



Article

Bronze Stand of The XII-Early XIII Centuries From Tashkent

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Abstract: The present article is devoted to the study of a group of bronze faceted coasters of the 11th-13th centuries stored in the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan. The analysis of the study has shown that in this period octahedral stands prevailed, but along with them stands with cylindrical bodies were also made. It was also possible to trace a certain regularity and sequence in the arrangement of ornamental belts, which medieval masters observed when decorating coasters. On the basis of comparative material, it was established that such coasters were widespread in Central Asia and can be dated to the 11th-13th centuries.

Keywords: Bronze octagonal stand, upper side, stems with shoots (islimi), sphinx, dragon, medallions, concentric belts of ornamentation

1. Introduction

Uzbekistan The State Museum of History of Uzbekistan has a collection of copper and bronze items, among which bronze coasters are of particular interest. These are faceted, less often cylindrical pieces with an edge and base bent outwards at the top and bottom. Considering the degree of study of such products, it should be noted that individual coasters were published as illustrative material in the works of a number of researchers, including Buryakova E.Y. [Buryakova 1973: 66-67], Abdullaev T.A., Fakhretdinova A., Hakimov A. [Abdullaev, Fakhretdinova, Hakimov 1985: 54], Buryakov Yu. [Buryakov 1990: 112-113], Pugachenkova G.A., Rempel L.I. [Pugachenkova, Rempel 1960: 162], A.A. Khakimov. [Khakimov 1983: 110, fig. 11, 12] and others.

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2. Materials and Methods

From In the process of writing this article, we studied the technique of bronze coasters, considered the elements of ornamentation that decorated them, and dated them on the basis of a comparative analysis with similar items stored in museums in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The aim of this work is to introduce into the scientific turnover new, previously unknown samples of similar bronze coasters.

The main base of our research are vessels found in different years in the territory of Tashkent.

There are nine faceted and three cylindrical coasters in our collection, of which almost all come from random collections of old years of receipts and have not preserved information about the time and circumstances of finds. And only one coaster has a known location. It was discovered by chance, judging by the entry in the inventory book «in 1883 in the city of Tashkent during excavation works near the barracks of the 3rd Turkestan Battalion».

Here's a description of it:

The stand is hollow, in the form of an octahedron tapering upwards (Fig. 1), the top

of which is decorated with a sharp wide socket with arc-shaped cut-outs and sharp edges. The bottom of the stand smoothly widens and ends with a not wide socket-base with similar cut-outs. The upper socket is adorned with an ornamental belt depicting fantastic animal sphinxes with two animal torsos and one female head in the middle. The animal torsos are lion-like, shown in profile with a wing on the back and a curved tail, while the maiden's head is shown in front with a rounded facial contour, almond-shaped eyes and a high hairstyle or halo with a pointed top. The sphinxes are depicted against a background of circular vegetal ornament and are separated by four round medallions outlined by thin double lines. In each medallion are inscribed five small circles, which are inlaid with copper and arranged crosswise. The ornamental belt on both sides is outlined with straight thin lines and narrow strips in the form of a series of inclined broken dashes resembling a tourniquet.

The vertical trunk of the stand is divided by carved lines into several belts of different widths. The upper belt is decorated with an ornament in the form of a continuously winding stem of a shoot with curls, the so-called «Islimi» pattern. Under it there are two smooth belts outlined with thin rollers. In the middle part is a wide ornamental belt, which is decorated with an inscription executed on the background of a circular floral ornament. The inscription is divided by four round medallions with circles inscribed in the centre with copper-encrusted branches with three rounded fruits. The belt with epigraphy is outlined above and below by paired thin lines and narrow belts of a number of slanted broken dashes resembling a tourniquet. Below are two narrow smooth belts delineated by thin rollers.

The bend of the lower socket is also decorated with a flagellated ornament. The surface of the lower spigot is ornamented with a not wide belt of stylised epigraphic ornament on a background of plant shoots. The stand is cast in bronze and covered with chased and engraved ornamentation.

Height of the stand-14.5 cm; diameter of the upper socket-24.2 cm; diameter of the lower socket-22 cm; diameter of the body in the upper part-11 cm; diameter of the body in the lower part-16 cm. Found in 1883 in the city of Tashkent during excavations near the barracks of the 3rd Turkestan battalion. Coll. No. 188/50; Inv. № A.14166.

As it was mentioned earlier, there are eight more similar faceted, but not passported stands in the museum's collection, among which presumably there may be items found in the Tashkent region. Therefore, we considered it necessary to briefly dwell on some peculiarities of ornamentation of these coasters.

All the stands have the same shape in the form of a hollow octahedron with a faceted top and base designed in the form of blades and are cast entirely from bronze. The height of the stands varies from 11.5 to 16 cm, the diameter of the upper socket from 22 to 25 cm, the diameter of the lower socket from 20 to 23 cm, the diameter of the body in the upper part from 9.5 to 12.5 cm; the diameter of the body in the lower part from 14.5 to 16.5 cm.

Their main ornamentation consists of a complex chased and engraved pattern decorating the surfaces of the upper side, trunk and base of the stands. Two stands (A.14165; A.14166) are inlaid with copper.

The decor of the upper side of the stands is decorated with concentric belts. The edges of the side are framed on both sides by belts with wave-bending shoots with curls, which at the level of the corners are interrupted by almond-shaped petals, as well as ornamentation in the form of a zigzag and a flagellum. Between them is the main belt, which was decorated with the following variants of ornamentation:

- in the form of two smooth ribbons, intertwined in the middle of the blades in circles, in which alternate between medallions with four and six-petalled rosettes, and between them cartouches with stylised images of birds on a background of vegetal ornament (A.14164 a), (Fig. 2);

- in the form of two ribbons intertwined in circles, in which alternate between medallions with five-petalled rosettes and medallions with a schematic image in the form of a circle, on either side of which are subtriangular «wings». The circle rests on two wishbones and is supported by two bands converging at an angle. In between the medallions are images of winged dragons on a background of vegetal ornament (A.14168), (Fig. 3);

- in the form of two ribbons intertwined in circles, in which are eight medallions with four-petalled rosettes. In between the medallions are eight shaped pentagonal cartouches, four with images of stylised birds and the other four with double circles inlaid with yellow copper. The petals of the rosettes are inlaid with red copper. The background in the cartouches is filled with plant ornament (A.14165), (Fig. 4);

- in the form of a belt with four round medallions with a small circle with a trefoil or three-petalled flower in the upper part. Between the medallions are winged sphinxes on a background of plant ornamentation (A.14171).

The ornamentation of the trunk or torso of the stands was also built in several horizontal parallel belts, which were divided by carved lines into five or seven bands of different widths. The widest was usually the middle or central belt, which was most elaborately decorated. The upper and lower belts were most often not wide or quite narrow and without ornamentation (usually two belts each). Sometimes the smooth belts were preceded by the following ornamental bands:

- in the form of cross dashes;
- as a wavy stem with curls;
- as a zigzag line;
- in the form of broken inclined dashes resembling a cord;
- in the form of meander and flagellated ornament.

The central wide belt includes Arabic inscriptions, mostly of benevolent content, executed in Kufic script, sometimes in «flowering Kufi» on a background of vegetal circular ornamentation, which alternate with medallions:

- medallions with a smooth surface;
- medallions with a circle with a plant shoot or flower inside.

Sometimes instead of round medallions, on two stands (A.14164 a; A.14171) there are figures in the form of a lancet arch with shoots - trefoils inside or in the form of arches with the same trefoils in a circle. The inscriptions are outlined by a frame of double thin lines.

One stand has a wide belt formed by a wicker of two smooth narrow ribbons, which on one edge go horizontally and between them is placed an inscription, and on the edge next to the ribbons intertwine and form circles, where medallions with ornament in the form of a circle with subtriangular «wings» on the sides, resting on arcs and a stop of two strips are inscribed (A.14168).

The ornamentation of the surface of the bases of the faceted stands is mainly a belt with stylised epigraphic ornament, which is interrupted by large or small almond-shaped petals at the level of the facets. On two stands, the bases are decorated with a belt with a plant shoot «islimi» and a belt with images of birds, possibly peacocks. The epigraphic ornament and birds are executed against the background of plant shoots (A.14170).

2. Results

Coasters of this type can be found in the collections of other museums in Central Asia. A stand from the early 13th century is kept in the Museum of the History of Culture and Art of the Peoples of Uzbekistan (Samarkand). The stand is cast with engraved ornamentation and inlaid with red copper. The surface of the upper socket is decorated with ornamentation in the form of lancet arches with filling in the form of a

triple stem with fruits or flowers at the ends. At the bottom of the stem on both sides there are petals (we see a similar element of ornamentation on the torso of our stand from Tashkent). The fields between the arches are filled with hatching. The centre of the body of the stand is decorated with Arabic inscriptions in the handwriting of «Kufi» and «Naskh»: «Eternal glory and success and long life ... and longevity to its owner. Happiness and blessing and power and blessing and happiness» (reading by S.B.Pevzner). There are two smooth strips on the top and bottom of the belt with inscriptions. The inscriptions are executed on the background of vegetal ornament. The surface of the base of the stand is also decorated with a belt with an inscription, which is interrupted on its edges by almond-shaped medallions. The height of the stand is 13.5 cm and its diameter is 23.5 cm. Inventory No. A-176/59 [Culture and Art of Ancient Uzbekistan, 1991: 205, No. 770].

The faceted stand with a magnificent carved ornament was part of the Kalaibaland hoard of bronze items from the 12th to the beginning of the 13th century, which is kept in the Uratybinsk Museum of History and Local Lore (Tajikistan). The height of the stand is 13 cm; the diameter of the socket is 22.5 cm; the diameter of the base is 21.5 cm. On the upper socket it has images of bird-maidens, which are placed in lancet shaped arches formed by a braiding of two ribbons running along the edge, which intertwine to form arches in four places. In the fields between the arches are images of fantastic animals (sphinxes) with two opposing bodies and one female head (the same images decorate the surface of the side of our stand from Tashkent). The images are executed against a background of circular vegetal ornamentation. On the torso there are two smooth belts at the top and bottom, and between them a wide belt with inscriptions, which alternate with round medallions filled with plant shoots with trefoils at the ends. The base of the stand is decorated with a belt depicting running animals, which is interrupted by almond-shaped petals. The faces of bird-maidens and paired winged lionesses are inlaid with thin plates of red copper with subsequent engraving of details [Antiquities of Tajikistan 1985: 309, 321, 322, No. 823; Negmatov, Kilchevskaya 1979: 49-52, figs. 12-14; Yakubov 2012: 152, 153, figs. 9,10].

If we look at the coasters, we can trace some certain regularity and sequence in the arrangement of ornamental belts. On many stands, the main belt of the upper side was built with the help of smooth ribbons, which intertwine to form circles with medallions enclosed in them, alternating with figural cartouches.

The main belt on the torso of the stands was decorated with certain obligatory elements. These are, first of all, Arabic inscriptions, between which medallions of circular form and in the form of a lancet arch. It can be seen that the main emphasis of the master - -toreutic was directed to the central ornamental belts, the patterns on which were the most ceremonial and best worked out.

The lower socket of the stands was most often decorated either with a belt of stylised inscription or with repeated plant shoots.

Let us dwell on some elements of ornamentation of the published coasters from the collection of our museum.

The plant motifs depicted on the stands under consideration are the most common ones found on almost all copper-coined items of the XI-XIII centuries. They include spiral curls with rectangular offshoots, plastic bending, curly stems of the «Islimi» ornament. The classical variant of the «Islimi» pattern is a wavy shoot with alternately departing from the top and bottom in different variants of trefoils - palmettes, enclosed in a narrow border [Khakimov 1975: 65; 1983: 96].

Another type of foliate ornamentation found on stands are images of stylised acanthus, lotuses, palmettes, which are enclosed in round medallions.

One of the functions of plant ornamentation was background filling, on which the main pattern was applied in the form of images of birds, animals, Arabic inscriptions, etc.

Epigraphic ornamentation in the form of Arabic inscriptions, unlike those described above, appeared in the Muslim period. The inscriptions were written in «strict» and «blooming» Kufi handwriting or in the form of flexible calligraphic ligature in «Naskh» handwriting. The inscriptions consisted of good wishes 'fame, success, health, happiness to the owner' of the vessel or stand. Over time, the inscriptions are stylised and become illegible [Ilyasov, Khakimov 2012: 251].

In the decoration of the stands, as can be seen from the above, there are images of fairy-tale-fantastic creatures - winged sphinxes and dragons.

Images of sphinxes we see on two stands of our collection. The sphinxes decorate the upper wide sides of the stands and are arranged in shaped pentagonal cartouches, which alternate with round medallions, inside which there are circles with flowers in the upper part or in the form of a rosette of five inlaid circles.

The stand from Tashkent (A.14166) depicts a whole plot composition consisting of four paired sphinxes with two counter-positioned torsos crowned with a female head in the middle.

The sphinx is a favourite motif of all ancient Eastern art. In Central Asia, the image of the winged sphinx can be traced back to the Achaemenid era. It was depicted with a high paw; it has a human head and massive wings attached to the torso of a lion. Winged sphinxes of the Muslim time continue the previous iconography. At the end of XI - beginning of XIII century, the sphinx was already a favourite motif of Central Asian lithics [Khakimov, 2012: 15-16].

In medieval Maverannahr, the most widespread variant of sphinxes' depiction on copper-coined wares of the 11th-13th centuries is a composition of round (sometimes shaped) medallions. They were depicted with a necklace around their necks and with a crown or halo, majestically striding against the background of swirling vegetation ornament [Rempel 1987: 61].

Images of sphinxes are found on the surface of the bottoms of trays and basins of the XI-XII cc. from the collections of the Samarkand and Fergana museums [Pugachenkova, Rempel 1960: 160, figs. 18,19], on a hemispherical bowl of the XII cc. from the Termez Museum [Khakimov 1975: 65], on cauldrons and jugs from the collection of the State Hermitage Museum (St. Petersburg) [Khakimov 2012: 15], as well as on the bottom of a basin from our museum (A.14185).

Some items show traces of the ancient connection of the sphinx with the solar cult. This can be determined by the drawing on which sphinxes with the body of a lion (solar animal) were depicted in the centre of the composition resembling the disc of the sun with rays departing from it. Some scholars also associate the image of the sphinx with protective and benevolent functions [Khakimov 2012: 16].

Sphinxes on stands alternate with round medallions with small circles and rosettes inside, which can also be considered as an interpretation of the solar symbol [Hakimov 2012: 9].

The images of sphinxes with two bodies and a female face on a stand from Tashkent [A.14166] find direct analogies with the images on a stand of the XI-XII centuries from the Kalaibaland hoard found in Tajikistan [Negmatov and Kilchevskaya 1979: 61, fig. 13; Yakubov 2012: 152-154, figs. 9/2,10,12] and on a stand of the XII century, stored in the Museum of the History of Culture and Art of the Peoples of Uzbekistan (Samarkand) [Khakimov 1983: 105].

The most ancient depictions of animals with one head and two bodies are well known already from the monuments of the Cretan-Mycenaean culture. In Central Asia we see a one-headed beast - diva with two bodies in the architectural decoration (carved piece of the palace of Termezshahs of the XII century) at the ancient settlement of Old Termez [Rempel 1987: 72; Alpatkina 2008: III, fig. 31 a, c].

On the stand (A.14168) on the upper socket we see images of other mythical creatures resembling lizards or dragons. They have the torso of a lion, a small pointed

wing, an upward curved tail with a tassel, a long neck with a large head turned back and an open mouth. Unfortunately, we did not find direct analogues to this image not only on the stands, but also on other objects of this period, although the image of a lizard-like dragon exists in the mythology of Central Asia under the name of Azhdarkho (Dragon). The peoples of Central Asia associated with this image the idea of «creatures initiated into the mystery, guarding the hidden treasure from the uninitiated» [Pugachenkova, Rempel 1960: 165].

Images of birds are engraved on three coasters in our collection. The birds are often so stylised that it is sometimes impossible to determine their real appearance or breed. Thus, on two stands (A.14164a; A.14165) images of birds, possibly geese, are placed in pentagonal cartouches on the upper socket with raised or lowered heads, clearly marked wings and curved tails. The stand (A.14170) has eight birds following each other, resembling pheasants or peacocks, engraved on the ornamental band of the lower socket. The birds are shown against a background of plant shoots.

The images of birds were widely popular on the products of toreutic pre-Muslim period. In Zoroastrianism, geese, peacocks, falcons, pheasants and swans were considered sacred and were especially honoured. In the X-XII centuries, stylised images of birds traditionally continued to decorate metal products, although by that time their magical significance may have been forgotten [Khakimov 2012: 9-10].

On a stand from Tashkent (A.14166) and another stand from our collection (A.14165) we see copper inlay. This technique, widely used by Khorasan masters, was mastered in Maverannahr later and began to be applied from the 12th century [Khakimov, Ilyasov 2012: 224].

Conclusion

Religion Thus, summarising some conclusions and assumptions can be made:

- It can be assumed that octagonal stands were the predominant form of coasters in this period, but along with them coasters with cylindrical bodies were also made;
- The medieval masters may have observed a certain regularity and consistency in the ornamentation of coasters;
- A certain part of the coasters in our museum's collection forms a group of similar items, which are the products of local Central Asian craftsmen who possessed high technological methods of metalworking;
- In the functional sense, these items were used as stands for trays, dishes, washstands, etc.;
- On the basis of similar materials cited above, the faceted stand from Tashkent can be dated to the 12th - early 13th century, and the other stands in our collection to the 11th - early 13th century.

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