

PER-HISTORICAL ART OF IRAN  
Hasanlu Golden Bowl

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By: Robert H. Dyson JR.

The context

The 'gold bowl of [Hasanlu](#)' was found in the debris of Burned Building I West on the Citadel Mound at Hasanlu in 1958. It had fallen into room 9 in the southeastern corner of the building where, at the end of the 9th century B.C.E., it was buried under the collapsed mud brick walls of the second story along with the bodies of three men. One of these men was carrying the bowl. Although badly crushed, it could be determined that the man had fallen on his right shoulder, with his head facing the north wall. His lower right arm lay upright against the wall face, his hand bent at the wrist. This arm, from wrist to shoulder, was protected by a gauntlet made perhaps of leather (represented by a thin, half-centimeter thick film of powdery yellow and plum-red material). It was backed by six or seven rows of round, flat-topped bronze buttons attached by loops at the back. Two larger flanged buttons formed attachments at either end. The left arm was unadorned, the upper part lying in front of, and parallel to, his chest, with the lower part lying against the wall. Between his hands, lying at forty-five degree angle, was the flattened gold bowl. The bowl was being carried in an upright position and contained three other valued artifacts: a mottled red and white uncut stone cylinder with gold caps, a shattered figurine (perhaps a bird) of laminated ivory (?), and a sword-hilt with a U-shaped bronze guard set over the shoulder of a broken iron blade with round tang. The grip was composed of three red sandstone and three white stone discs fitted over the tang. The pommel was missing. This object is of considerable interest as it matches one found in the former Russian Armenia at Mouci-yeri, dating to between 1200 and 900 B.C.E. (de Morgan, p. 91, figs. 34, 35; Schaeffer, p. 501, nn. 6 and 7).

The bowl

The Hasanlu bowl weighs 33 3/8 ounces and is decorated by repouse, work and chasing. The bowl is about 20 cm in height, with a base about 15 cm and a rim about 18 cm in diameter, indicating a slight outward flare for the sides. A slight bulge around the base duplicates the shape of the gold cup found at Kalâr-daët in Mâzandarân Province in 1934 (Porada, 1969, pp. 99-100, fig. 61). The sides of both vessels have guilloche borders, double at the top and single at the base, with chased patterns on their bottoms. The bottom of the Hasanlu bowl is decorated with a checkerboard pattern, flanked on each side by a ram walking to the right, giving a rotary motion to the design.

The decoration on the sides of the Hasanlu bowl is organized into an upper and a lower register, linked at only one point by a flow of water issuing from the mouth of a bull in the top register and falling to the register below. The upper register presents a single composition consisting of a young, unshaven, male individual carrying a beaker, followed by two others, each bringing a sacrificial lamb. All three wear ankle-length draped garments like those of the three gods riding in chariots, whom they approach. The first god, identified as a storm, weather, or atmospheric god, drives a chariot drawn by a pair of bulls (the second bull indicated by the doubling of the horns). The god is identified by a pair of rays, wings, or flames issuing from his shoulders. He wears a simple headband ending in a triangular tab at the back. The second god is a sun god, as shown by his solar-disc headdress, while the third is a moon or local god, identified by a horned headdress. These two gods ride chariots with six-spoked wheels drawn by mules or onagers. The weather god's type of headband is worn also by three male figures in the lower register: One offers a libation in a tall beaker to an altar, and the other two are combatants, holding their arms outstretched at a forty-five degree angle in opposition to each other. The position of this combat scene at the base of the falling water singles it out as the focal point for the lower register.

The lower register, in contrast to the upper, is composed of a series of episodes that begin to the right of the combat scene with a nude goddess exposing herself while standing on the backs of two rams (indicated by a doubling of the face and horns). All of the figures in the episodes, including the goddess, look to the right in the direction of the combat scene which comes at the end of the sequence. This fixed orientation may well indicate the direction in which the story unfolds. The figures include (from the right of the nude goddess) a warrior-hunter, dressed in a woven, tasseled kilt carrying a bow, an arrow, and a quiver; an eagle carrying a woman (who alone

looks to the left); another woman riding on a lion, gazing into a mirror; two attendants, wearing draped ankle-length garments like those in the upper register but with no headbands, subduing a third figure similarly dressed; three swords in a group pointing downward; a seated male figure wearing a woven garment, offering a tall beaker to an altar with animal feet; and a female wearing a woven garment, a counter-balanced necklace, and some kind of hair ornament. She offers a nude child to a male figure wearing a short-sleeved shirt and woven skirt, without a headband, holding an axe-adze in his left hand, and seated on a throne(?) stool with animal feet. Curiously, both the seated male and the child extend their right hands with the same open gesture toward the woman.

The left-hand figure in the combat scene wears a woven kilt with embroidered border and tassels, and some kind of "boxing mittens." His opponent stands, or sits, in a throne(?) chair with high back covered with mountain scales. The throne appears to rest on the back of a recumbent lion. This figure also apparently wears only a kilt, represented by the top of its belt-line. From the back of this mountain throne issues a scaled monster with three fox-like heads, facing left toward the combat scene.

These elements, which recall mythological episodes, reflect older Akkadian, Hurrian, Hittite, Neo-Hittite, and perhaps Iranian traditions. It is evident that the style and content of the Hasanlu bowl developed from a mixture of such traditions, perhaps organized around some specific story such as the myth of the Hurrian god Kummarbi (Porada, 1969, p. 104). Given the very complex ethnic composition of northwestern Iran, and the absence of written evidence, attributions of date of origin, place of manufacture, or ethnic association are, at present, speculative (Barrelet).

Note:

Robert Dyson (1959, p. 14), erroneously attributed the gauntlet to the left arm, an error repeated in Porada (1969, p. 103), but corrected in Dyson 1960, p. 250. The official, corrected, drawing of the bowl, designated as MTMS 1974, was reproduced in Marie Barrelet (Pl. V) and used for Irene Winter, Fig. 6.



Hasanlu Silver Beaker from period IV B. Electrum overlay. HT 17.0 cm. HAS 58-427. Iran Bastan Museum, Tehran.

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source:

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