion, see Zournatzi 2000.
4. A good example of these finds is provided by an electrum cup which was found at Nagyszéksós in Southern Hungary. With its spherical body, pierced to accommodate (now lost) glass insets, it is the closest known parallel to a gold cup with polychrome glass and crystal insets (which include a roundel showing an enthroned figure on the bottom) in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. In light of such finds, the earlier, almost consensual, attribution of this famous gold cup to Sasanian Iran has been challenged and it is now considered to originate from the wider cultural sphere of Western Asia, where nomadic tribesmen like the Hunnic chieftain of Nagyszéksós played a dominant role in the dissemination of artefacts. For a summary, see Kürti 1987. For a discussion of later mediaeval Islamic metalwork in the Balkans based on the evidence of the so-called Tatar Pazarcik hoard, see Ballian and Drandaki 2003.
5. Numerous metal objects of Asian manufacture arrived with immigrants, perhaps outnumbering those which were acquired via regular commerce. The imports were then imitated locally. For instance, a handled bronze mirror of Chinese origin, which was found in a presumed Cuman female burial near Medgyesegyháza, in Southeast Hungary, belongs to a type which was copied in almost industrial quantities throughout the Great Seljuk Empire and elsewhere in Eurasia. See Hatházi and Szende 2003. Although the closest analogies of the Bánkút mirror are Jurchen bronze objects dating from cca. 1200, our example might not be a Far Eastern original, but an East European copy. These moulded metal plates lent themselves well to reproduction. Several similar mirrors with fish motifs have been excavated in burial sites associated with Volga Bulgaria and the Golden Horde, the former’s successor state, where these items were in great demand among Mongols and Muslims alike. The Hungarian burial, however, is the westernmost excavated example of both the mirror and the burial type. No published analogy from the Balkans is known yet. It has been argued that the westward spread of these mirrors was initiated by the unification of China under the Khitan and the Jurchen, as well as by those travellers who brought them back from their travels to the Far East. East European mirrors are almost exclusively local copies of not only Chinese originals, but also Iranian mirrors which themselves had been inspired by Chinese art. For example, a Volga Bulgarian bronze mirror now in the State Historical Museum in Moscow replicates faithfully a mass-produced Eastern Iranian prototype (late 12th–early 13th century), showing the double-image of harpies. For an example, see Fedorov-Davydov 1976: pl. 127.
6. For developments in Serbia, see Radojković 1965.
7. For the presence of Armenian braziers in the Balkans, see Slavov 1974: 20, 296. Slavov also mentions Georgians, although the last mentioned are more difficult to attest.
8. It seems that an important study about one such ambiguous group, namely ‘Medieval Persia or the Ottoman Balkans? A Misattributed Group of Silver Bowls’, remains unpublished.

9. The founding of museums of applied or decorative arts in the region spanned a century, as shown by the following dates: 1864 (Vienna), 1872 (Budapest), 1880 (Zagreb), 1950 (Belgrade).
10. As well as in a few general catalogues of Near Eastern art, certain individual objects in Romanian collections have been discussed in separate articles, for instance in Tomozei and Baltă 1998.
11. While the Islamic collection is largely unpublished, a few objects may be mentioned here. These include a cast, turned, and inlaid brass candlestick with an interesting decorative programme. See Jevtović and Radojković 1971: cat. no. 9; it is published as ‘Shiraz, 14th Century’. As usual, the group to which this object belongs cannot be securely localised. While David Storm Rice originated the type from Western Iran, Assadullah Melikian-Chirvani ascribed it to Anatolia, although he still included it in his monograph of Persian metalwork. The controversy is discussed in Melikian-Chirvani 1982: 356–368, cat. nos. 168–172. Displaying a frieze of dancers with crossed hands, between figured medallions, the Belgrade candlestick has at least one exact parallel with an identical decoration; see Melikian-Chirvani 1982: cat. no. 170. In addition to this object, two interesting Safavid trays with figural decoration are photographed from the same museum without further discussion in Karamehmedović 1980: cat. nos. 72–73.
12. For more about this enterprise, see Szántó 2013.
13. For the background of the establishment of the Regional Museum in Sarajevo, see Hartmuth 2012.
14. As to Greece, apart from local finds (see Ballian and Drandaki 2003: 47–92), particular mention should be made of the rich Islamic, including Persian, metalwork holdings of the Benaki Museum, Athens; Ballian 2009: 113–141; Sardi 2003, 157–176.
15. Some objects are illustrated in Karamehmedović 1980.
16. Identifiable as Karamehmedović 1980: 236. ZM, new inventory number: 7201/III. Acquired as a gift from Budapest in December 1896
17. دیگ چون گرم شود، آب چکد ازسپوش  
تا دم را آتش عشق تو می آرد بجوش  
نفس مانند دیگ جوش ...  
... دل به جوش است روان اشک زحمت  
صاحبه ابوالقاسم محمد ابن قاسم
18. Identifiable as Karamehmedović 1980: 340. ZM, new inventory number: 7980/III. Acquired as a gift from Budapest in December, 1896. Illustrated in Szántó 2013: fig. 2.8.
19. ZM, new inventory number: 7018/III. Acquired as gift from Vienna in 1907.
20. See Komaroff 1992: cat. no. 7, verse no. 2. In spite of the identical prosody and contents of the inscriptions on both jugs, there is one hemistich ( تا بقای حیات جاودانی ) in Sarajevo which does not feature on the Oxford example. The more general Arabic inscription on the neck ( القدرة لله تعالى القوة لله تعالى ) is also different and so is the decoration of the two vessels.
21. ZM, new inv. no. 6977/III. Acquired as a gift from Vienna in September 1903.
22. ZM, new inv. no. 7017/III. Acquired as a gift from Vienna in 1907; identifiable in the foreground of a photograph in Karamehmedović 1980: 235.
23. ZM, new inv. nos. 7556–7/III. Acquired as gifts from Budapest in December 1896. In the museum there are also objects from India, decorated with the same technique, but in a different style.

24. ZM, new inv. no. 5705/III. Acquired as a gift from Vienna in 1903; identifiable on the right-hand side of a photograph in Karamehmedović 1980: 235.
25. ZM, new inventory number: 7066/III, acquired in 1892.
26. For a detailed coverage of his activities based on archival material in Vienna, Győr, and Mosonmagyaróvár, see Szántó 2013.
27. Kelényi and Szántó 2010: cat. no. C.2.2.2. For Eperjessy's diplomatic activities, see Slaby 1982: 221.
28. I am grateful to Dr. Suat Alp for drawing my attention to the workshop album in the museum. Personal communication in Budapest, February 2012.

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