

## COSMOLOGICAL & IDEOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE ARJAN BOWL

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### Introduction

In 1982 in the vicinity of Arjan, 10 km north of Behbahan, a city in the southwest part of Iran, a bronze bowl measuring 43.5 cm in diameter was found inside a rectangular tomb built of stone slabs. The expense implicit in the construction of the tomb and the luxurious items found inside suggests that its occupant enjoyed a status of wealth and high rank.

The bowl was engraved with five concentric registers around a rosette and contained an inscription in the Elamite language reading "Kidin-Hutran son of Kurlush." Although three kings of the Middle Elamite II period (c. 1400-1200 B.C.) were bearers of the name Kidin-Hutran (Potts 1999b: 231), this name is otherwise absent from the Neo-Elamite period (c. 1000-539 B.C.). In contrast, a Neo-Elamite tablet identifies an individual named Kurlush as a provider of garments for the Elamite court at Susa. In addition, a Neo-Elamite cylinder seal, also found at Susa, refers to "Kurlush, father of Parsirra." The Elamite language specialist F. Vallat suggests these three individuals — Kurlush father of Kidin-Hutran, Kurlush the merchant from Susa, and Kurlush the father of Parsirra— to be one and the same person, having lived sometime between 646 and 525 B.C. (Vallat 1984: 4). A. Alizadeh however stresses what he takes to be an absence of concrete data on the development of the Elamite language during the first centuries of the 1st millennium B.C. and instead, locates the Arjan bowl inscription in the first half of the eighth century B.C. (Alizadeh 1985: 56). In addition, a study of iconographical and stylistic elements in the Arjan bowl by Y. Majidzadeh places its manufacture sometime between 725 to 625 B.C. (Majidzadeh 1990: 141). Finally, a forthcoming article by David Stronach of the gold "ring" found in the Arjan tomb—also containing the inscription "Kidin-Hutran son of Kurlush"— traces its making to around the beginning of the sixth century B.C. (Stronach 2003). Altogether, the chronological frame recommended by the previous scholars gives a broad time span of circa 275 years (from c. 800 to 525 B.C.) for the possible manufacture of the Arjan bowl.

From a geopolitical standpoint, the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. in the Near East were characterized by unremitting clashes between the imperial aspirations of the Neo-Assyrian rulers and the resistance of their neighbors. The escalation of the conflict between the Assyrians and the Elamites reached its peak during the second half of the seventh century B.C. In 653 B.C. The army of Assurbanipal advanced beyond the border town of Der and confronted the Elamites on the banks of the Ulai River. After the ensuing brutal battle in which the Elamite king Teumman (Tepti-Humpan-Inshushinak, 663–653 B.C.) lost his life, Assurbanipal installed the pro-Assyrian Humpan-nikash II (Huban-nugash) as king of Elam and his brother Attamet (Atta-hameti-Inshushinak) as viceroy or king of Susa. A third kingdom was created in the city of Hidalu for a third brother, Tammarihu II. A year later, a civil war broke out between the Assyro-Babylonian king Shamash-shum-ukin and his brother Assurbanipal. The Elamite king Huban-nugash broke his oath of alliance and sided with Shamash-shum-ukin. Another anti-Assurbanipal alliance was made in Hidalu between Huban-nugash, his brother Tammarihu II, and the people of the land of Parsuash. It took three years and a devastating civil war for the victorious Assyrian king Assurbanipal to defeat Elam again—an event which obliged Kurash (Cyrus), son of Teispes, to surrender his son Arukku as a hostage at the court of Assurbanipal—. In 646 B.C. the Assyrian army returned to Elam this time to lay siege to the city of

Madaktu (Mirochedji 1985: 215) and to ravage Susa. Thereafter, the Elamite territory seems to have reorganized along multiple centers of power centered on the cities of Susa, Madaktu, and Hidalu (Boucharlat 1994: 220).

#### Arjan and the Location of Hidalu

Arjan is located on a plain about 10 km northeast of Behbahan; 4 to 5 km north of Arjan the Zagros piedmont rises to 900 m. The River Marun cuts deeply into the plain, creating a natural boundary during the spring and summer floods. To date, the most comprehensive study regarding the identity of Arjan during the Neo-Elamite period is by Elizabeth Carter, who has explored the relationship between the Elamites and Persians in southeastern Khuzistan (Carter 1984). Despite the political and economic importance attached to the region, and its location on the Behbahan plain at the crossroads linking the Persian Gulf coast with the north and the highway linking Susa with the country of Anshan, surveys in the Arjan region failed to discover any evidence of Neo-Elamite remains prior to 1982.

The texts indicate that Hidalu was a seven days march southeast of Susa, between Susa and Persepolis. W. Hinz, F. Vallat, and D. Stronach take the modern town of Behbahan to occupy the place of ancient Hidalu (which appeared as Ha-i-da-la in the annals of Senacherib and as Hi-da-li / I-da-li, in the documents from Susa). G. Cameron suggests that the location of Hidalu ought to be somewhere along the Karun.

All in all, however, the location of ancient Hidalu is most probably to be sought somewhere in the Behbahan region. River, while J. Hansman places the "mountains of Hidalu" northeast of Behbahan. D. T. Potts, following Mirochedji, situates Hidalu between Behbahan and Ram Hormuz. Duchesne-Guillemin however identifies Huhnur/unar/Unar with Arjan/Arrajan, which he believes to be covered by the modern ruins of Behbahan, and so places Hidalu in the area of Kuhgiluya, east and north of the Behbahan plain. E. Carter nevertheless, doubts that the actual site of Arjan (occupying an area of 1200 m by 800 m) could have been densely populated during this particular period.

#### THE ARJAN BOWL

Previous studies of the Arjan Bowl have considered its archaeological context; chronology; and iconography. Despite the wealth of designs depicted on the bowl, however, an articulation of the visual narratives on the bowl has not been attempted. The purpose of such an enterprise is twofold: to establish the uniqueness of the bowl in relation to comparable first millennium B.C. bowls, and to reveal ideological and cosmological aspects manifested by the visual culture portrayed in the bowl. The term visual narrative refers to "the representation of a specific event, involving specific persons, where the action and persons might be historical, but not necessarily." The term visual culture refers to the "pattern of relationships on a given work from which meaning can be discerned."

I shall try to persuade the reader that the images portrayed in the Arjan bowl are structurally divided into a series of consecutive episodes, the sequence of which is organized along ideological grounds. This correspondence between content and structure reveals itself first to the viewer across a division of five registers and one rosette separated by concentric circles and intertwined guilloche bands. Carefully distributed among these registers lies a universe of miniature forms inhabited by 112 human figures, 66 animals of 33 species, diverse trees, and various artifacts

In seeking to compare the Arjan Bowl with the metallic bowls known as Phoenician and distributed throughout the Near East and the Mediterranean during the first millennium B.C. (Markoe 1985), I

take up a position which stands in sharp contrast to an alternative view stressing the strictly ornamental value of the bowls. As we shall see, the adaptation of a typical Phoenician style by the Arjan bowl reveals the enormous influence of the Phoenician carving and engraving schools in articulating a distinctive international style (Markoe 1985: 15) of the period in question. Yet, I shall contend, the particular Phoenician stylistic vocabulary of the Arjan bowl did not preclude the artist, or whoever commissioned the work, from taking “infinite care to unify and integrate its decorations (and narratives) within a highly (Neo-Elamite) individual format.” Furthermore, the exceptional dimensions of the Arjan bowl, which reach a diameter of 43.5 cm and a depth of 8.5 cm, and which set it apart from any other “Phoenician” or Neo-Assyrian bowl, also call in question its functional usage and lead us to consign its “function” to an entirely symbolic world, the characteristics of which remain to be determined.

#### TOWARDS A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE ARJAN BOWL REGISTER V

Register V (the outer register) divides into two narratives depicting a ceremony of drinking from a cup (Va) and the return of a hunting party (Vb). The two scenes are separated by mountain ranges.



#### Va. Drinking from a Cup Ceremony

Narrative Va depicts a scene whose central event is of a king-like individual sitting on a throne and drinking from a cup. Behind him we observe two beardless attendants and two small persons inside a yurt. In front of the king there are seven standing, bearded attendants dressed in ceremonial Assyrian-related outfits and arranged next to cross-legged tables. Further away from the king, two beardless personages, one holding a jar and the other holding a flywhisk, stand beside a table with two large jars and rhytons. Except for the small individuals inside the yurt, all the other individuals wear a helmet with a rounded protuberance on top. These helmets also appear to have a visor in front, as well as a band with a row of rosettes (Majidzadeh 1990: 138). The pointed visor is a characteristic feature of Elamite helmets, at least from the Middle-Elamite times; As for the rounded protuberance on the top of the helmet, it appears to be at home in the Elamite world since the Sukkalmah period.



#### Vb. The Return of the Hunting Party

Narrative Vb depicts a king inside a horse-drawn box-like square-running chariot, accompanied by a driver and what appear to be a child and a small animal. The chariot is located behind a suite of seven people dressed in ankle-long, ceremonial robes each of whom carries a large animal on his shoulders. Behind the chariot, a similarly dressed individual carries a lotus flower aloft and pulls the reins of an onager. All the individuals wear the Elamite-type helmet. The animals represented on register Vb can generally be identified as three male ibexes (*capra ibex*) (note that the horn rings—each representing one year—have been intentionally sketched in order to stress the maturity of the animal). Following the ibexes is a goat (identified by the tail and the double chin, perhaps also wearing a collar—, and a pig or boar (an uncastrated male hog or wild pig-jabalina). Additional animals depicted here are the two horses pulling the chariot of the king. The head of the animals carried by the soldiers appear to be held

either by the beard or by a collar. beard), a lioness with a collar around her neck, a fox, wolf or jackal (possibly an ichneumon?)

#### Interpretation of Register V

It has already been pointed out that some features of the iconography portrayed on Register V show a direct correspondence with Assyrian reliefs (Majidzadeh 1990). However, although the iconographic allusions deriving from Assyrian origin are easily verifiable, the content and significance of the narrative upon which the images are based remains to be determined. Let us begin by considering the location in which the events here portrayed take place. Register V comprises a set of two distinct but related narratives: the ceremony of drinking from a cup and the return from the hunt. These are separated by two similar sets of mountains or hills suggesting that the events portrayed took place on or nearby hilly ground. This location, in conjunction with the actual placement of Register V at the outer edge of the bowl, calls to mind the various literary and artistic traditions of the ancient Near East indicating the presence of a "twin mountain" at the "edge of the world". It is in this "final frontier" that a Babylonian "map of the world," dated to about the ninth century B.C., places ibexes, mountain goats, lions, and wolves, among other wild animals, in association with monsters (Horowitz 1988: 149), implying that "The farther away from home, the more the familiar and domesticated is replaced by the wild, strange, primeval and diabolical" (Green 1994: 238). Hence, the convergence at the edge of the bowl of the twin mountains and the hunting and drinking-from-the-bowl ceremonies appears to suggest that reaching the far away mountains aiming to kill or to capture wild beasts may have been considered an exercise of heroic proportions. In order to come closer to understand the nature of such events one has to look at the evidence presented by contemporary hunting practices.

Coming from what has hitherto been a marginal area of study in the ancient Near Eastern world, texts found in the territories of the ancient kingdoms of Hadramawt, Haram, and Saba in southern Arabia attest in great detail to the performance of seasonal, highly ritualized hunting practices since at least the sixth century B.C. According to these accounts, failure to perform hunting rituals at the proper season and according to strict guidelines was believed to incur divine wrath and retribution. One inscription relates the absence of rain to the absence of hunted game for the god Hal fan: "... therefore he did not protect them but made their watercourses to flow in spring and autumn with very little water" (Beeston 1972: 192). The success of the hunting ritual was contingent on respecting certain taboos such as abstinence from sex, food, and from spilling the blood of immature animals. These were known as the "days of supplication."

The hunt took place on traditional hunting grounds associated with a divinity. Consequently, the animals hunted within this territory were considered "the game of the god." As a result, if the hunt was conducted properly, i.e. the taboos were not violated, the deities rewarded the ruler and his community with protection and bountiful crops. During the twenty days of hunting that took place in Wadi 'Irma, the king and a legion of 200 soldiers, 100 hunters and 200 dogs captured four panthers, two leopards, and 600 ibexes. Document CHI 350 reveals interesting parallels between hunting expeditions for lions and panthers and military maneuvers.

On the Neo-Assyrian side, large-scale hunting for the capture of live animals appears well attested in both stone reliefs and texts. Adad-Ninari II mentions the killing of eight wild bulls and eight ostriches, along with the capture of eight live ostriches. Shalmaneser III, however, preferred larger trophies: "I made to fall 29 elephants" (Lion 1992: 202). An emphasis was placed on the territory where the hunt was performed: "I captured with my hand 15 powerful lions from the mountains and forests," says Assurnasirpal II "I took 50 wild bulls alive, I made to fall 30 elephants, 140 ostriches (captured) alive,

and 20 powerful lions from the mountains and the forests." Analogous to the South Arabian texts, the hunt is performed at specific times appointed by the gods: "In the high mountains they [Ninurta and Pali] gave me [Ashur-bel-kala] the order to hunt . . . at the moment when [the constellation] Sirius rises, which looks like smelted copper, in the mounts Ebeh, Urashe. . ." (Lion 1992: 363). To the Assyrian kings and aristocracy, hunting was the royal "sport" par excellence. Its purpose fulfilled two functions; to collect exotic and wild animals for use as presents or tributary goods, or simply to expand the king's personal menagerie (such as those of Assurnasirpal II and Sennacherib); and to stress the ideological role of the king as the Chosen One whom, under the guidance and protection of the gods, reached "the mountains and the forests" in order to confront and victoriously tame the wild forces of nature (i.e. the enemies).

In addition, Assyrian reliefs portray two kinds of ceremonial events performed after the hunt in which the holding of a cup by a monarch takes center stage. In one, as in the famous "restoration of order" scene of Assurbanipal and Ashur-sharrat, the king is preparing to drink from a cup in celebration of the new "Pax Assyriaca." In a second category, Assurbanipal does not actually drink himself but, after having successfully confronted a number of fierce lions, pours a libation from the cup over the dead carcasses. The inscription over this scene reveals a suggestive explanation of his acts: "I, Assurbanipal, king of the world, king of Assyria, whom Assur and Mullisu have granted exalted strength. The lions that I killed: I held the fierce bow of Ishtar, lady of battle, over them, I set up an offering over them, (and) I made a libation over them" (Russell 1999: 202).

In short, the ritual hunt and the ceremony of drinking from a cup portrayed in register V share mythological and sacred characteristics with the South Arabian and Assyrian hunting traditions. The direct involvement of the gods as protectors of the king while conquering the enemy—taking the form of wild animals or humans—is an underlying aspect of those rituals involving some type of sacrificial offering—taking the form of wine pouring or wine drinking. However, and in contrast to the realistic accounts of southern Arabian texts or the hunting scenes of the Assyrian reliefs, we are struck by the fictional elements illustrated in the Arjan narrative: in particular, the individual soldiers supporting the weight of mature animals which appear to wear collars around their necks and, in some cases, seem to have their tails raised. These elements might have remained unexplained were it not for the former Neo-Assyrian texts attesting to the practice of capturing live wild animals. Yet the fact that the narrative in Register V stresses the fictional nature of the Herculean soldiers underlines both the heroic content of the task accomplished and further serves to compliment the central role held by the king as tamer of the wild and benefactor of the gods. The ceremonial dress of the individuals and the lotus flower held by the figure behind the chariot also underline the ritualistic and sacred dimension of the events depicted.

#### REGISTER IV

Register IV features some of the most intricate scenes on the Arjan Bowl. Majidzadeh's interpretation divides the representation into a battle and four scenes from daily life: (1) fishing in the marsh, (2) dancing, (3) date harvesting, and (4) a man standing between two palm trees (Majidzadeh 1990: 133). In my opinion, however, this register comprises two main narratives: The Mock-Battle (IVa) and Date Harvesting and Fishing in the Marsh (IVb). In regards to the location where these events take place, note that both scenes unfold on the periphery of a fortified city.

Narrative IVa: The Mock-Battle

The Mock-Battle scene occupies about half of Register IV and merges into the Date Harvesting scene. On the right side of a fortified city there is a raft being dragged by four individuals. Adjacent to the raft an Elamite chariot with six spokes (Majidzadeh 1990: 138) contains three passengers, two of whom wear the rounded-knobbed Elamite helmet. Behind the chariot a running individual carries a mace—a standard Assyrian symbol of authority (Reade 1972: 102). Two horsemen follow him. Next to the fortified city a king wearing a long dress sits on a chair. The king faces two soldiers and their captives. Except for the king, all the men wear the short kilt characteristic of the Assyrian army.

#### Interpretation

According to Majidzadeh's interpretation the scene depicts a fortified city under attack from the right by infantry, cavalry, charioteers, and naval forces. Certainly, a fortified city under attack was a frequent theme in Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs since the time of Assurnasirpal II which continued with only minor variations throughout the Neo-Assyrian period (Gunter 1982: 107). Clearly, the degree of destruction and violence represented in these Assyrian scenes classifies them as war scenes. However, and in contrast to the Assyrian representations, in Narrative IVa there is no suggestion of the destruction of the city or of its surrounding fields. This militaristic display, I propose, requires consideration under a different lens.

Between the Fishing-in-the-Marsh and the Date Harvesting scenes, a pair of men hold hands and grasp their foot at the same time. This unusual display of equilibrium is better known as the foot-clutch dance and it represents a contest or game of balance in which one male tries to knock the other down. The game is still played today among the marsh dwellers of southern Iraq and is called "hopping on one leg." In ancient Mesopotamia, religious dance is attested variously in cylinder seal representations of the Old Babylonian period (Kilmer 1985: 2611). As in the "dance with arched legs" executed by dwarves, religious dance was performed within the framework of religious practices and beliefs. In various examples, the dancers performed within the celebrations of the fertility rites of Ishtar, the goddess of fertility and war (see the sealing in *and* notice the presence of the date palm). These dances intermingled with mock battles and the throwing of boomerangs—an ancient mode of hunting birds also practiced in the river marshes (Matousova-Rajmova 1978: 162).

Once more, compelling written evidence for the ensuing interpretation of this register comes from ancient Arabia. After the hunt, in order for the hunting party to return to the profane life, i.e., to enter the city, a rite of desacralization entailing ceremonial dance needed to be achieved at the city gates. In many cases, an altar-stele was erected at the gates to celebrate the "Attar-hunt and a festival-[hunt]" (Beeston 1972: 195). In another related example, toward the end of the Hittite empire, ca. 1200 B.C., to mark the festivities of spring and fall the statue of the king was transported outside the sacred enclosure. Ritualistic sacrifices were followed by a meal taken in common, after which sporting competitions and combat simulations ensued (Macqueen 1975: 109). If anything, these two chronologically distant and geographically divergent locations of the ancient Near East indicate that ritual dances, sport competitions and combat simulations were integral parts of ritualistic religious celebrations, and help to explain the otherwise odd combination of militaristic displays and fertility rites present in the Arjan bowl.



#### Narrative IVb: Date Harvesting and Fishing in the Marsh

These two scenes are filled with keenly detailed images depicting peacetime activities evolving next to a marsh filled with meticulously drawn avifauna. Among the numerous varieties of fowl flying over the marshes and feasting abundantly on fish, one can distinguish a goose, a flamingo or stork, a heron,

and perhaps some odd urogallus-like bird displaying the characteristic engorged esophagus or 'air bag'. Except for the urogallus these birds all qualify as common winter visitors of the shallow marshes of Khuzistan (Hole 1969: 18). Nearby, a man concentrates on his extended net, while a smaller individual grasps a net folded over a catch. Behind him lies a dog-like animal. On the left side of the fishing scene, two animals emerge from either side of the reeds; one wears a collar and looks very similar to the small animal found inside the chariot in Narrative Va.

On the right side of the marshes there is a date harvesting scene (which overlaps with the mock-battle scene). Date palms (*Phoenix dactylifera*) provided shelter, food, clothing, timber, fuel, building materials, sticks, sugar, oil, wax, wine, etc. Not surprisingly, in Mesopotamia, the date palm was a sacred tree associated with fertility (Danthine 1937: 104). Narrative IV b, portrays the seasonal date harvest. Men climb the palms, and the women and children collect the dates from the ground.

On the right side of the date-harvesting scene there is a "secondary" narrative involving two dog- or monkey-like animals at the base of two palm-trees trying to chase away a figure with raised arms standing between the top of two palm trees.

#### Interpretation

The two scenes portrayed on register IV, harvesting from nature and the celebratory mock-battle, are the logical continuation of the previous two narratives portrayed in Register V. After returning from a hunt and before entering the city, a king performed a series of rituals of desacralization. These rituals were enacted out at the periphery of the city, an ambiguous threshold between the city itself and the country-side, between chaos and stability, anarchical nature and civilization. This register celebrates in an idealized manner the bounty and richness of the natural world which, as a consequence of having performed the correct rituals and respected the taboos, gives itself freely to humans in the form of harvest.

#### REGISTERS III and II

Whereas the events in Register V take place in the mountains and the events in Register IV take place at the edge of the city, the actions represented in Registers III and II develop inside the city, which represents the space of the familiar par excellence. The city is controllable, manageable, civilized, and enclosed. In the refuge of this interior setting, two secular, socioeconomic, activities performed by and in the palace can be observed: the tribute procession (Register III) and the feast of music (Register II). Economically, the palace was a "closed-circuit organization in which goods and services were channeled into a circulation system and where the entire personnel were included in a hierarchic order" (Oppenheim 1964: 95).



#### The Tribute Procession

The king sits on a throne with a large pine cone topping either side of the back holder and wears the peculiar round-knob Elamite helmet and a long Assyrian-like ceremonial robe. His right hand rests on his lap while his left hand may be holding a drooping flower. Behind him is an individual whose iconography and rank is characteristic of a crowned prince. He wears a long ceremonial robe, the circular-knob helmet, and holds a long scepter. Behind the prince there are three armed individuals

occupying the rank usually given to the chief-ministers of the army or to local elite tribal chiefs. They wear short kilts and hold smaller staffs. In front of the king there is a royal attendant in Assyrian dress. Next to him, an individual wearing a short kilt bends his body forward as he holds his hand in front of his mouth. Next follows a beardless, eunuch-like royal guard, holding a short staff and raising his arm in a gesture towards the tribute bearers. The tribute the king receives is typified by the various species of animals present: four long-tail horses, three lions, a young deer or gazelle, a tiger or leopard, small birds inside a cage, a tiger or panther, four well-behaved ostriches, two big birds of prey, a bear, and two large containers of unknown content.

#### Interpretation

In Assyrian and Persian reliefs, a king's range of territorial influence was signaled by the number of populations willing to recognize his authority; non-payment of tribute at the expected time may have been a signal for dissent and revolt. Such a proclamation was stated implicitly by the variety of "gifts" depicted in a presentation. These "gifts" were not merely material offerings in the modern sense but also carriers of symbolic gestures of relationship, signifiers of allegiance, prestige, status, and territorial extension. The gifts, here manifested as animals, conveyed not necessarily friendship or generosity but a calculated relationship founded on the ideas of hospitality and reciprocity. By giving, and with the gift being accepted, the giver created an obligation in which neither he nor the receiver was free, but bound to comply with customary rules. The terms of the agreement took the form of an alliance in which the tributary party would offer material goods and personal services in exchange for ideological legitimacy, prestige and protection.

*"From the princes of the four regions (of the world), who had submitted to the yoke of my rule, whose lives I had spared, together with the governors of my land, the scribes and superintendents, the nobles, officials, and elders (?), I received their rich gifts as tribute.... Gold, silver, vessels of gold and silver, precious stones, bronze, iron, vessels of bronze, all (kinds) of shrubs (evergreens), choice oil, brightly colored (woolen) garments and robes of linen, violet and purple (cloth), elephant hides, ivory, antimony, maple (?) and boxwood, large Egyptian horses, broken to the yoke, mules, asses, camels, cattle, ... as their rich gifts, I received... I caused them to sit down at a banquet and instituted a feast of music.*

#### The Feast of Music

The narrative in register II contrasts dramatically with the hieratic and formal organization of the tribute scene. Register II opens a window into a lively, informal party characterized by the almost total absence of a central focus. Instead, our attention drifts from the preparation of food and performances by musicians, dancers, and acrobats to a loosely arranged central event. Amid the display of a coordinated feast for the senses and panoply of sounds and smells, a cup bearer, the most trusted, loyal servant of the ruler, approaches the seated king from behind while pouring a liquid into a bowl. Two individuals are sitting on the ground in front of the king —notice that one of them may be wearing the Elamite round-knobbed helmet as well.

#### Interpretation

Sharing the bounty of the king's table, i.e. drinking from the same bowl, had implications beyond participating in a ritual of fraternity, enjoying the best entertainment and eating the finest foods. Classic sources reveal that, for the most part, and outside the rare public banquets, Persian kings ate alone. Neo-Elamite evidence may point out to a similar practice. After dining, the kings selected only a small number of invitees with whom to exchange toasts. Only then would the king drink wine from his



special personal cup (Briant 1989: 59). The royal meal and the idea of tribute were part of the same code of social and political-economic relationships. Those leaders showing their allegiance to the king (Narrative III) were in charge of providing the king's table with the best goods of the kingdom. In exchange, they were invited to sit at the table of the king and to share in the royal redistribution (Narrative II). Equally, all those losing favor with the king would be excluded from the royal circle and barred from receiving any of the accumulated goods from the king's table.

What had the king to offer in exchange for this allegiance and tribute? The king provided material goods to his "subjects" according to conventional obligations determined by geographical location and rank, but also social and political status in the form of prestigious goods symbolizing merit and personal connections. Prestigious goods such as metallic drinking bowls were "absolutely indispensable for the maintenance of social relations" (Claessen 1996: 31). The rulers that succeed in maintaining a monopoly on such goods could use them to proclaim common destiny and to reaffirm the allegiance of the highborn. Furthermore, by maintaining their original form and substance prestigious goods were able to "preserve symbolic meanings that were recognized long after they were donated" (Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1976: 132).

The narrative in register III features a tribute procession recalling the ones portrayed in Assyrian and Achaemenid monumental reliefs. Yet, some details disclose a tantalizing window into the Neo-Elamite world just before it was to become part of the emerging Achaemenid Empire. It has been suggested that the tribute procession, a theme derived from Mesopotamia and Egypt originally meant to describe the military subjugation of the tributaries, was to be transformed by the Achaemenids into "a scene of pious reverence" invested with an "aura of religiosity" (Root 1979:277). Thus, it would appear as if the Achaemenids came to formulate their own tribute scenes out of a rejection for Assyrian realism and, consequently, came to represent a ceremony that may never have taken place. Whether or not one shares the previous views, the steps by which the Achaemenids reached their own version of the tribute theme remain to be thoroughly explained.

The lack of evidence indicating the existence of Elamite tribute scenes of the Neo-Assyrian and Achaemenid kind should not preclude us from asserting distinctive characteristics of the tribute procession represented in the Arjan bowl. Despite the proposition that "it was probably only in the time of Darius that the king had chosen to represent the crown prince with himself" (Kaptan 1996: 261), the presence of the "prince elected" standing behind or beside the throne in the Arjan bowl suggest that this practice was already in vogue during the Neo-Elamite period. Furthermore, the individual in front of the king making a reverent gesture, combined with a procession of tribute bearers bringing different animals (such as is characteristic of a Persian tribute scene than an Assyrian one) speaks for a Neo-Elamite participation in the formation of the classic Persian tribute scene.

#### REGISTER I: Running Lions and Bulls

Register I drives further beyond the spatial boundaries of the city and takes us into the vertical realm of the cosmological. This register is filled with six alternating pairs of running lions and bulls. The lion-bull association goes back to the first Mesopotamian dynasties; The strength and temperament of the two beasts made them favorite symbols of power and protection throughout the ancient Near East.

#### Interpretation

For practical and religious reasons having to do with the seasonal cycles as established by the divinities—the usurat shame uersti, "plans of heavens and earth" or "cosmic destinies"—deciphering the language of the sky was a major priority for the agricultural and grazing cultures of the ancient Near

East. A modest comment on cosmological interpretation in ancient Near Eastern culture is in order here. As far as we can tell, the study of heavenly phenomena was systematic and recorded variously in the form of omens; as descriptive and mathematical astronomy; and, as horoscopes since the Sumerian period (Rochberg 1998). Earlier cosmological, computational schemes focused on lunar visibility throughout the month, length of daylight throughout the year, and planetary observations. By 1000 B.C. the Babylonians were able to recognize 18 zodiacal constellations (whose paths the moon and the planets appeared to move through). Around 650 B.C., these constellations were systematized and distributed among 12 months. Two hundred years later, the number of zodiacal constellations had been reduced to 12 (each covering 30 degrees of the sky and beginning with Aries from mid-March to mid-April) (Rochberg 1990).

A theory developed by W. Hartner perceives the lion-bull combat as a celestial representation of a cosmic struggle between the constellations Taurus and Leo, marking the beginning of the Assyrian lunar-solar calendar as well as that of the Zoroastrian year, or the Nowruz. According to Hartner, the relative position of the two constellations in the horizon by about 500 B.C. marked the vernal equinox (when the length of the day and night are about equal, March 21) or Spring, which set in motion the beginning of barley, and date harvesting, and sheep shearing:

*The triumphant Lion, standing at [the] zenith and displaying thereby its maximum power, kills and destroys the Bull trying to escape below the horizon, which during the subsequent days disappears in the Sun's rays to remain invisible for a period of forty days, after which it is reborn, rising again for the first time (...) to announce Spring equinox and the advent of the light part of the year (...) (Hartner 1965: 16).*

Although there is no reason in the context of the Arjan Bowl not to interpret the motif of a lion pursuing a bull around a rosette as an announcement of the equinox—a most important event in the life of any pre-industrial agrarian community—caution must be raised regarding the general application of this interpretation (Stronach 2002: 387). "Bulls and lions...are found among the fabulous beasts in heraldic groups in the so-called proto-Elamite glyptic art of north-western Iran" (Green 1994: 249). Those associations, Pierre Amiet asserts, may simply stand for "elementary powers charged with the stability of the world".

CENTRE: The Rosette



The rosette is a prevalent ancient Near Eastern decorative motif long associated with the goddess Inanna and the planet Venus. One of its early manifestations appears in the Uruk period, where a rosette oversees the entrance to an animal barn adorned with the ring-posts of Inanna. Also, many of the rosettes known from the Middle Assyrian period were found in the Ishtar (Inanna) temple at Ashur. During the Neo-Assyrian period, rosettes were a common object of decoration on wrist straps, royal robes, and horse ligatures. They were equally popular on earlier and contemporary Iranian metal and terracotta vessels (Muscarella 1977: 36).

Interpretation

On the Arjan Bowl, the rosette is not just an expedient, traditional decoration gracing the center of a bowl. Rather, the motif, while not necessarily representing the goddess Ishtar, complements perfectly the evolving thematic sequence of the five previous registers (see below).

#### CONCLUSION

The description and interpretation of the images engraved in the Arjan bowl have unveiled the presence of distinctive series of narratives documenting the activities of a high-status individual best identified as a king. These activities occur in three, well-differentiated territories: in mountainous terrain, in the periphery of the city, and in the inner city, all of which suggests a clear awareness of the topography of the land and its qualitative properties. Beginning at the edge of the bowl with the unfamiliar terrain of a mountainous region (Register V), the artist takes us to the periphery of the city (Register IV); follows the royal dependencies of the inner city (Register III and II); and the lions and bulls in perpetual cyclical movement perhaps marking the beginning of spring (Register I); to finally reach the center of the bowl, the realm of the gods, which transcends direct human experience; the origin of all that is stable, primal, and immortal. The ideological landscape of the Arjan bowl as represented in these five registers appears to have been understood as a set of concrete orientations directly related to a literal sense of perception, that is to say, to a set of qualitative orientations ordered concentrically within experiential reality. Given a lack of known empirical geography, space was understood and defined as friendly, familiar, manageable and enclosed, or as hostile, alien, unmanageable and open. This knowledge of space does not just inquire about the nature of reality but provides a map of reality in the context of which one can navigate and, with the help of rituals, transform the mundane into a meaningful set of actions directed by the figure of the king. In short, the bowl subscribes to an ideology of kingship where the monarch, sitting on his throne or riding inside a chariot, acts as mediator between the deities and humans, asserting by the absence of chaos, foreign enemies, wild beasts, sickness and infertility, the blessing and the protection of the gods over the land he rules. This understanding of space is not just ideological inasmuch as the bowl illustrates a propagandistic exaltation of the rule and role of the king, but cosmological, since it provides a complete view of the world (*Imago Mundi*). Respectively, the Arjan bowl subscribes to a long-held ancient Near Eastern tradition, which upholds the primary religious character of a work of art. At the same time, the visual program of the Arjan bowl is multi-dimensional since it addresses and negotiates the interests and interactions of two separate parties: the maker of the bowl and the person who commissioned it.

Indeed, the intentions of the patron and the artist in this case can only be examined against the background of the large body of exceptional Phoenician metallic bowls. These bowls have been attributed to the particular skill of individuals tracing their artistic lineage to the Mediterranean Levant during the eighth through the seventh centuries B.C. The Phoenician artist has been characterized as a master in “pulling elements out of their traditional (Egyptian, Assyrian, North Syrian, Aegean) setting and reinserting them in a new environment” (Markoe 1985: 34). This eclectic approach to the image is thought to have originated out of the Phoenician multicultural nexus, “whose status as middlemen and commercial intermediaries would readily account for such a pronounced intermixing of elements”. As the Neo-Assyrian empire expanded towards the Mediterranean between the ninth and eighth centuries B.C., the new political order made it possible for these artisans to advertise their luxury items throughout the empire and its periphery, catering to the wealthiest of clients whom, at least in two instances, involved princes or kings. These individuals belonged to a distinct cultural tradition, described as a “warrior aristocracy,” characterized by burials housed in built chambers (Markoe 1985: 79). The Phoenician system of replicating and customizing the same scene or sequence of scenes suggests that individual artists may have had available a manual or sketchbook including entire series of model episodes or scenes from wide range iconographic sources.

Y. Majidzadeh has demonstrated striking stylistic and thematic analogies between the Phoenician corpus of bowls and the Arjan bowl. Yet, despite direct references to both Assyrian and Phoenician iconographic and stylistic models, the Arjan bowl reflects in its own idiosyncratic way a new adaptation to prior Phoenician influence. Certainly, the traditional method of attributing one or another origin is by looking for the source of a particular style or narrative. Yet, one cannot ignore why an object was made, its intended use, and the context in which it existed.

As has been pointed out (see footnote 34), the unusual dimensions of the Arjan bowl suggest that, contrary to its Phoenician relatives, this object was not meant to have been used as an individual drinking vessel. Curiously, this observation is further underlined by the two occasions in which a drinking vessel appears represented in the Arjan bowl. In both cases—in register V the king sits on the throne and holds a cup; and, in register II, the cup-bearer behind the king pours a liquid inside a bowl held with one hand—it is apparent that these images were not meant to be self-referential representations of the Arjan bowl. Thus, we are left with the question of the real, intended, usage of the bowl and, indirectly, the vexing question of the identity of the bowl's commissioner. Accordingly, I would like to suggest that the exceptional size of the Arjan bowl is directly related to the constraint to represent a complete cycle of narratives—which could not otherwise have been included on a smaller bowl—and to the religious-funerary context of the bowl itself. Like most Phoenician style bowls, the Arjan bowl “ended life” as a funerary offering. In this respect one particular series of metallic bowls was marked by inscriptions identifying them as offerings to the gods “for the life of the soul” of such or such individual. Thus we are led to think that the images portrayed on these bowls were addressed not to a living audience but to the ancestors and to the gods themselves. Ultimately, like a biographical account, the deeds represented in the Arjan bowl articulated to a mortal audience the epical accomplishments of a royal life as ordered by the gods. Accordingly, the main purpose of the images represented on the Arjan Bowl could have been to serve as a visual mnemonic device for the “soul” of the king so as to insure his rightful place among his ancestors. The function was essentially commemorative (lit. within memory): a monument of remembrance.

Generally speaking, the quest for fame and immortality and the tradition of a king metamorphosing into a mythological figure after death is strongly rooted in ancient Near Eastern tradition—the idea of raising humans to heroic levels goes back to the time when epical kings, such as Gilgamesh “establish[ed] forever a name eternal” by confronting and defeating the forces of chaos during their lifetime. Thus, to be a king, hierarchically at the very tip of the human pyramid, implied obligations requiring defending and upholding the “heroic destiny” and the harmonious balance of the cosmic order as decreed by the gods. In addition, parallel to the international ideological justification for the role of kingship and to the cosmological dimension of the Arjan bowl, we should not overlook the fact that, as betrayed by a number of details such as the Assyrian-dressed soldiers wearing the Elamite helmet; the detailed portrayal of musicians, cooks, and performers on Register II; or the unique Tribute Scene on Register III, we are dealing with a number of events whose historical significance remains yet to be determined.

In conclusion, it can be argued that the available evidence locates these scenes, and the Arjan bowl itself, in the waning days of Neo-Elamite rule just prior to Elam's assimilation into the newly evolving Persian political order. The evidence points to a wealthy individual of conceivable Persian ancestry who bore an Elamite name and was connected to the territory of Arjan, perhaps the location of the ancient Neo-Elamite capital of Hidalu. Precisely, the “biographical” aspects of the Arjan tomb have unveiled important aspects of the identity of the deceased revealing his elite social status as well as ideological concerns of religious and cosmological proportions. Hence, we may be gazing at events that took place in the Elamite-Persian permeable cultural koine of the end of the seventh century B.C. or the beginning of the sixth century B.C. which, as the Arjan bowl strongly suggests, was a

fascinating period of transition characterized by a symbiosis of emerging Persian influence with the last manifestations of an Elamite cultural and political revival.

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