

Exhibition organized by the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation, New York

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Financial assistance for this project has been provided in part
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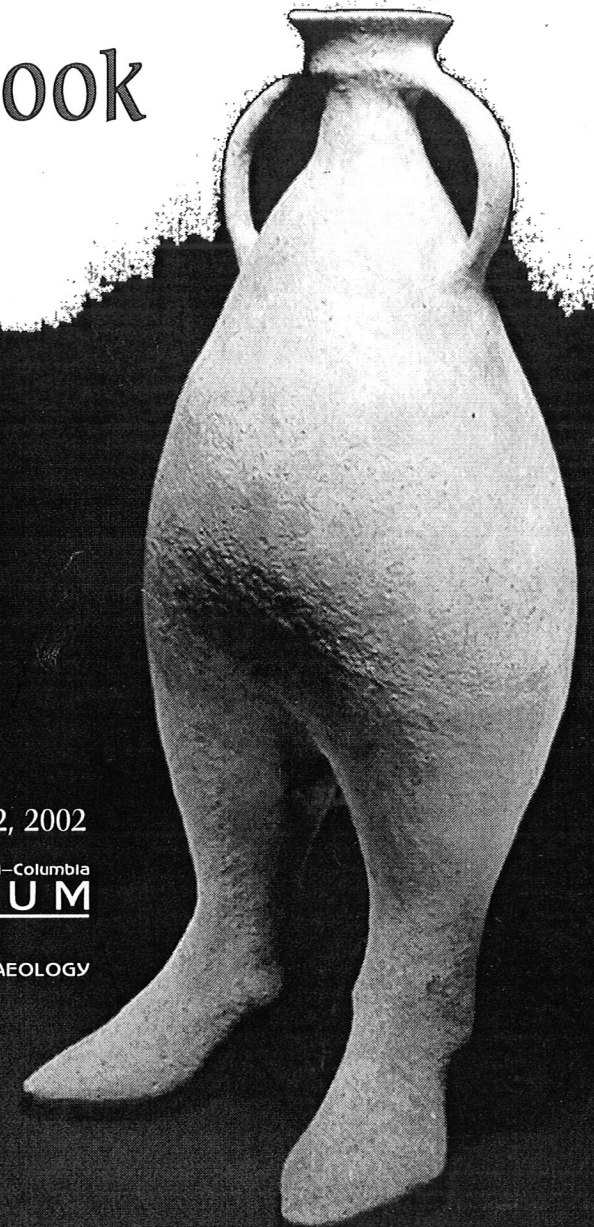
Wit and Wine:

A NEW LOOK AT ANCIENT IRANIAN CERAMICS
from the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation

DOCENT BOOK

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OF ART AND
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Godin Tepe

The site of Godin Tepe (ca. 3500 BCE) in the Zagros Mountains was a major trading center of a state having obsidian and iron. Remains from storage jars in depth provide some of the earliest evidence for wine in the ancient Near East.

Hasanlu



The wheel-thrown pottery of Hasanlu (ca. 3000 BCE) shows that long-distance trade and contact with the Mediterranean were active. The ceramics of Hasanlu included burnished gray ware with long necks, specific including metal vessels, and sculptural figural forms whose wheel-thrown base under a dove's foot or those with a rounded base.

Choga Zanbil



Fans of germs, bulls, and winged griffins flanked the lower sides of the zigzag or scalloped terraces of Choga Zanbil (ca. 1200 BCE). The terraces complex also displays a series of the Ishtar Gate Luristan Hoopline.

Germe



The germs of Germe (ca. 2000 BCE-1500 BCE) yielded two distinctive types of ceramics. One is a large jar with a rounded shoulder and a long neck. The other type is a small jar-shaped container, possibly a wine vessel.

Marlik



The stone-bowl vessels of Marlik (ca. 1500 BCE) for a painted gold, silver and copper vessels, bronze and iron weapons, gold jewelry, glass beads, and other artifacts. In addition to unglazed bowls and jars, the forms held specialized pouring vessels in the form of human figures, birds, bulls, deer, and cats.

Zaghe



The artists of Zaghe (ca. 1500 BCE) produced large, thin-walled, high-foot bowls painted with geometric patterns and intricate floral forms. Mosaic-like glass beads decorated the walls of the main rooms of the Palace. Building a large public structure.

Tepe Hissar



Tepe Hissar produced outstanding ceramics, including two different ceramics. Around 2000 BCE, pottery made from wheel-thrown vessels included, great-bellied, rounded grays and spotted redware. A incised pattern like the paws of a lion preferred against gray or black ceramics with a shiny surface produced by burnishing.

Tepe Sialk



Excellent ceramics painted with glazes and long-handled bowls of various shapes and forms were excavated from Tepe Sialk (ca. 5000 BCE). These thousand years later the pottery of Sialk produced a series of hand-painted pouring vessels painted with colorful, abstract, geometric, and other decorative motifs and characterized by a pinkish-red hue.

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Arthur M. Sackler Foundation
New York, New York

The Arthur M. Sackler Foundation was founded in 1965 by Arthur M. Sackler, M.D. (1913-1987), a research psychiatrist, medical publisher, connoisseur and collector of art. Dr. Sackler established the Foundation to make his extensive art collections available to the general public. He once said, "Great art, like science and the humanities, can never remain as the possession of one individual, creator or collector . . . great art and all culture belongs to all humankind."

The Foundation collection was formed through purchases of art selected by Dr. Sackler and gifts from Dr. Sackler and his family. It consists of over 900 works of art ranging from Chinese ritual bronzes and ceramics to Buddhist stone sculpture and the renowned Chu Silk Manuscript, the oldest existing Chinese written document.

Since 1973, the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation has organized exhibitions of the Foundation's collection and the Arthur M. Sackler Collections, and published eleven scholarly catalogues of the Arthur M. Sackler Collections. The Foundation has donated art to several museums in the United States, and currently has works of art on loan to many museums including the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington, D.C.; and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.



Arthur M. Sackler, M.D. (1913-1987)

Arthur M. Sackler, M.D. was born in Brooklyn, New York, and completed his medical studies at New York University in 1937. An eminent research psychiatrist, he pioneered research on the causal relationship between chemical imbalance and mental illness. Dr. Sackler remained active in the medical sciences throughout his life, founding *Medical Tribune*, the first medical newspaper for physicians, in 1960 and was its international publisher. At the time of his death in 1987 the journal was published in 21 countries.

An avid student of art history, Dr. Sackler began to purchase European and American art in the 1930s. "One wonderful day in 1950," he said, "I came upon some Chinese ceramics and Ming furniture. My life has not been the same since." Asian art, especially Chinese bronzes and jades, came to form the core of the Arthur M. Sackler Collections. "I collect as a biologist," Dr. Sackler said. "To really understand a civilization or a society, you must have a large enough corpus of data." As he studied the arts of Asia, he began to see the influence one culture had upon another. By 1987 Dr. Sackler's Asian collection included art from China, Korea, Cambodia, India, Japan, and ancient Iran. Eventually his interests expanded to include Italian maiolica and European terracotta sculpture from the fourteenth to the early twentieth century.

The Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, opened on the Mall in Washington, D.C. just four months after the sudden death of its principal benefactor. Dr. Sackler had donated funds for the building as well as 1,000 objects from the Foundation and the Arthur M. Sackler Collections. He also supported the construction of the Arthur M. Sackler Museum at Harvard University, though it does not house art from his collections. Together with his brothers Mortimer and Raymond, he provided the funds for the Sackler School of Medicine in Tel Aviv, the Sackler Institute of Graduate Biomedical Science at New York University, and the Sackler School of Graduate Biomedical Sciences at Tufts University, and the Sackler Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which houses the Temple of Dendur.

"Art and science are two sides of the same coin. Science is a discipline pursued with passion; art is a passion pursued with discipline. At pursuing both, I've had a lot of fun."

Arthur M. Sackler, M.D.

INTRODUCTION

For more than five thousand years (circa 5000 BCE–ca. 100 BCE), the artisans of ancient Iran produced beautiful, technically sophisticated, and often amusing ceramics. This rich tradition equals the pre-Columbian, Chinese, and Greek achievements in terms of ceramic design, but these artifacts are little-known today, having emerged from Iran only in the last fifty years. The body of work represented by the objects in this exhibition establishes Iran as the source of the fourth great ceramic tradition of the ancient world.

Because little written documentation survives from the early cultures that produced these ceramics, the religious beliefs and social practices associated with them remain mysteries to us. By analogy with other ancient people—such as the Greeks—as well as many modern Islamic cultures, we surmise that the drinking and pouring of liquids played an important social role in ancient Iran. The slender arched spouts, witty shapes and clever forms of the vessels indicate that this ceremonial or social activity was not necessarily somber.

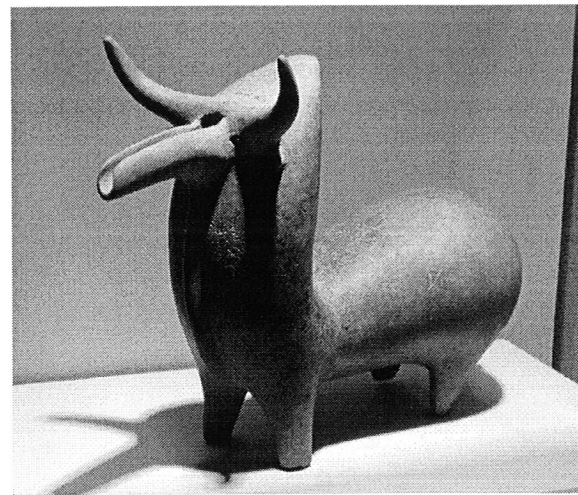
The works in this exhibition are organized into three sections: how these vessels may have been used; how they were made, and how they were decorated.

Spouted bull vessel
Northern Iran, Gilan province
1200–800 BCE*

The pronounced shoulder hump of this bull identifies it as a zebu, a type of cattle originally bred in India. Five vessels identical to this one were found in a tomb at Marlik in the southwest Caspian region, suggesting that this vessel, used for pouring water or wine, was also a tomb gift.

Back broken and repaired; tips of horns and spout, ridge on front and tail restored.

*OXTL analyses (ref. nos. 481c85 and 381u15) estimate that the samples tested were last fired between 2000 and 3800 years ago.



THE ENVIRONMENT OF ANCIENT IRAN

Ancient Iran, or Persia as the Greeks called it, was a land defined by natural barriers that may have hindered movement but also provided protection. The accompanying map of modern Iran illustrates that the rugged Zagros Mountains in the west separate the Iranian central plateau from lowland Mesopotamia (modern Iraq). The Elborz mountain chain running from Armenia and Azerbaijan in the west along the Caspian Sea to what is now Turkmenistan defines the northern edge of the region. Two major salt deserts and smaller mountain ranges form Iran's eastern boundary with modern-day Afghanistan and Pakistan. The southern edge ends in the dry, rocky coastline of the Persian Gulf.

Most of Iran has a high elevation, ranging from an average of 5,000 feet above sea level on the central plateau to 10,000 feet in

the Zagros Mountains. The climate is predominantly arid with hot, dry summers and cold winters. Most of the precipitation occurs in the winter. The ceramics in this exhibition come from the western and northern portions of the country where water from the snow-fed rivers encouraged settlement and allowed for later irrigation. The people in this region were the first in the world to domesticate the wine grape, *Vitis vinifera*, and to produce wine.

Several major trade routes passed through Iran in antiquity. The Baghdad-Khorasan Road, the principal trade route between eastern and western Asia, crossed Mesopotamia, climbed the Zagros Mountains west of Godin Tepe, and continued to the northeast to join the Silk Road to China. Luxury goods, such as lapis lazuli—a brilliant blue stone mined in eastern Afghanistan—and wine from the Zagros Mountains were traded along this route to Cyprus and Egypt.



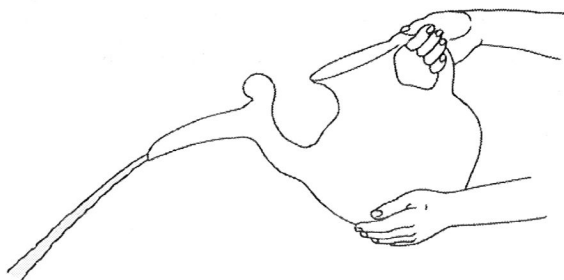
Ancient Iran was also a stock-breeding region. Sheep, goats and cattle flourished as early as 6500 BCE. The northwestern region (modern Azerbaijan) was famous for horses. Images of these domestic animals, as well as wild goats and deer, repeatedly appear on the ancient ceramics.

how old are they?

The ceramics in this exhibition were acquired on the art market and therefore lack archaeological documentation. We have relied upon information produced by the numerous Iranian, English, Belgian, Danish, American, German and Japanese archaeologists working in the field since the late 1950s to confirm the antiquity of these ceramics and to place them in their proper archaeological context.

Many vessels in this exhibition have been subjected to thermoluminescence (TL) testing, a technique that determines the age of fired pottery by measuring the amount of radiation acquired since firing. The phrase "OXTL analysis" seen on many labels in the exhibition means that the TL testing was carried out by the Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art, Oxford, England. The TL test provides a broad range of dates; information from archaeological excavations has allowed us to determine a more exact date for each piece.

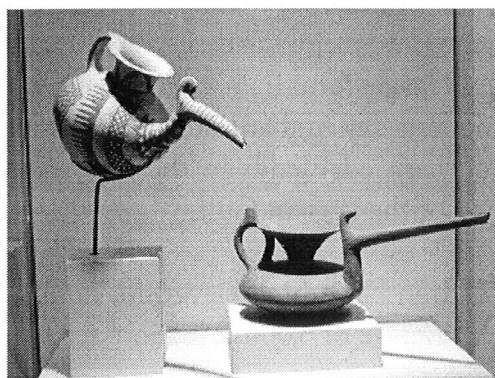
The abbreviation BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era) are used throughout this exhibition.



Spouted vessel
Central Iran, region around Tepe Sialk
800–600 BCE

The slender, curving neck, coiled terminal and horizontal spout give the pot a profile like a water bird. Archaeologists have excavated identical pieces from a cemetery at Sialk in central Iran. The elongated spout would have cast a thin arching stream as the funerary offerings, whether water or wine, were poured out. Notice that even the bottom of the vessel bears painted patterns.

Vessel broken and repaired; part of rim and neck of spout restored.



Beak-spouted vessel
North-central Iran, region around Khurvin
800–600 BCE*

The exaggerated spout of this dramatic vessel is twice the length of its body. The similarity of the shape to the preceding painted vessel from a different region implies shared social practices throughout Iran.

Spout broken and repaired.

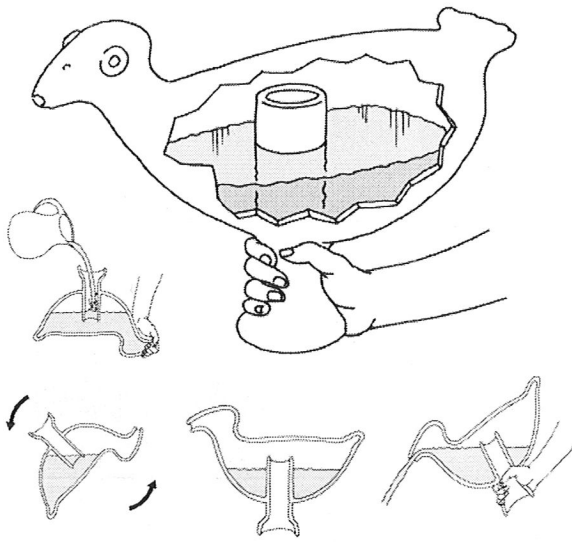
*OXTL analyses (ref. nos. 481c85 and 381u15) estimate that the samples tested were last fired between 2000 and 3800 years ago.



how were they used?

Most of the fine ceramics of ancient Iran were made for pouring and drinking liquids. The slender beaklike spouts on many vessels produce a thin, arching stream, suggesting a showy presentation appropriate for a religious ritual or social ceremony. But what was poured? Chemical analysis of the residue in storage jars excavated at Hajji Firuz (ca. 5000 BCE) and Godin Tepe (ca. 3300 BCE) reveals that the jars once held wine. In the middle of the first millennium BCE ancient Greek historians wrote about the Iranian custom of extensive wine drinking in social situations. Thus we assume that many of the vessels in this exhibition were used to hold or pour wine.

Spouted vessels may have been part of religious or funereal ceremonies, while other types may have played a role in social settings. Couples at wedding feasts or clan chieftains sealing alliances may have drunk from the twin spouts at the base of some animal-handled vessels. One can also imagine the entertainment value of these double-spouted vessels as an evening of social drinking progressed. The ingenious hidden opening in the bird-shaped vessel in the exhibition suggests how much the potters, and their patrons, enjoyed such clever effects.



Bird-shaped vessel with trick spout
Western or southwestern Iran
Parthian period, 250 BCE–AD 224*

This vessel must be turned up-side down to be filled. The beak is plugged and the liquid is poured into the columnar base. This hollow base extends within the body forming an interior well. When the vessel is slowly righted, the liquid remains inside without a plug or cork in the open base. It is then poured out through the open beak. While we don't know the specific uses to which this piece was put, its intricate design indicates that the elaborate ceremonial pouring of liquids was important.

Tip of beak, end of tail and part of base restored.

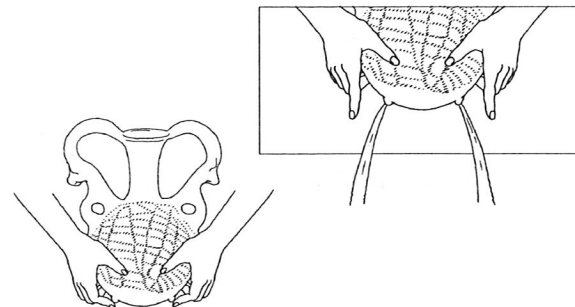
*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 481c74) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 2900 and 3600 years ago.



Twin-spouted vessel
Northwestern Iran
Early Parthian period, 250–100 BCE*

This vessel with handles shaped like mountain goats has twin spouts at the base. Two individuals could drink from the container at the same time, perhaps to formalize a marriage or seal an alliance. Even filling this vessel takes two people—one to hold it, a finger stopping each spout, another to pour in the liquid.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 381t95) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 2100 and 3200 years ago.



Recumbent camel with vessels
Western or southern Iran
Parthian period, 250 BCE–AD 224*

The dromedary or one-humped camel and the Bactrian, two-humped camel, were the most common caravan animals during the Parthian period when this piece was made. These camels carried the riches of the Silk Road, which linked China and the Mediterranean, through Iran. The two jars of the camel's load open into the hollow body that may have held wine. The liquid would have been poured through the small nozzle beneath the camel's neck.

The vessel was broken at the lower neck and repaired in antiquity; the back area with spout and handle was missing and rebuilt.

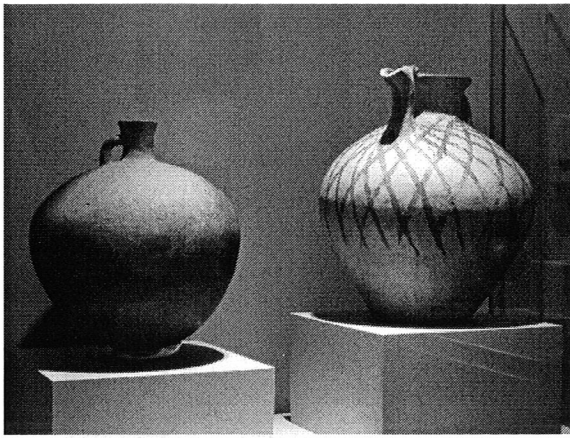
*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 481c82) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 1900 and 3000 years ago.

Globular vessel with bull's head
Western or southern Iran
250–50 BCE*

The arching head and neck of this bull look like a spout, but are in fact solid. The small nozzle protruding from the chest of the animal is the functional spout.

Left horn broken and repaired.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 381w24) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 1700 and 2700 years ago.



Globular jug
Northern Iran
1000–650 BCE

Wine may have been stored in this voluminous jug. The small mouth would have been easy to seal and the little ring handle is useful for pouring, rather than carrying. The rounded base kept the vessel from standing on its own, so a separate ceramic or cloth ring was most likely used to stabilize the vessel.

Spouted jug
Western or northwestern Iran
750–600 BCE*

The shape of this jug has a classic simplicity that is subtly enhanced by the net-like pattern painted on the swelling body.

Chips on rim and spout filled and inpainted.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 481c76) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 2000 and 3200 years ago.



Painted beaker
North-central Iran, region around Tepe Sialk
Ca. 3500 BCE

The tiny base of the beaker makes it most unsteady, especially when filled with liquid. Once filled, did the drinker have to empty it before it was set down?

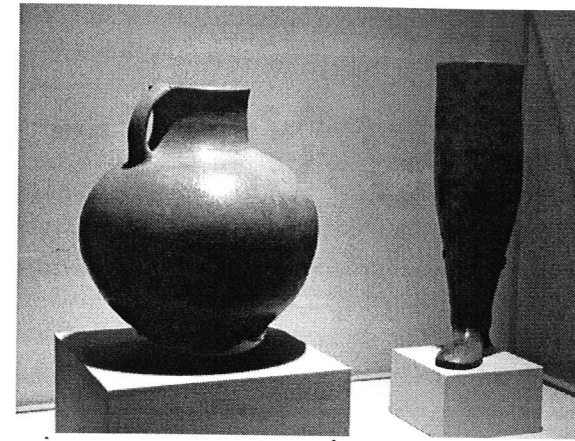
Small portion of rim missing and restored.

Jug with knobbed handle
Northern Iran
1100–800 BCE*

The rope-like ring at the base of the neck emphasizes the contrast between the spherical, bulbous body full of liquid and the narrow opening through which it must be poured.

Vessel broken and repaired; front half of rim restored.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 381q3) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 1900 and 3000 years ago.



Jug
Northern Iran
1000–700 BCE

The wide mouth and short neck of this jug made it easier to fill and to drink from. Not surprisingly, jugs of this type are fairly common, suggesting that they were made for daily use.

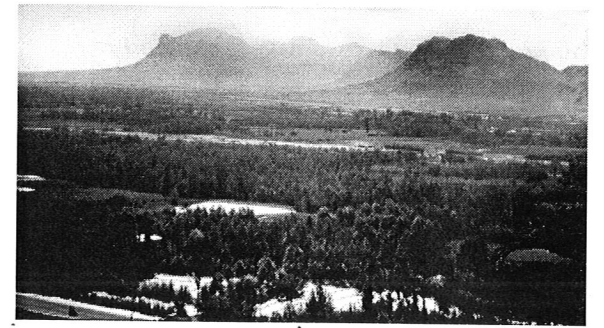
Vessel badly broken and repaired.

Leg-shaped vessel
Northwestern Iran, Azerbaijan province
Uartian culture, 800–600 BCE*

This leg-shaped drinking vessel is the ancestor of the modern glass boot used for beer. The Uartians who made such vessels would have poured wine into the top of the leg and let it flow out through a circular opening in the heel.

Broken at the ankle and repaired; portions of the upper leg restored.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 481c87) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 1500 and 2400 years ago.



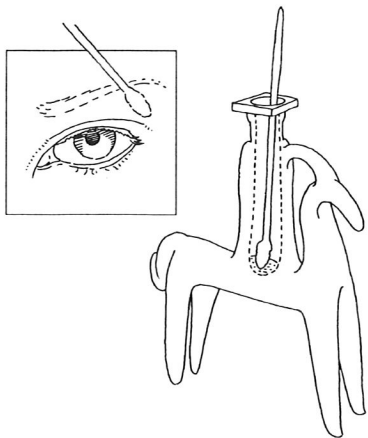
OTHER USES

Potters in ancient Iran also created fine ceramics to contain liquids other than wine. Water is a precious fluid in any dry country, and as early as the medieval period was offered from specially decorated or uniquely shaped vessels. This may have been the practice in antiquity as well. Perfumes, cosmetics and other luxury goods were stored in small, elegant containers with narrow necks that protected the expensive contents. Also religious practices may have led potters to create vessels for storing fragrant incense or pouring religious offerings.

1 Composite vessel
Western Iran
1900–1600 BCE

This vessel combines two deep wide-mouthed bowls and a smaller narrower jar into a complex form. Similar pots were excavated from tombs in western Iran, and we assume that they played some role in funerary rituals.

All four legs rebuilt at base.



2 Cosmetic bottle on a horse
Northwestern Iran, Azerbaijan
province
Urartian culture, 800–600 BCE*

Small slender bottles, generally without the horse-shaped support, are cosmetic containers whose narrow interior chambers probably held *kohl*, a black mascara-like substance used by both men and women in the ancient Near East to darken the edges of the eyes. The *kohl* was applied with a slender wooden or metal wand with a rounded tip that fit into the narrow bottle. Kohl is still used today in eye pencils.

Broken in many pieces and repaired; all four legs and tail restored.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 381u12) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 2500 and 3800 years ago.

3 Compound vessel with basket handle
Western Iran
700–600 BCE

This complicated pouring vessel features three connected jars linked by a rope-like handle. The handle ends with a cartoonish ram's head that is best appreciated when viewed from the front. When viewed from the side, the overall effect of the vessel is that of a whimsical long-nosed animal with short, stubby feet. Small animals form the handles of the two jars to the rear. Perhaps this vessel was used to offer a liquid that combined three different elements like a mixture of water, wine and grape juice.

4 Bull vessel with wheels
Western Iran
1000–700 BCE*

This amusing bull with leafy branches incised over its body and down its hindquarters looks like a very breakable pull toy. The bull was revered in ancient Iran as a symbol of life and regeneration. Ancient Iranians probably used this vessel in a religious setting as did many other ancient Near Eastern cultures. The openings in the muzzle and on the back suggest that it once held liquid.

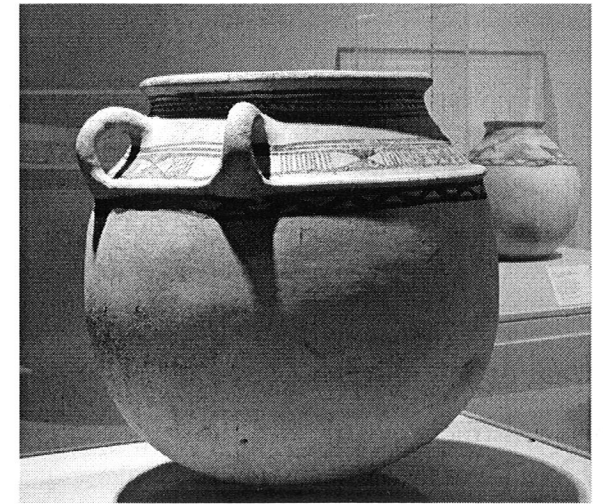
Some of the ancient wheels may be from another vessel; the wooden axles are modern.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 381w20) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 2000 and 3200 years ago.

5 Bottle with ram's heads
Northern Iran
1200–800 BCE*

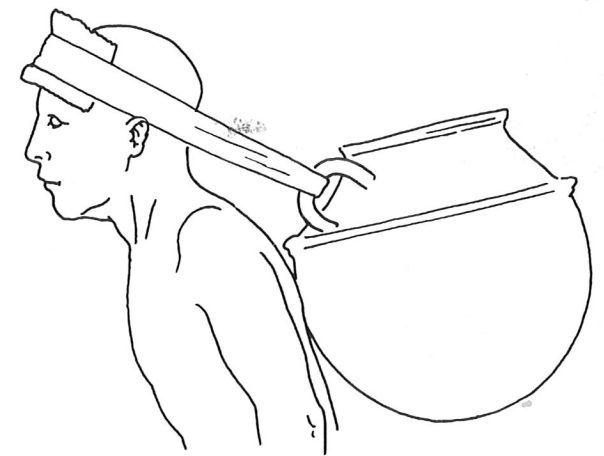
The rounded base keeps this bottle from standing securely by itself whether full or empty. Its narrow neck and flaring rim make drinking awkward, so it probably did not hold water or wine. The holes on opposing sides of the rim suggest that the vessel may have been suspended when in use, or they may have served to secure a stopper or lid. We do not know the vessel's function.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 381y89) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 1500 and 2400 years ago.



Storage jar with two lug handles
Western Iran
2000–1600 BCE

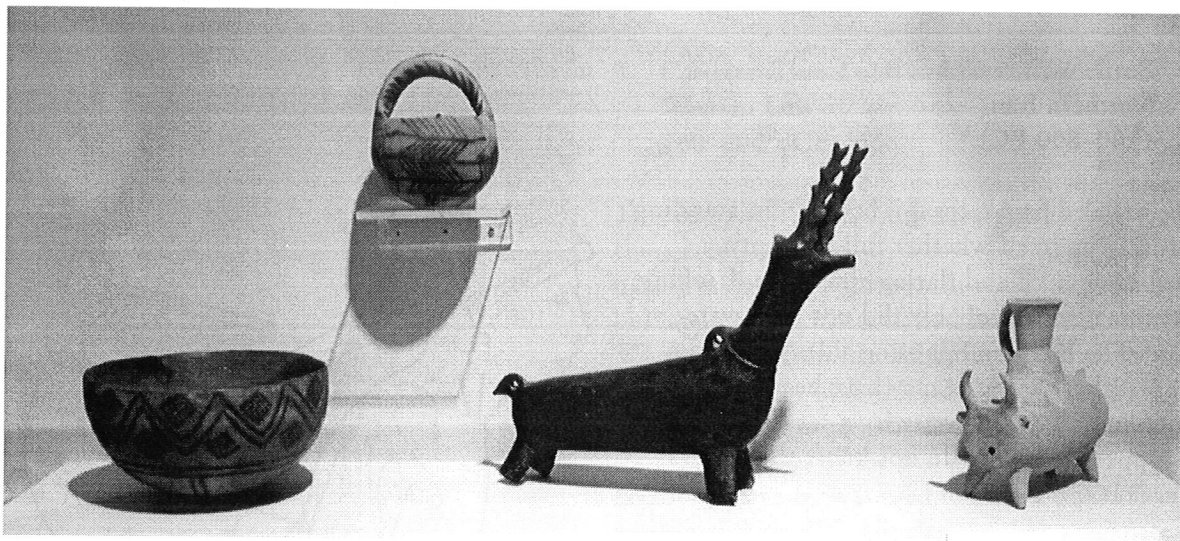
This large storage jar could have held water or even grain as the wide mouth makes it easy to scoop out the contents. The distinctive placement of the two lug handles on one side of the jar suggests that it was carried with a head strap.



HOW WERE THEY MADE?

The simplest way to make a ceramic pot has always been to shape the clay by pinching, pulling, rolling, pressing and otherwise manually manipulating it. The resulting works are handbuilt pots. By 4500 BCE the potter's wheel had been developed allowing the potter to use centrifugal force guided by the potter's hands to move the clay up and outward to form voluminous and uniform shapes with thin walls. These are wheel-thrown pots. Many sophisticated Iranian potters employed a combination of both techniques to make complex ceramics.

After thoroughly drying, a pot would be fired, that is it was heated until red hot. The shape and construction of the kiln, the type of fuel used, the length of the firing, and the availability of oxygen in the kiln, and the mineral components of the clay affect the finished appearance of the ceramic. One simple way of changing the color of iron-rich clay, which was common throughout Iran, was to add damp straw to the fire box of the kiln reducing the oxygen available during firing. This process, called a reduction firing, produces a dark gray or black surface. Conversely, an oxygen-rich atmosphere in the kiln produces a bright red-orange surface.



Painted bowl
Northern Iran
5000–3500 BCE

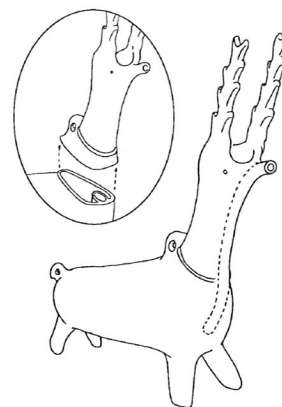
This bowl was hand-built by a skillful potter who stretched the pliable clay to a remarkable thinness. The sides and bottom of the bowl are painted, but the interior is plain indicating that the exterior was visually more important.

Stag vessel
Northern Iran, Elborz Mountains
700–200 BCE*

The smooth symmetrical body of the deer was probably wheel-thrown, but the legs and antlers were hand-built. Although the deer stands securely on its four legs, the vessel could also be suspended using the tabs at the base of the neck and on the rump. The tubular muzzle is the end of a long siphon-like tube that runs down the interior of the neck to the chest. The tube functions like a straw allowing the drinker to sip the contents without tipping the vessel.

Neck and horns repaired and restored; legs re-attached.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 381w16) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 2500 and 3800 years ago.



Basket-handled cup
Northern Iran
4500–3000 BCE

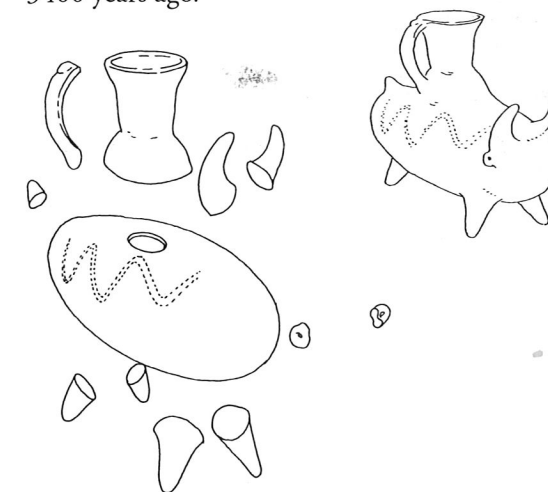
This little cup was made by pinching and pulling the clay into the round shape. The thick round handle, a separate strap of clay, was added to the cup before drying, painting and firing. The chevron pattern painted on the sides makes the cup look like a little basket.

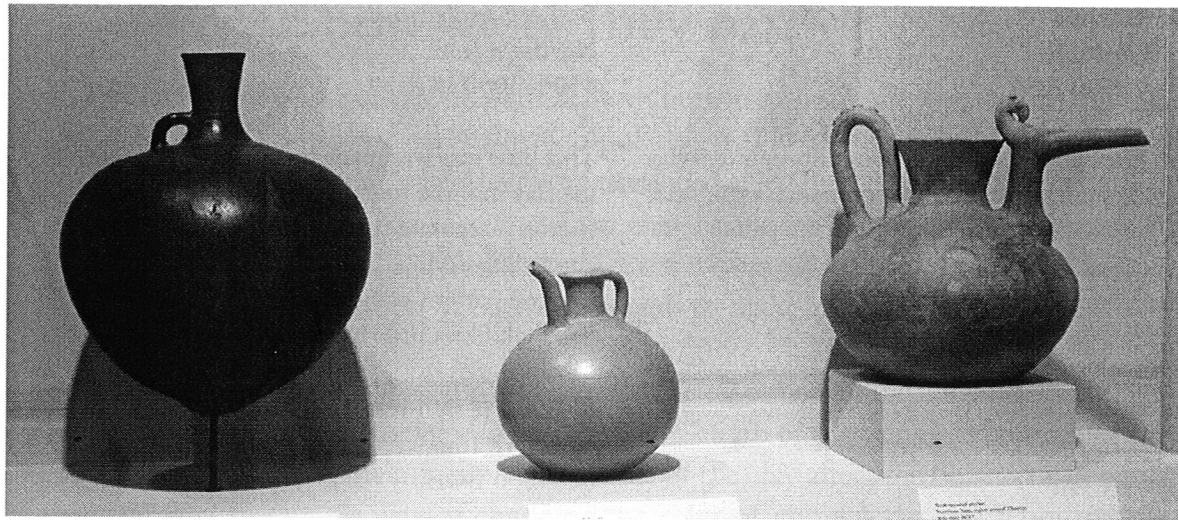
Composite bull vessel
Northern Iran
800–200 BCE*

The neck of the jug and the body of the bull were wheel-made separately and then joined. Traces of this process are visible on the interior of the neck. The horns, ears, feet, tail and handle were hand-built. The result is an intriguing though awkward little vessel.

Neck broken at the base and repaired; forelegs restored; mouth-like hole is modern.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 381u13) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 2200 and 3400 years ago.





Ovoid jug with tall neck
Northern Iran
1200–900 BCE*

The walls of this jug are very thin, so when empty, the vessel is surprisingly light. The neck is most likely wheel-made, but the body may have been made in segments, because the thin clay walls could not have supported the weight of the neck when wet. The pieces were then joined, dried, burnished to produce a shiny surface, and fired in a reduction kiln to achieve the dark gray color.

Vessel broken and repaired.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 381y91) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 2400 and 3700 years ago.

The high arching handle and the thin horizontal spout with its bird-head terminal were hand-built. The smooth even profile of the body suggests that it was wheel-made, but the oval shape indicates that the potter altered the body during fabrication. The round discolorations on the body indicate that other vessels were very near or touching this one during firing.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 481c34) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 2000 and 3200 years ago.

Spouted jug with handle
Northern Iran
1000–600 BCE*

The body and neck of this thin-walled jug were wheel-made; the spout and handle were hand-built. Burnishing, or smoothing the surface of the pot before it was thoroughly dry, produced the shiny surface. The bright red-orange color is the result of firing in an oxygen-rich kiln.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 481c52) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 1800 and 2800 years ago.

Beak-spouted pitcher
Northern Iran, region around Khurvin
800–600 BCE*

DECORATION

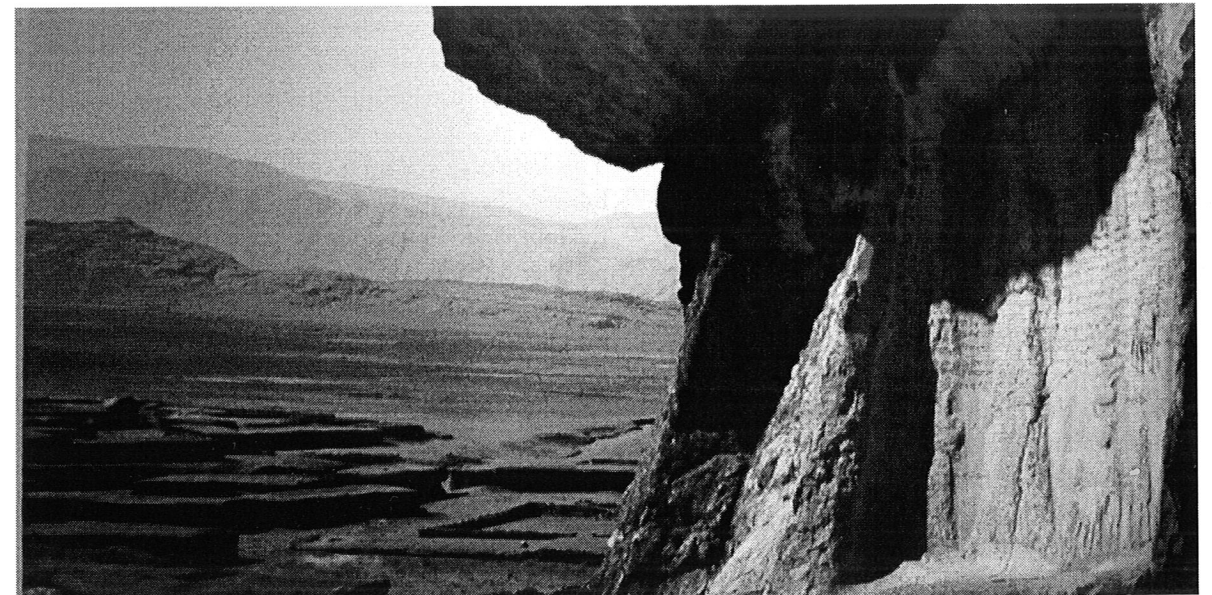
One of the simplest methods of decorating ceramic vessels was to paint the surface with a fine clay solution called slip. This slip may be painted in patterns, may cover the entire surface in a solid color, or may be used in a dilute form to merely tint the vessel. The areas painted with slip fire to a different color than the body of the vessel.

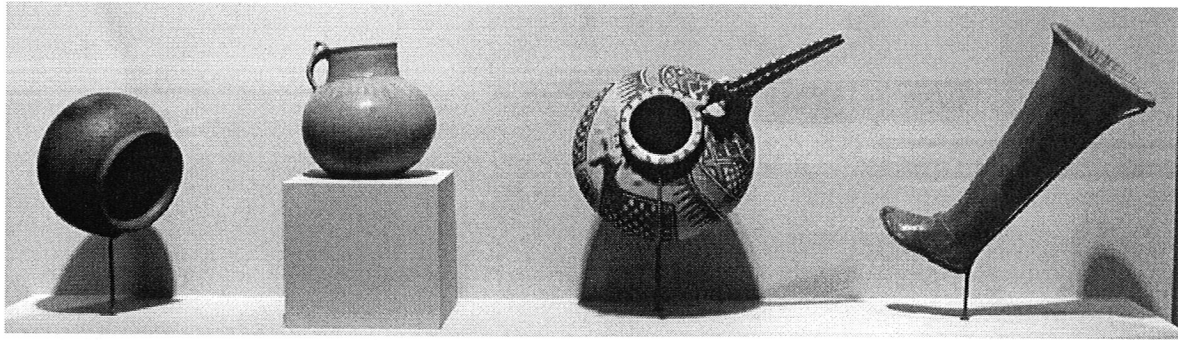
In another method of decoration, called burnishing, the damp surface of the unfired pot is polished with a smooth tool such as a pebble or bone. This produces a shiny surface after the pot is fired. Burnishing may be applied to the basic clay body or to the slip. It may be uniform to produce an all-over shine, or may be used in bands to produce patterns of alternating shiny and matte surfaces. The burnished shine is distinct from the glossy surface produced by a vitreous or glassy glaze. Ancient Iran did produce glazed ceramics, but there are none in this exhibition.

The surface of the pot may be altered by incisions made before or after firing. Patterns and textures produced by points pressed into the surface of the clay can be used to ornament specific zones or draw attention to transitions between segments of the pot.

Finally, small clay pellets applied to handles, rims and other areas of the pots create additional texture and ornamental shadows, as do three-dimensional appliqués such as animal heads.

Some pots in this exhibition demonstrate more than one method of decoration.





Pattern–burnished bowl
Northern Iran
1000–700 BCE

Burnished stripes descend vertically down the sides of the bowl from the solidly burnished shoulder. These stripes continue to the bottom where they merge into a cross-hatched square.

The three drilled holes on the bottom of the bowl are the result of sampling for thermoluminescence testing.

Spouted vessel
Western Iran, region around Tepe Sialk
800–600 BCE

This vessel is painted with richly layered bands of varied geometric ornament, even on the base. The checkered squares, fringes and net-like patterns suggest woven, embroidered or appliquéd textiles. The only known source for these unusually ornate ceramics is the cemetery at Tepe Sialk where some thirty examples were excavated in the 1930s. Most of these ceramics are in the Iran National Museum, Tehran, or in Paris at the Louvre Museum.

Body broken in many pieces and repaired.

Globular jug
Northern or northwestern Iran
1000–400 BCE*

The band of hatched pendant triangles around the shoulder of the jug was incised after firing.

Top of loop on handle restored; chipped rim filled and inpainted.

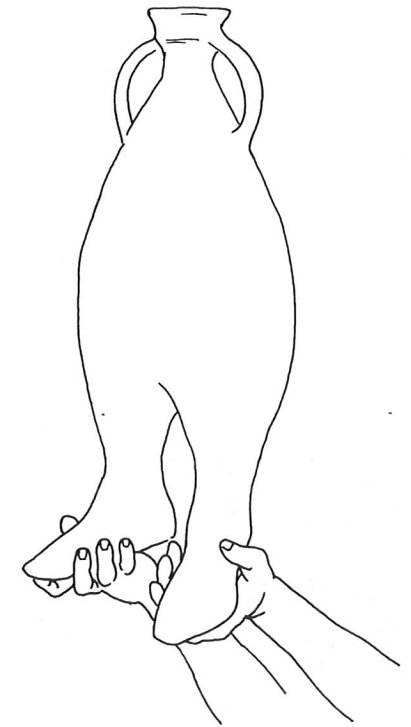
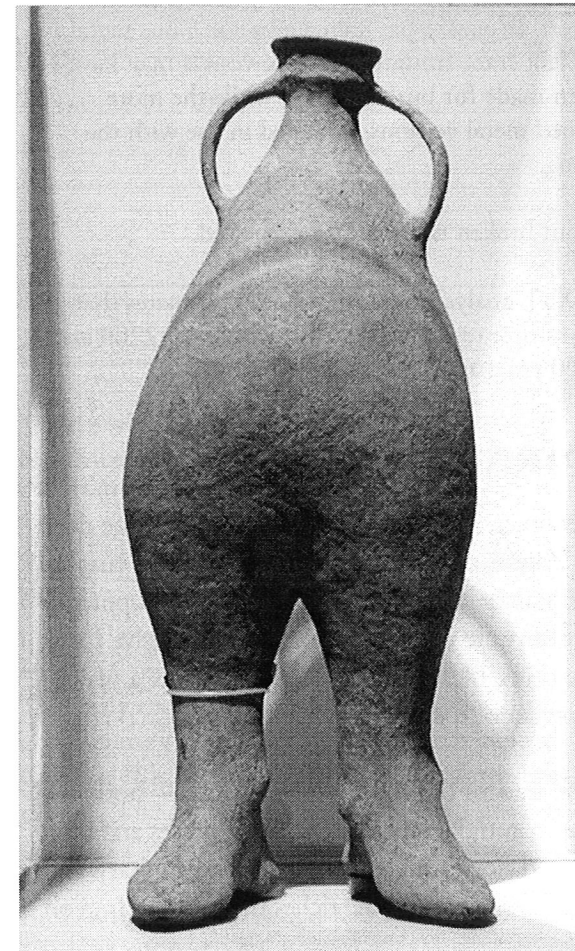
*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 381y64) indicates that the sample tested was last fired between 2100 and 3200 years ago.

Boot-shaped drinking cup
Northwestern Iran, Azerbaijan province
Uartian culture, 800–600 BCE*

This boot-shaped vessel combines a slipped and burnished exterior surface, sculptural modeling of the foot, and painted patterns inside the rim to produce a striking drinking cup. Use of this cup requires care. If it is tipped the wrong way, liquid may briefly remain in the toe and then splash on the careless drinker's face.

Broken at the ankle and repaired.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 481c86) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 1800 and 2800 years ago.



Vessel with two feet
Northern Iran
1000–800 BCE*

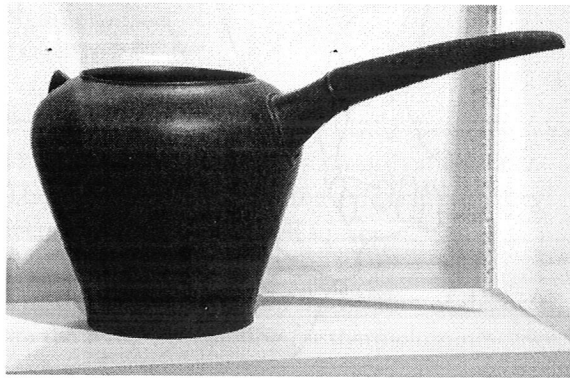
This walking wineskin is a witty ceramic version of the soft leather bags used to hold wine from ancient to modern times. Details such as ankle bones and the arch of each foot are made by modeling forms, not incising lines. A small opening beneath each pointed toe serves as a spout. Imagine the full vessel carried as if standing on the extended hands of the bearer. Merely the movement of a finger would release a stream of wine into a waiting cup.

Broken in many pieces and repaired.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 381u16) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 1400 and 2200 years ago.

INFLUENCES OF OTHER MEDIA

Clay is pliable and readily takes on the forms, textures and colors the potter gives it, sometimes imitating other materials. Some early Iranian potters streaked vessels with dark and light slips to resemble patterned stone. Others shaped objects like round-handled baskets and painted them with simple hatching to suggest woven patterns. Potters also produced visual puns making ceramic water jugs that mimicked the soft yielding shapes of leather bags. Potters in the first millennium BCE used the smooth shiny surface produced by burnishing and the dark coloring of reduction firing to imitate the smooth shiny surface of valuable bronze.



Vessel with long spout
Northern Iran
1050–800 BCE*

The simple yet precise form of this vessel with its burnished surface and elongated spout creates the illusion that it is bronze, not ceramic. Even the ridges on the spout suggest the joining of metal pieces. Bronze was a valuable, prestigious metal in ancient Iran. Imitation bronze vessels may have been made for burial display, while the more valued metal versions remained in use with the living.

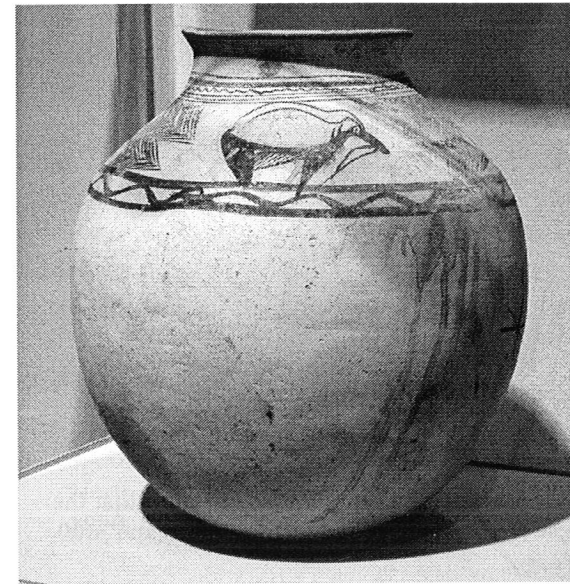
Spout broken near base and repaired.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 381t82) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 2200 and 3500 years ago.

ANIMAL INSPIRATIONS

Animal imagery was a characteristic of ancient Iranian ceramics. Mountain goats, red deer and roe deer, recurring motifs in the ancient ceramics, still inhabit the Zagros and Elborz mountains. Potters emphasized the sweep of horns and the tufted fringe of the mountain goat's beard, a symbol of sexual potency whose horns adorned the walls of Neolithic houses. The deer were depicted as elegant and elusive forest animals, hunted by kings and princes in later times. Honoring these animals in ceramic was a way to transfer their agility and life-force to the potter or to the owner of the vessel.

Domesticated animals appear in greater variety than the images of wild animals. Cattle—both the domestic bovine and the hump-backed zebu—are the most common, followed by sheep, horses and then camels. The cattle and sheep evoked wealth in livestock, and horses suggest mobility and military and political power. The camel, the most common caravan animal, symbolized the riches that crossed Iran on the trade routes between China and Rome.



Storage jar painted with goats
Western Iran, region around Godin Tepe
2400–2200 BCE

Three standing goats with scraggly beards and diagonally hatched bellies stare defiantly at the viewer with a large pale eye. The emphasis here on the cranky character of the goats contrasts with the elegant creatures painted on the beaker in the case at right.

Chipped rim filled and inpainted.



Beaker with goats
North-central Iran, region around Tepe Sialk
Ca. 3500 BCE

The four “skidding” animals are probably bezoar goats that still live in mountainous regions across the Near East. They are considered the ancestors of the domesticated goat. The only excavated ceramics with skidding goats come from Tepe Sialk in north central Iran, so this beaker probably came from that region. The meaning of the skidding posture remains a mystery.

Broken in many pieces and repaired; small missing portions restored.

Large footed bowl
Northern or central Iran
5000–3500 BCE*

The sway-backed animals with long ears and drooping tails may be domesticated donkeys or more likely onagers—wild donkey-like animals that were native to Iran. Look for the small scorpion painted on the lower side of the bowl. What this stinging arachnid meant to the ancient Iranians is unknown.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 381y53) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 5000 and 7700 years ago.

1 **Stag-head rhyton**
Northern Iran
1000–550 BCE*

The stylized antlers make it difficult to accurately identify the species of deer depicted on this drinking horn. The most likely species is the roe deer whose range includes northern Iran. The roe deer has small upright antlers and its summer coat is a rich foxy red. Kings and nobles hunted deer; this vessel's owner may have been a successful hunter and ruler.

Vessel badly broken and repaired with cracks inpainted.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 381w28) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 2100 and 3300 years ago.

3 **Ram-shaped vessel**
Northern Iran
1000–800 BCE*

The contrast between the tiny ram's head with its curving horns and the smooth plump body nicely evokes a fat, wooly sheep, perhaps suggesting well-being and abundance for those who used the vessel.

Vessel broken in many pieces and repaired; part of right side restored.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 381y90) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 2500 and 3900 years ago.

2 **Crocodile (?) vessel**
Northern Iran
900–300 BCE*

This curious vessel, with its cone-shaped head, slit-like nostrils and long body, looks like a crocodile. No crocodiles live in modern Iran, but the timid fish-eating gavial crocodile of India lives in a habitat much like the reed-filled lowlands of southwestern Iran. Iranian traders may have seen the gavial crocodile during their trips to India.

Body broken vertically from neck to base and repaired; tail broken, repaired and inpainted.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 381u10) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 2000 and 3100 years ago.

4 **Quadruped vessel**
Northwestern Iran, region around Germe
250–50 BCE*

The potter placed this flat-bottomed jug on its side, gave it four legs, a spout in the middle, an animal head and a small tail on the hindquarters. The general shape is so abstracted that the species of animal is impossible to identify.

Neck broken and repaired; upper right side of hind legs missing and restored.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 381w23) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 1900 and 3000 years ago.



5 **Spouted stag vessel**
Northern Iran, region around Marlik
1000–550 BCE

The smoothly abstracted forms, the pierced ears, the small genitals and the cloven hoofs simply indicated on the bottom of the feet are also found on animal-shaped vessels excavated at Marlik, southwest of the Caspian Sea. The significance of the stag in ancient Iranian culture is unknown. By analogy with other ancient cultures, we may assume that the animal represented virility and agility. Both the large red deer and the smaller roe deer still inhabit the region around Marlik.

Vessel badly broken; small missing pieces on body, horns, head restored; left foreleg restored.

7 **Camel vessel**
Southern Iran
Parthian period, 250 BCE–AD 224*

This vessel shows the unusual musculature of the hind legs that allows camels to tuck their legs far under the body in a manner, unlike cattle or horses. Notice the large double-toed feet modeled on the bottom of the pot. The slight upward curve of the mouth gives the figure a pleasant, humorous expression. The domestication of camels may have begun as early as 2600 BCE, but representations in the round are rare until the Parthian period.

Hind legs broken and repaired; chips on head and tail filled and inpainted.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 481c40) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 2000 and 3100 years ago.

6 **Cosmetic bottle on a two-headed horse**
Northwestern Iran, Azerbaijan province
Urartian culture, 800–600 BCE*

The horse with its speed, mobility and elegance was an animal of the ruling elite in Iran. This bottle sits atop its base like a rider on a horse. Since men as well as women used cosmetics, could this have been a cosmetic bottle for a man?

Right horse head, left hind leg, and tip of right foreleg restored.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 381u11) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 2300 and 3600 years ago.

SCULPTURE

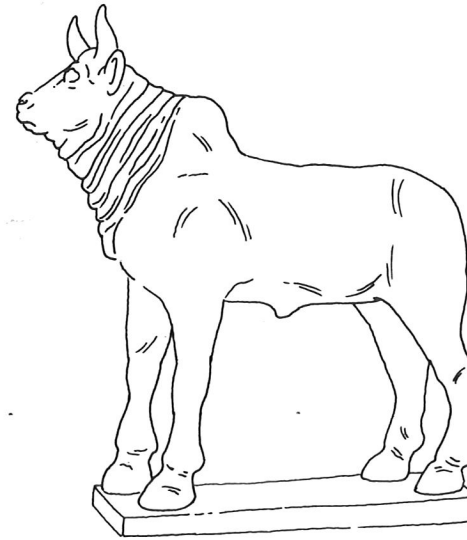
Clay was also a medium for sculpture in ancient Iran. Small female figurines, probably fertility amulets, date to the Neolithic period (6500 BCE). They continued to be made in northwestern Iran as late as 1000 BCE. Perhaps they were a sort of folk art reflecting beliefs and practices now lost to us.

By the second millennium BCE sculptors were creating monumental clay sculptures that were made in the lowlands of southwestern Iran, a region with relatively little stone. These large sculptures were hollow to allow the clay to dry evenly and fire thoroughly. Their production required large kilns and the services of a specialized workshop. Free-standing ceramic bulls and griffons guarded the doorways of the religious complex at Choga Zambil.

Female figurine
Northwestern Iran, region around Kaluraz
1000–800 BCE*

This figure wears a high cup-like crown with a band of double zigzags faintly impressed into it. A wide curving element on each side of the head may indicate ears or part of the hair arrangement that cascades down the back. Like the other figurine in this exhibition, this one cannot stand on its own but must be held. Similar figures in various sizes were excavated at Kaluraz. We do not know their purpose.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 481c84) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 1800 and 2800 years ago.

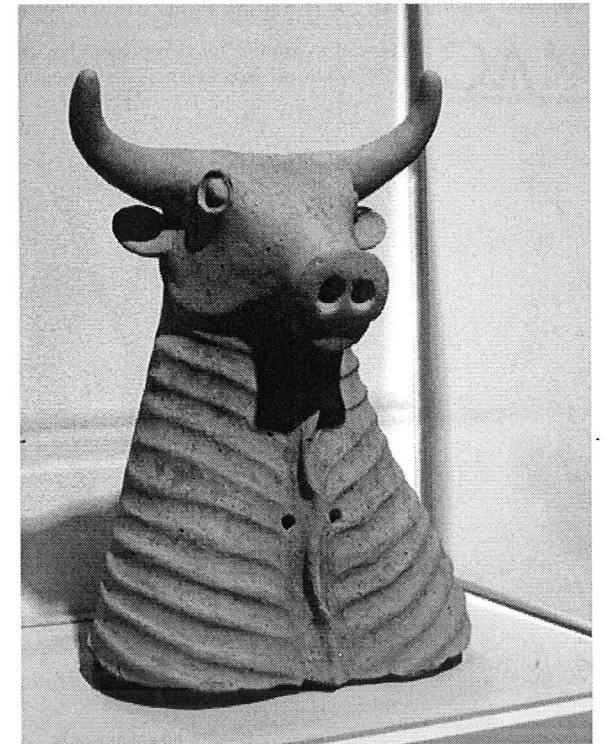


Female figurine
Northern Iran
1300–800 BCE*

This female figure has a stalk-like torso and neck, large tapering thighs and tiny stump-like feet. When viewed from another angle, the imagery is phallic. The union of these two aspects emphasizes fertility.

Broken through the arms, the neck, below head, and through the projection on top of head; the face was once split from the neck and repaired.

*OXTL analysis (ref. no. 381y86) estimates that the sample tested was last fired between 2700 and 4200 years ago.



Head and neck of a bull
Southwestern Iran
1000–600 BCE

This bull's head was part of a ceramic statue made in sections. It is hollow inside to facilitate drying and firing. The head may have been secured to its underlying support using the two holes on either side of the dewlap, the loose flap of skin on the underside of the bull's neck. Four small holes on the head between the horns suggest that an ornament was attached there. Large ceramic statues of bulls served as gate guardians at the Elamite religious site of Choga Zambil.

Ears and horns restored.

[Drawing label: Ceramic bull statue from Choga Zambil now in the Iran National Museum, Tehran.]