

Notes on the formation of Persian art collections at the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale 'Giuseppe Tucci': research projects, exhibitions and Italian missions in Iran

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The National Museum of Oriental Art was established in 1957, thanks to the tireless work of Giuseppe Tucci (1894-1984).¹ He had long lamented the lack of an institute in Italy dedicated to Oriental Art in depth which would provide a point of reference for the preservation and study of Asian Art.

In 1933, Tucci founded the Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East (IsMEO)² with Giovanni Gentile, the aim of which was to establish a cultural and economic relationship with Asian countries and asked the Italian government to provide the funding to establish a Museum of Oriental Art, which would not come into being, however, until 1957. After the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950, he was no longer able to visit Tibet and, after the last two Nepalese expeditions of 1952 and 1954, he abandoned his exploratory activities. After 1955, as president of the IsMEO, he devoted himself to organizing and promoting archaeological expeditions to Pakistan, followed by campaigns to restore monuments and carry out excavations in Afghanistan and Iran.³

Following Italian excavations in the Swat Valley which had begun in 1956 at

¹ There is a large amount of literature about the famous scholar, see here only Beniamino Melasecchi, ed, *Giuseppe Tucci nel centenario della nascita. Roma, 7-8 giugno 1994*, Conferenze IsMEO, 8, Roma: Grafica Cristal 1995; Deborah Klimburg-Salter, 'I viaggi sul Tetto del Mondo verso la scoperta dell'arte e della cultura del Tibet' in Deborah Klimburg-Salter, *Alla scoperta del Tibet. Le spedizioni di Giuseppe Tucci e i dipinti tibetani*, Roma: Skira 2014, 33-59; Oscar Nalesini, 'Giuseppe Tucci' in Maria Grazia Bernardini, Mario Lolli Ghetti, eds, *Lo Stato dell'Arte - L'Arte dello Stato*, Roma: Gangemi Editore 2015, 89-90; Oscar Nalesini, *Giuseppe Tucci's Chronological Bibliography*, Serie Orientale Roma, n.s. 10, Rende (CS): Universal Book 2018; Alice Crisanti, *Giuseppe Tucci. Una biografia*, Milano: Edizioni Unicopli 2020.

² On the IsMEO institute, see the information in <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/italy-xv-ismeo-2> and <https://www.ismeo.eu/about-ismeo/>

³ In 1959, Giuseppe Tucci, along with Enrico Mattei, public administrator and chairman of the Italian National Fuel Trust, laid the foundation for the future of Italian archaeological activities in Iran. cfr. Pierfrancesco Callieri, Jebrael Nokandeh, Adriano V. Rossi, Seyyed Mansur Seyyed Sajjadi, eds, *Iran and Italy. 60 years of collaboration on Cultural Heritage*, Tehran: National Museum of Iran, 2019, 19. For an overview of the activity of the Institute in Iran, see Michael Jung, 'L'attività dell'Istituto per l'Africa e l'Oriente (IsIAO) in Iran nel campo della ricerca archeologica e della conservazione del patrimonio culturale' in *Antica Persia. I tesori del Museo Nazionale di Tehran e la ricerca italiana in Iran*, Roma: De Luca, 2001, XVII-XIX.

the Butkara site, where an important Buddhist sacred area had been discovered, the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale opened on 16 June 1958, with a major exhibition on Gandharan art. It was housed in the apartment of the Brancaccio princes¹ in the Palazzo Brancaccio² where it remained until 2016, when the Museum closed pending its move to the newly-established Museum of Civilisations. From 1958 to the present, the collections, have been enriched through purchases³ on the antiquities market, including donations, and bequests. These collections are divided into several departments (Near and Middle East, Archaeology and Art of the Islamic World, Gandhara, Tibet and Nepal, India, China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam) and a coin cabinet with gold, silver, copper and bronze specimens representing the entire Asian production from the 6th century BCE to the 20th century.

The department of the pre-Islamic collection

Before the establishment of the National Museum of Oriental Art, four rooms of the first floor of Palazzo Brancaccio housed the IsMEO Museum, where the collections of the IsMEO Institute were exhibited. These items became part of the new Museum of Oriental Art, under permanent deposit. Some of these finds were acquired by private collections following the first exhibition of Iranian art, held in the halls of Palazzo Brancaccio in 1956.



Figure 1. Doorlock, glazed pottery, Western Iran, Choga Zanbil, 13th century BCE (inv. n. 545).

Since 1959, the Persian collection has grown, thanks to a large donation of Persian pottery to IsMEO by the diplomat Ferdinando Scorretti,⁴ dated to the Iron Age I and II (1450-800 BCE), the *Archaic* and *Late Horizons of Western Grey Ware*. In the same period, Roman Ghirshman, director of the French Archaeological Mission in Chogha Zanbil near Susa (Khuzestan), also donated a glazed clay doorknob with the name of Elamite king Untash Napirisha (14th century BCE) (fig. 1).⁵

⁴ Paola D'Amore, ed., *L'argilla e il tornio. Tecniche e tipologie vascolari iraniche dal periodo del Ferro all'età dell'Impero sasanide*, Roma: Iasillo 1998.

⁵ Enrica Fiandra, 'Porte e chiusure di sicurezza nell'antico Oriente', *Bollettino d'Arte* 13 (gennaio-marzo 1982), 1-18.

In the IsMEO Collections the different cultures, developed on the Iranian plateau, were represented by painted vessels from Tepe Siyalk (Central Iran), from Luristan (Western Iran), and from the region of Kerman (South Eastern Iran), respectively from the V-IV millennium BCE and second half of the III to the first half of the II millennium BCE.

Thanks to gifts and purchases, this initial collection has grown over the years to what it is today, due also to excavations promoted by Giuseppe Tucci in the eastern region of Sistan from 1962 to 1977. Due to agreements with the Iranian government, Italy obtained part of the materials unearthed in the great proto-historic site of Shahr-e Sokhte (3rd millennium BCE),⁶ in the Achaemenid site of Dahan-e Gholaman (6th-5th century BCE),⁷ and in the Parthian-Sasanian site of Kuh-e Khwajeh (3rd century BCE-6th century CE).⁸ Shahr-e Sokhte (IV-II millennium BCE) was an important centre of the manufacturing and long distance trade of semiprecious stones and, besides the documentation of the stone processing, the large Shahr-e Sokhte collection in the Museum includes pottery, copper and bronze objects, wooden and bone tools, textiles, ropes, mats, parts of fishing nets, and seals and tokens used for accounting in the city store, which serve to document the administrative activity of this period.

The ceramic collection of the Iron Age in the museum is particularly remarkable. The painted pottery that had characterized the Iranian plateau in the 4th-3rd millennium BCE disappeared at the beginning of the second millennium and was replaced around 1450 BCE by a new grey pottery in the North-western region of Iran, specifically in the Hasanlu region. *Grey Burnished Ware* marks the start of the Iron Age (1450-1000 BCE). The Museum has a large collection of these

⁶ Shahr-e Sokhte is located in Zabol neighborhood. The place, one of the UNESCO world heritage sites, was discovered in 1967 by Maurizio Tosi. Since 2016 the city has been the subject of research and excavation interventions by an Italian-Iranian mission directed by Enrico Ascalone Director of the Multidisciplinary Archaeological Italian Project at Shahr-e Sokhte and by Seyyed Mansur Seyyed Sajjadi of the Iranian Center for Archaeological Research, see Enrico Ascalone, Seyyed Mansur Seyyed Sajjadi, *Scavi e ricerche a Shahr-i Sokhta. Studies and Publications* Institute, Pishin Pajouh, Tehran: Iranian Center for Archaeological Researches, 2019.

⁷ Dahan-i Gholaman was firstly identified by the IsMEO team in Sistan during a survey campaign in 1960. Subsequently, it was extensively excavated between 1962 and 1965 by Umberto Scerrato; in 1975 another season of excavations took place, mainly focusing on Building no. 4, see Bruno Genito, 'Dahan-i Ghulaman: una città achemenide tra centro e periferia dell'impero', *Oriens Antiquus*, 25, 1986, 287-317, Bruno Genito, 'Italy - VI. Italian Excavations in Iran; ii. Excavations in Sistan', in Ehsan Yarshater, ed., *Encyclopædia Iranica*, XIV, iii, New York: Brill 2007, 265-70.

⁸ Kuh-e Khwajeh is a flat-topped black basalt hill rising up as an island in the middle of Lake Hamun in Sistan. The citadel complex was investigated by Marc Aurel Stein in 1915-1916 and by Ernst Herzfeld. Subsequently, in 1960-1961 the Centro Scavi dell'IsMEO and the Centro Scavi of Turin conducted archaeological investigations directed by Giorgio Gullini, see Giorgio Gullini, *Architettura iranica dagli Achemenidi ai Sasanidi: il palazzo di Kuh-i Khwajeh (Seistan)*, Torino: Einaudi 1964.

ceramics including the vessels with long horizontal spouts, an indicative form of the Iron Age I.⁹

From the Iron Age II (1000-800 BCE), the grey pottery has multiple variations in both types and applied decorations, with the distinctive shape of the period being a jar similar to the modern teapot.¹⁰ In the Iron Age III (800-359 BCE), grey pottery tends to disappear, to be replaced in the North and South by a new pottery (similar but not identical), named *Late Buff Ware*, characterised by painted vessels with incised geometric motifs.¹¹ The range of the museum's ceramic collection shows a comprehensive variety of all the common and innovative elements created by local factories working at this date.

During the Iron Age, several distinct cultures developed in North-western Iran, especially in the Luristan Region, from where the museum's beautiful collection of Luristan Bronzes originate, which are described in a recently published monograph (fig. 2).¹²



Figure 2. Zoomorphic finial, Luristan, 1300-800 BCE (inv. n. 6498).

The period of the Great Persian Empires (Achaemenid, Parthian and Sasanian) is well represented in the Museum by a range of artefacts. The combination of nomadic and cultural traditions with those found locally in Persia, particularly Elamite, are represented in metallurgy and had common stylistic characteristics (the international Style), developed under the reign of Darius I in the 5th century BCE and became widespread in all regions of the Empire. Parthian art

⁹ D'Amore, *L'argilla e il tornio*, 21-4.

¹⁰ D'Amore, *L'argilla e il tornio*, 36, no. 35.

¹¹ D'Amore, *L'argilla e il tornio*, 43, no. 46.

¹² Paola D'Amore, Giovanna Lombardo, eds, *Bronzi del Luristan. La raccolta del Museo d'Arte Orientale 'Giuseppe Tucci*, Roma: Gangemi Editore 2019.

reflects the complexity of its period, in which the Iranian traditions are mixed with elements of Greek and Roman art. Among the most important finds is a Palmyrene funerary stele (3rd century CE), which had been part of the 19th-century collection of Count Gregory Stroganoff.¹³ Objects from the Sasanian period testify not only to its arts and crafts, but also to its wide circulation in the East and West, particularly its silver and glassware and demonstrate the Sasanian roots of so many elements of later European art. The collection of Sasanian silver items is especially rich: in particular, plates, bowls, round, oblong (elliptical) and multi-lobed cups and bottles decorated with motifs connected to royalty along with celebratory subjects.

Over the years, important acquisitions have expanded the already rich original nucleus of the museum's collections, including a number of seals dating from the 4th millennium BCE to the Sasanian period, and a small but important number of cuneiform tablets, collected by the antiquarian bookseller Lorenzo Vannini in Parma in the 19th century. The museum collections also include Persian ceramics and metal objects dating from the 3rd millennium BCE to the 18th century, a small number of animal figurines, pins and make-up palettes belonging to the cultures of Gilan, Transcaucasia and Luristan (Nota Collection), a large body of painted and monochrome Persian ceramics dating back to the 1st millennium BCE, and a variety of bronze weapons (particularly arrowheads and spears), attributable to workshops in the Gilan region (Carotenuto Collection).

In its first 60 years of activity, the 'Giuseppe Tucci' National Museum of Oriental Art presented various exhibitions of Persian art of the pre-Islamic period, in particular, *Shells. The trade and processing of seashells in the Middle East from the 4th to the 2nd millennium BC* in 1981,¹⁴ *Clay and the potter's wheel. Iranian Vascular Techniques and Types from the Iron Age to the Age of the Sasanian Empire* in 1999,¹⁵ *Ancient Persia. The treasures of the National Museum of Tehran and Italian research in Iran* in 2001,¹⁶ *Splendours from Iran. Jewellery and costumes for 5000 years of history* in 2007,¹⁷ and lastly *Parthian Iran* in 2009.¹⁸

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¹³ Paola D'Amore, 'Nobili, ambasciatori e medici. Alle origini del collezionismo vicino-orientale del Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale 'Giuseppe Tucci' in Silvana Di Paolo, ed., *Il collezionismo di antichità vicino-orientali in Italia: un rapporto tra pubblico e privato*. Atti del pomeriggio di studi 6 aprile 2011. Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Roma, CNR 2012, 49-67.

¹⁴ See the exhibition catalogue Raffaele Biscione, Maurizio Tosi, eds, *Conchiglie. Il commercio e la lavorazione delle conchiglie marine nel Medio Oriente dal IV al II Millennio a.C.*, Roma: De Luca Editore, 1981.

¹⁵ See the exhibition catalogue D'Amore, *L'argilla e il tornio*.

¹⁶ See the exhibition catalogue *Antica Persia. I tesori del Museo Nazionale*.

¹⁷ See the exhibition catalogue Silvana Balbi de Caro, ed., *Splendori dall'Iran. Gioielli e costumi per 5000 anni di storia esemplari da una donazione*, Roma: De Luca Editori 2007.

¹⁸ See the exhibition catalogue Carlo Lippolis, Roberta Menegazzi, Paola Piacentini, eds, *L'Iran dei Parti. Scavi a Nisa e materiali archeologici delle collezioni*, Roma: La Nuova Italia Scientifica, 2009.

The department of the Islamic collection

The core of the Department's "Archaeology and Art of the Islamic World" collection was formed around the few but important artefacts already in the IsMEO's possession in the years immediately following the establishment of the Museum, augmented over the years by purchases made directly by the Italian state and through numerous donations from private individuals.¹⁹ The initial collection included 8th-century Proto-Islamic pottery covered with heavy green glazing, inspired by Sasanian artefacts, slip-painted 9th-10th-century Samanid-era cups and dishes produced in Nishapur and Samarkand, decorated with elegant epigraphic motifs of great decorative effect or stylized figurative elements on a yellow background, which may be linked to court themes. Additionally, there were lustre-painted bowls produced in Iran in the 12th and 13th centuries, a series of star-shaped tiles for the decoration of architectural facades, produced in Kashan, and a group of ceramics of the same period imitating Chinese porcelain. Finally, there was a remarkable dish decorated in black slip under a turquoise glaze with a polylobate pattern, belonging to the group of ceramics called Kubachi after the name of a village in Caucasian Dagestan where they were found. A verse from the Divan of Hafez is inscribed on the rim, referring to the tears of an unhappy lover.²⁰

From 1960 onwards, the collection was enriched with a small number of Iraqi lustre ceramics,²¹ with very elegant examples of Samanid cups and dishes, *mina'i* ware from the late 12th to early 13th centuries and *lajvardina* (second half 13th-14th century) ceramics.²² The *mina'i* ware was produced mainly in Kashan and is characterized by a particularly delicate and refined design painted in polychrome enamels, where each colour used required a separate firing; with some details executed in relief and covered with gilding. The *lajvardina* ware, on the other hand, flourished before 1300 and is distinguished by a blue background imitating lapis lazuli, overlaid with floral, calligraphic and arabesque decorations in white, red and black with applied gold leaf.

¹⁹ For more details, see Donatella Mazzeo, 'Il contributo di Umberto Scerrato alla formazione delle collezioni del Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale', in Maria Vittoria Fontana, Bruno Genito, eds, *Studi in onore di Umberto Scerrato per il suo settantacinquesimo compleanno*, II, Napoli: il Torcoliere, 2003, 565-71; Gabriella Di Flumeri Vatielli, 'Introduzione alla collezione dei metalli islamici' in Gabriella Di Flumeri Vatielli, Roberta Giunta, *I metalli islamici. La collezione del Museo delle Civiltà Museo d'Arte Orientale 'Giuseppe Tucci'*, Roma: Artemide, 2022, 11-6.

²⁰ Paola Torre, 'Arte della ceramica islamica' in Paola Torre, Gabriella Di Flumeri Vatielli, Michael Jung, eds, *Arte dell'Islam*, Roma: Artemide 2010, 28-9.

²¹ Umberto Scerrato, *Ceramica irachena del IX-X secolo (cosiddetta ceramica di Sāmarrā)*, Museo Nazionale d'arte orientale, schede 2, Roma: Tipografia Don Bosco, 1968.

²² Umberto Scerrato, 'Acquisti del Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale. Arte Iranica', *Bollettino d'Arte*, 50, 1965, 235-41; 'Nuove acquisizioni dei Musei e Gallerie dello Stato. Roma. Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale. Arte Iranica pre-islamica. Arte islamica', *Bollettino d'Arte*, 57: 3-4, 1972, 349-52; 'Nuove acquisizioni dei Musei e Gallerie dello Stato. Roma. Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale. Iranica pre-islamica. Arte islamica', *Bollettino d'Arte*, 58: 4, 1973, 240-6.

Qajar ceramics are also represented in the collection by a series of relief tiles decorated with figurative scenes (equestrian handing food to a phoenix, a pair of opposing figures on horseback, galloping horseman).

The museum collection of metalwork contains tableware, jewellery, weapons and armour, made of gold, silver, copper, iron, lead, zinc and tin, brass, and a quaternary copper alloy, which was used for mortars, inkwells, buckets etc. The items which make up the collection include jugs (7th-10th centuries), of Sasanian tradition, small bottles of Roman-derived shape for khol, bath oils and perfumes (12th century), large circular and rectangular trays (datable to the 10th-11th centuries), mortars, oil lamps with one or more spouts and a lid, several specimens of lamp-stands consisting of a tripod base and a cylindrical stem or a stem composed of overlapping spherical motifs and a saucer, as well as several burners for perfume or incense.²³

The Iranian art collection includes manuscripts and miniatures depicting hunting and court scenes produced in Iran under the Safavid (1501-1736) and Qajar (1779-1924) dynasties and in 2007, was considerably enriched through the acquisition of the Antonio Giuliano collection, which consisted of 70 individual folios belonging to 46 manuscripts in Arabic and Persian, and one in Turkish, dating from the 8th to the 19th century,²⁴ as well as some Indian and Qajar-era miniatures. This acquisition also includes seals in semi-precious stone.

With regard to Iranian textiles, the museum possesses a 16th-century Safavid fabric re-used in Europe as a liturgical vestment.²⁵

Thanks to a successful seizure by the Nucleo Tutela Patrimonio Culturale (*Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage*) of Monza, the Museum's small glass collection²⁶ has been augmented with new specimens, dating from the 10th-11th century.²⁷ The numismatic collection contains Arab-Sasanian coins, issued by the Dabuyid dynasty of Tabaristan between 640-761 CE, and coins from the following periods up to the Afsharids and Qajars.²⁸

²³ On the metalwork of the museum, see Gabriella Di Flumeri Vatielli, Roberta Giunta, *I metalli islamici*.

²⁴ Valentina Sagaria Rossi, 'Elementi di mise en page illustrati dai manoscritti di origine persiana del Museo Nazionale di Arte Orientale' in *L'arte della calligrafia persiana. Roma. Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale 'Giuseppe Tucci' 5-13 febbraio 2011*, Roma: LG. Roma, 2011, 57-67.

²⁵ Paola Torre, 'Arte Tessile' in Paola Torre, Gabriella Di Flumeri Vatielli, Michael Jung, eds, *Arte dell'Islam*, Roma: Artemide 2010, 55-8.

²⁶ Bruno Genito, *Vetri iranici*, Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale, schede 10, Roma: Tipografia Don Bosco, 1977.

²⁷ Michael Jung, 'Vetri' in Paola Torre, Gabriella Di Flumeri Vatielli, Michael Jung, eds, *Arte dell'Islam*, Roma: Artemide 2010, 61-2.

²⁸ Gabriella Di Flumeri Vatielli, Roberta Giunta, Michael Jung, *Le monete islamiche. I, La collezione numismatica*, 1. Roma: Artemide 2008, 73-5; II-III, *La collezione numismatica*, 2. Roma: Artemide 2009, 61-70.

Before the Oriental Museum of the Brancaccio Palace closed in order for it to be moved to its new home in 2016, its collection was increased enormously thanks to the "Bonardi-Tucci Collection" formed by Giuseppe Tucci and his wife Francesca Bonardi (1917-2014)²⁹ who joined Tucci in several archaeological expeditions as a photographer. Tucci's widow had already donated an initial number of artefacts, consisting of 2092 works of art from Iran, Tibet and Nepal in 2005,³⁰ and in 2008 she gave the Museum a collection of 1600 pieces of ethnic jewellery mostly from Afghanistan, Pakistan but also from Iran, Tibet, Turkmenistan, and India³¹ for study purposes with a view towards it becoming a permanent donation. It includes rings, buttons, bracelets, necklaces, collars, anklets, tiaras, earrings, ear and temple ornaments, pendants, as well as small items such as zoomorphic (animal-shaped) perfume holders and ophthalmic bottles.

Of particular note, are the items produced in the Qajar period which were donated by Francesca Bonardi to the Museum. Besides jewels,³² the museum received an oil painting, objects made in *papier mâché*, for example a box and penholder, and a triptych with a mirror decorated with courtly scenes. The number of items representing this period in the collection was therefore significantly increased. Besides the pottery tiles already mentioned above, the museum owns a beautiful oil painting showing a noble woman,³³ about sixty cups and dishes in ceramics from the Vannini Caggiati collection, acquired in 1999, and weapons comprising helmets (*kolahkhud*), shields (*sipar*), and an armguard (*bazuband*) (fig. 3).



Figure 3. Qajar weapons, 18th- 19th century, gift Brunetti (inv. n. 18244, 18243, 18245, 18246).

²⁹ Paola D'Amore, 'Dall'Iran al Giappone lungo la Via della Seta. La raccolta d'arte di Francesca Bonardi Tucci' in Maria Grazia Bernardini, Mario Lolli Ghetti, eds, *Lo Stato dell'Arte - L'Arte dello Stato*, Roma: Gangemi Editore 2015, 85-8.

³⁰ Donatella Mazzeo, ed., *Splendori dell'Asia. Frammenti di Diamante*, Roma: Artemide, 2005.

³¹ Umberto Scerrato, Maurizio Taddei eds, *Monili dell'Asia dal Caspio all'Himalaya*, Roma: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente 1963.

³² Gabriella Di Flumeri Vatielli in *Splendori dell'Asia*, figs. 218-9, 223.

³³ Paola Torre, 'Un dipinto Qajar tra oriente e occidente' in *Splendori dall'Iran*, 83-7.

Quite extraordinary are the two 3.50m high brass sheet candelabras with engraved, embossed and openwork decorations.³⁴ A wedding contract is also included.³⁵

Although our contribution focuses on Iranian Islamic art in the Roman museum, it is also worth mentioning briefly the other treasures in the museum collection from Islamic countries such as Turkey, Uzbekistan and India. Particularly noteworthy is the huge collection of Ghaznavid art, numbering about 2,000 pieces, from the excavations of the Italian Archaeological Mission in Ghazni (1957-1968), which includes architectural decorations in marble and terracotta, tombstones, ceramics and metalwork,³⁶ as well as the wooden pillars, columns and huge capitals from the summer hall of the mosque in Lakar, Swat Valley, Pakistan, which are quite remarkable and which will be installed in the future Oriental Museum (see below).

Activities/exhibitions, research and archaeological excavations

The permanent exhibition of the collection and the conservation of the artworks constitutes only one part of the activities of the Oriental Museum. Another vitally important aspect is the organization of exhibitions and conferences devoted to the archaeology and art of Iran. A small review of these events testifies not only to the museum's activity in this field, but also to our institution's constant and fruitful cooperation with the Ministry of Culture of the Islamic Republic, the

³⁴ Umberto Scerrato, 'Coppia di candelabri di Isfahan di epoca qāğār', *Arte orientale in Italia*, II (Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale, 3), Roma, 1971, 27-48. As there has been increased interest in Qajar in recent years, I have included information on artworks of this period kept in other Roman museums. The Museo Nazionale del Palazzo Venezia holds two helmets (*kolahkhud*), part of the Odescalchi collection (inv. PV 13002, 13330), as well as an armguard (*bazuband*) and a shield (*sipar*), cfr. Gabriella Di Flumeri in Maria Giulia Barberini, ed., *L'elmo lucente dal XV al XIX secolo nella collezione Odescalchi*, Roma, Museo Nazionale del Palazzo di Venezia 16 dicembre – 16 gennaio 2004, Roma: Miligraf, 2004, 43-4. Furthermore, a curved-bladed dagger (*khanjar*), a battle axe (*tabarzin*), a pair of steel candlesticks decorated in gold, a lapwing made with the same technique and materials, an interesting lion-shaped padlock surmounted by a warrior, and blue and white pottery imitating Chinese ceramics. The Oriental Room of the Banca d'Italia at the Koch Palace houses part of the Riccardo Gualino collection which includes a pair of beautiful steel sculptures of peacocks decorated in silver (inv. 43931) and in silver, gold and copper (inv. 43932), cfr. Michael Jung, 'Due sculture islamiche in metallo dall'Iran di periodo Qajar', in *La collezione di Arte Orientale della Banca d'Italia- visione d'arte asiatica* (in print); two attractive items of the Qajar period period can be found in the Musei Vaticani: a watercolour in the style of Aqa Riza (inv. MV.112488.0.0) and a ceramic tile showing a hunting scene with a hawk (inv. MV.125641.0.0).

³⁵ Written in Isfahan in 1918 (inv. 21307-9). The text in *nasta'liq* specifies that Balkis Khanum's dowry comprises a house with a cistern, a well and adjoining outbuildings in a neighbourhood of Isfahan, in the alley of the 'bean sellers'.

³⁶ For the Ghaznavid collection see the mission website <https://ghazni.bdus.cloud/>, where there is a bibliography including all publications related to the archaeological research in Ghazni and its materials.

Embassy of Iran, the Embassy's Cultural Institute, and the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization of Iran.

Since 1965, several exhibitions have taken place, showing new museum acquisitions or special exhibitions on particular aspects of Persian culture. In 1989, the exhibition *Oriental Padlocks, Function, Symbol, Magic* showed the function, manufacture and symbolism of these special artefacts.³⁷ In 1993, *Oxus. Treasures from Central Asia*³⁸ with a selection of Central Asian materials from the museum and loans from several foreign museums, included, as a highlight, works belonging to the famous Oxus treasure loaned by the British Museum and, more recently, the exhibition *Muslim Art from Iran and Afghanistan* was held in 2000.

The richest exhibition, which was a resounding success with the public, took place in 2001: *Ancient Persia, Treasures of the Tehran National Museum and Italian Research in Iran*.³⁹ About 170 distinguished works from the Tehran Museum were displayed in our halls, in order to illustrate the history and achievements of Italian research teams in Iran, such as excavations and restorations at Shahr-e Sokhte, Dahan-e Gholaman, Persepolis and Isfahan.

The subject of the *Sports and the East*⁴⁰ exhibition in 2002-03 concerned sporting competitions such as the game of Polo⁴¹ and their depiction on Islamic works of art. In the exhibition *Aromatics: Essences, Fragrances and Spices between East and West*⁴² held in 2003, Iranian objects made of metal, glass and ceramics for the purpose of storing essences, spices, aromas and perfumes were displayed. In *Splendours of Asia – Diamond Fragments. Exemplary Works from a Donation* of 2005,⁴³ objects belonging to the Tucci-Bonardi donation, including precious Khorasan-made metals as well as jewellery from the Qajar period, were exhibited to the public for the first time. With the numismatic exhibition *Caskets of the Orient*, in 2006, an in-depth study was devoted to the Islamic medal collection; the research carried out for the exhibition then resulted in the publication of the entire corpus in two volumes. In the 2007 Exhibition

³⁷ Paola Torre, ed., *Lucchetti Orientali. Funzione, simbolo, magia*, Roma- Palazzo Brancaccio 5 luglio- 30 novembre 1989, Roma: Arti Grafiche Jasillo, 1989.

³⁸ Paola D'Amore, Giovanna Lombardo, eds, *Oxus. Tesori dell'Asia Centrale*, Roma: De Luca, 1993.

³⁹ *Antica Persia. I tesori del Museo Nazionale di Tehran e la ricerca italiana in Iran*.

⁴⁰ See the exhibition catalogue Paola Torre, ed., *Lo sport e l'oriente. Roma- Palazzo Brancaccio 10 dicembre -30 marzo 2003*, Roma: Iasillo Grafica, 2002.

⁴¹ See also Michael Jung, 'Breve storia del gioco del polo nella civiltà islamica come sport e come fonte d'ispirazione letteraria ed artistica' in Claudio Mancuso, ed., *Percorsi di storia e antropologia dello sport*, Lavis: il mulino, 2021, 85-92.

⁴² See the exhibition catalogue *Aromatica. Essenze, profumi e spezie tra Oriente e Occidente, Roma, Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale. 7 maggio- 8 luglio 2003*, Roma: Elio de Rosa editore, 2003.

⁴³ Donatella Mazzeo, ed., *Splendori dell'Asia*.

Splendours from Iran, Jewellery and Costumes for 5,000 Years of History,⁴⁴ a selection of ethnic costumes as well as jewellery was displayed.

Among the most inspiring initiatives was the exhibition *The Art of Persian Calligraphy* in 2011,⁴⁵ in which the public had the opportunity to admire and compare the modern calligraphic art works of the artist Zoreh Abbasi with those of the Safavid period from manuscripts in our collection. In the workshop she set up and organized, interested visitors had the opportunity to deepen their understanding of this art by trying their hand at performing simple calligraphy. The exhibition *Iran Art and Culture. The Civilization of Iran through Pottery, Calligraphy, Miniatures and Images of the Present and the Past*⁴⁶ took place in 2015 and was the last one that was held in the Museum's former location in the Palazzo Brancaccio pending its move to new permanent quarters in the Pigorini National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography. A photographic exhibition was organized in 2018: *Peoples and lands of the wool. Traditions, cultures and glimpses into the transhumance routes between Iran and Italy* and comprised a comparison of pastoral civilizations with customs, activities and traditions which are deeply linked even though separated by thousands of kilometres, namely between Iran with the Talysh and Qashqai pastoralists and, in Italy, the transhumance between Abruzzo, Molise and Puglia. The exhibition activity of the Islamic sector related to Iran also included participation in off-site exhibitions in Italy and abroad, with the loan of state-owned works and scientific artefacts.⁴⁷

In addition to the work carried out in the Rome office, it is also necessary to mention briefly museum participation in excavations or research missions in Iran. From 2002 – 2006, the museum was involved in the IsMEO/IsIAO Mission to Isfahan and in the Italian post-earthquake cooperation project at Arg-e Bam.

The Great Mosque of Isfahan is outstanding not only for its architecture and the beauty of its decoration in brickwork and in tiles, but also for its long and rich building history. Its decay, caused by various factors such as humidity, static problems, and neglect, required a thorough restoration which was conducted by the IsMEO from 1970 to 1978. From 1972, excavations in several sectors of the mosque accompanied this restoration work.⁴⁸ The activity of the Italian Mission was

⁴⁴ See the exhibition catalogue Silvana Balbi de Caro, ed., *Splendori dall'Iran*.

⁴⁵ See the exhibition catalogue *L'arte della calligrafia persiana*, Roma, 2011.

⁴⁶ See the exhibition catalogue *Iran. Arte e cultura. La civiltà dell'Iran attraverso ceramiche, calligrafie, miniature e immagini del presente e del passato*, Roma: P.S. Edizioni 2015.

⁴⁷ Artworks were lent for the exhibition *Marco Polo y el Libro de las maravillas* to the museums La Lonja (Zaragoza) e Centro Social y Cultural Fundaciòn "la Caixa" (Tarragona) in 2006 and Casa de la Provincia (Sevilla) in 2007; for Marco Polo, Man and Myth, to the Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum Hannover in 2011-2012, to the Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico (San Juan) in 2014; for *Court and Cosmos: The Great Age of the Seljuqs*, to the Metropolitan NY in 2016; *For Drop by Drop. Life falls from the Sky. Water, Islam and Art* to the Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization in 2021.

⁴⁸ For an overview: Umberto Scerrato, 'Ricerche archeologiche nella moschea del Venerdì di Isfahan della Missione archeologica italiana in Iran dell'IsMEO (1972-1978), in *Antica Persia*,

stopped unfortunately because of the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1978-79. When work was resumed by the Italian mission in 1999, the main task was to archive, study and analyse the findings left behind by the Italian team within the mosque in 1978 for safekeeping. Among the finds, which constituted over 510,000 excavated artefacts such as pottery, glass, metals, coins, leather, etc., were about 300 fragments of wall paintings. In addition to undertaking organizational tasks, museum officers were mainly involved in the study and publication of the pre-Seljuk wall paintings⁴⁹ and the Blue and White pottery found previously during the excavation.

The greater part of the mural fragments comes from the mihrab area (sector 190) of the sanctuary under the dome built by Nizam al-Mulk. These fragments were researched and subdivided into a typology by Michael Jung (Co-director of the Mission 2002-2004) and samples were analysed by means of XRF analysis and mineralogical-petrographic investigations on cross-sections in the laboratories of ENEA (*Italian National Agency for New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Economic Development*). The decorations were made with only a few pure colours: white (the final gypsum colour coating the mud plaster left in reserve), blue (lapis lazuli), red (cinnabar/vermilion, ochre, or earth), gold, and, very rarely, black-olive green. The expensive lapis lazuli was the only blue pigment used in the mosque, applied in very thin layers. The results of gas-chromatography-mass spectrometry confirmed the presence of egg, utilized as a binding medium.

The paintings of the mosque show different pictorial styles and techniques of execution. Their typology includes 11 different types of wall paintings, which can be assigned to several phases. They consist in epigraphic bands in Kufic script, pearl-strings, linked three-lobed arches, relief scrollwork and geometric and vegetal ornaments. The greater part of the murals seems to belong to the pre-Seljuk period (before the 11th century, probably between the 8th and 10th century). Future research will perhaps make it possible to link the paintings more precisely to 'Abbasid phases of the mosque (under the caliphs al-Mansur and al-Mu'tasim, during the 2nd-3rd c. H/8th-9th c. CE) and /or to the Buyid phase during the 4th c. H/10th c. CE).

The involvement in the Italian post-earthquake cooperation project in Arg-e Bam was also an important project. After the disastrous earthquake in 2003, the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage chose seismic improvement measures and restoration of the huge Tower No. 1 as its project, accompanied by archaeological surveys in collaboration with the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization.⁵⁰ These

XXXVII- XLIII; Bruno Genito, Fariba Saiedi Anaraki, eds, *ADAMJI Project. From the excavation (1972-1978) to the Archive (2003-2010) in the Masjed-e Jom'e, Isfahan*, Tehran, 2011.

⁴⁹ Michael Jung, *The Wall Paintings of the Great Mosque of Isfahan*, Firenze: Nardini 2016.

⁵⁰ The collaboration involved besides the author, the Iranian colleagues Narges Ahmadi, Mehdi Keramatfar, Joodaki Azizi, Leila Fazel and Nazanin Khojasteh Behzai (ICHTO) and Vincenzo Torrieri from the Abruzzo Superintendence of Archaeology and Fine Arts, Teramo office.

limited excavations helped understand the very nature of the tower and contributed to the setting up of proper consolidation and restoration methodology.⁵¹

In 2017 a new project was started with its major goal being to search for a lost and forgotten city gate, which was presumed to be hidden under the collapsed walls of the huge tower n. 46 (*Shotor Galu*). This tower represents a crucial point within the city walls and is aligned with one of the major road axes of the settlement, running from east to west. Its discovery will be able to give further proof of a general plan of Arg-e Bam as being a town quite similar in formation to those of Central Asia which were inspired by Hellenistic forms, with its rectangular layout being in direct contrast to those with circular or irregular plans found in neighbouring provinces.

Bam⁵² is composed of three main parts, described also by Arabian and Iranian geographers like al-Istakhri, al-Muqadassi, Ibn Hawqal, Yaqut and Hamdallah Mustawfi. A citadel (*arg* or *hisn*), seat of the Government Quarters and centre of the administration, can be distinguished by the existence of a circumvallated inner city (*qal'a*, *medina* or *sharistan*) with the bazaars, wealthier living quarters and the Friday Mosque, and an outer city (*rabad*) with more modest dwellings, craftsman's establishments and orchards. A third additional wall also protected this part of Bam. Therefore, we can identify in Bam the typical tripartite division of the ancient and medieval towns of Central Asia, going back to the most ancient traditions of Khorasan and Khwarazm.⁵³

The circumvallated inner town of Bam measures about 425 x 300 m and has a rectangular shape, its city wall following the cardinal points. The massive walls are

⁵¹ Michael Jung, Vincenzo Torrieri, Nargez Ahmadi. 'Objectives and Activities of the Iranian-Italian Archaeological Team at Bam (Report February 2008)', *Arg. Annual Report of Arg-e Bam Research Foundation*, 2, 2008, 8-11; Michael Jung, Vincenzo Torrieri, Nargez Ahmadi, 'Apporti italiani alle problematiche di conservazione promosse dall'UNESCO in conseguenza di calamità naturali. Arg-e Bam. Archaeological Research of joint Iranian-Italian Mission. Italian post-earthquake cooperation project of MiBAC. I- The archaeological research (2005-2010)', *Bollettino d'Arte*, 6, 2010, 145-52; Michael Jung, Vincenzo Torrieri, 'II - Fortificazioni, sistemi difensivi ed eventi bellici a Bam. Fonti storiche e archeologia', *Bollettino d'Arte*, 6, 2010, 153-65; Michael Jung, Vincenzo Torrieri 'Ritorno nel deserto dei Tartari. Le ricerche archeologiche italiane a Bam', *Archeo*, 343, 2013, 30-41; Michael Jung, Vincenzo Torrieri, 'The preliminary results of the archaeological missions of the Italian Post-Earthquake Cooperation Project at Arg-e Bam, UNESCO World Heritage site, in collaboration with ICHTO since 2004', *Journal of Sistan and Baluchistan Studies*, 1, 2021, 31-48.

⁵² The best and most comprehensive study on the history of Bam is still Chahryar Adle, 'Qanats of Bam: An Archaeological Perspective: Irrigation system in Bam, its birth and evolution from the Prehistoric Period up to Modern Times' in Morteza Honari and al., eds, in *Qanats of Bam. A Multidisciplinary Approach*, UNESCO Tehran Cluster Office. Tehran, 2006, 33-85.

⁵³ There is ample literature on the urbanism of Central Asia, see e.g. Rocco Rante, 'The Iranian City of Rayy: Urban model and military architecture', *Iran*, XLVI, 2008, 189-211; Pierre Leriche, 'Das Baktrien der 1.000 Städte', in *Alexander der Grosse und die Öffnung der Welt. Asiens Kulturen im Wandel*. Publikationen der Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen, 36. Regensburg, 2009, 155-67.

very high and reinforced by 52 robust towers. Today, there are only two city gates left in the southern wall. The main north-south axis of the Sharistan emanates from the main gate in the south-western section of the wall.

Some important architectural elements of the ancient city gate were already identified in the excavation and the stratigraphic analysis of the first campaign.⁵⁴ In the external sector, on top of the bastion and on the embankment of the city walls, we were able to discover the northern and southern wing of the city gate in its last phase. The northern wing is made of mud bricks and positioned orthogonally to the west walls of the town. It is linked to a pre-existing tower, which was curved in form.

This discovery confirms our assumption of a city gate on the west side of the walls. Considering that the excavated structures stand high on the level of the bastion, we expect to find earlier phases of the city gate and corresponding towers in the lower layers which are yet to be excavated.

The study of the ceramic material found in the different stratigraphic units supports this thesis, which will certainly have to be verified in future campaigns. The ceramic materials discovered in the erasure phases of the city gate are due to backfilling and overlaying from the Islamic period. The earliest ceramic materials, Achaemenid and possibly Seleucid, that can be associated with the structures that were found were discovered sporadically in the inner areas of the city, in a well silo sealed within the walls, and in the rubble created by the collapse of the walls, filling the room that closes off the inside of the ancient gate. The dynamics of the documented material suggest that the found structures of the gate, which were sealed off in the phases associated with the Islamic period, are indeed ancient.

New research campaigns will be essential to complete and confirm our assumption that this is indeed the western gate of the city of Bam, with its layout typical of the Hellenistic town planning, which is substantially supported by the data we already have. As the excavated and documented levels were somewhat disturbed by pre- and post-earthquake contamination (including plastic fragments), the relative chronologies of the different phases of the rampart and walls still need to be verified and defined. Therefore, a definitive chronological assignment must be postponed until future archaeological seasons. Three campaigns were planned for the project, but for various reasons, only one has been carried out so far.

As mentioned above, Arg-e Bam shares important characteristics with the urban centres of Central Asia of Khorasan, Khwarazm and Afghanistan like Herat, Begram, Merv, Tobrak Kala, Zar Tepe. Dal'verzín Tepe and Kafyr Kala. They have in common:

- The orientation towards the points of the compass,

⁵⁴ See. Joodaki Azizi, Michael Jung, Leila Fazel, Vincenzo Torrieri 'Archaeological excavation of Tower 46/Shotór Galou in the Western Rampart /Citadel of the Arg-e Bam Complex', *16th Annual Symposium on the Iranian Archaeology*, 5-7 March 2019 (in Farsi).

- A square or rectangular shape of the city plan as opposed to a round or irregular shape,
- One or more rectilinear street axes dividing the city into a grid of regular building areas,
- A strong city wall, provided with towers and sometimes with a ditch,
- A tripartition of the town in a citadel, *sharistan* and *rabad*,
- A citadel located on the edge of the residential quarters, integrated into the city wall and mostly in the northern part of the city,
- A building period after a certain time, i.e. after the Achaemenid period and after Iran and Central Asia had come under Greek political and military control or were in close contact with Greek theories and practices of urbanisation.

Therefore, it is obvious that Bam's city layout undoubtedly belongs to this kind of urban design that is typical for Central Asia and which goes back to the Hellenistic period. Further studies and hopefully new excavations at Arg-e Bam will certainly prove even more parallels, which may stress the common characteristics of urban planning in Iran and Central Asia after the Achaemenid period. They may also help to uncover the beginnings of Arg-e Bam's present urban layout, which probably date back to the Seleucid or Parthian periods, built over even more ancient settlements.

Michael Jung

Move of the Museum and future full reopening

The National Museum of Oriental Art *Giuseppe Tucci*, housed in the Brancaccio Palace, was closed in 2016 in preparation for its move to the newly-established Museum of Civilizations.⁵⁵ This institution brings together the collections of the Prehistoric and Ethnographic Museum *Luigi Pigorini*, the Museum of Folk Arts and Traditions *Lamberto Loria*, the Museum of the High Middle Ages *Alessandra Vaccaro*, and the Museum of Oriental Art *Giuseppe Tucci*. This union was complemented recently by the African Museum *Ilaria Alpi* and the Museum of Geology of the *Istituto Superiore per la Protezione e la Ricerca Ambientale* (Superior Institute for Environmental Protection and Research). At the present time, unfortunately, only a rather small selection of our notable Islamic collection is exhibited in a room of the Pigorini Museum, whereas the major part is still kept in storage. The management of the Museum of Civilizations and all specialists interested in Oriental art in Italy and abroad are hoping for an expeditious and dignified re-opening of our collection. It should be housed, according to the intentions of the Ministry of Culture, in the Palace of Sciences under the Pigorini Museum in Rome's EUR district.

⁵⁵ The museum is located in the EUR (Esposizione Universale Roma) district in Rome, Piazza Guglielmo Marconi, 14.

D'Amore and Jung Notes on the formation of Persian art collections at the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale 'Giuseppe Tucci'

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