

# THE OPEN COURT

*New Orient Society Monograph  
Second Series Number One*

JANUARY

1933

*Vol. 47*

*Number 920*



# THE OPEN COURT

Founded by Edward C. Hegeler

SECOND MONOGRAPH SERIES OF  
THE NEW ORIENT SOCIETY OF AMERICA  
NUMBER ONE

## PERSIA

EDITED BY

ARTHUR UPHAM POPE

*Published Monthly by*

THE OPEN COURT PUBLISHING COMPANY

337 EAST CHICAGO AVENUE

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Subscription rates: \$3.00 a year, 35c a copy, monograph copies, 50c

Entered as Second-Class matter March 26, 1887, at the Post Office  
at Chicago, Illinois, under Act of March 3, 1879.

COPYRIGHT  
THE OPEN COURT PUBLISHING CO.  
1933

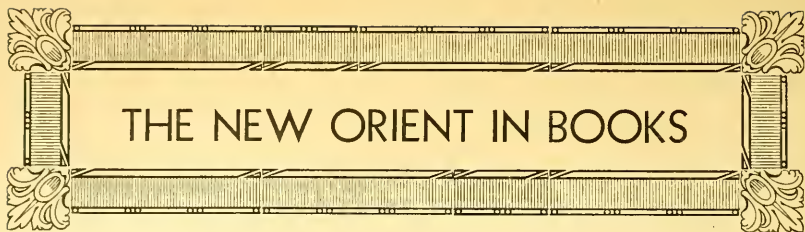
THE OPEN COURT PUBLISHING COMPANY  
ANNOUNCES

That, during 1933, the following numbers of  
THE OPEN COURT  
magazine will be combined:

February-March, May-June, July-August, and  
October-November. The January, April, September  
and December will remain single issues.

## CONTENTS

THE ARTS OF IRAN.....	1
<i>Arthur Upham Pope</i>	
PERSIA'S CONTRIBUTION TO LITERATURE.....	21
<i>Sir E. Denison Ross</i>	
PERSIAN PAINTING.....	28
<i>Laurence Binyon</i>	
THE POTTER'S ART IN PERSIA.....	31
<i>Arthur Upham Pope</i>	
THE FINE FABRICS OF PERSIA.....	38
<i>Phyllis Ackerman</i>	
THE RÔLE OF IRAN IN THE HISTORY OF ASIA.....	44
<i>Réné Grousset</i>	
PERSIA'S INFLUENCE IN THE ARTS OF OTHER LANDS.....	53
<i>Arthur Upham Pope</i>	
PERSIA TODAY. A REVIEW OF <i>Persia</i> BY SIR ARNOLD WILSON...	58
<i>Phyllis Ackerman</i>	



## THE NEW ORIENT IN BOOKS

*The Keys to Power, A study of Indian Ritual and Belief.* By J. Abbott, B. A. (Oxon) Dutton and Co. New York, 1932. Pp xi+560 (\$6.00)

The "Keys to Power" are the rules of conduct by which man tries to control the forces of nature for his own purposes. There are also negative factors which can destroy power and which lead to restrictions of conduct.

Under the stress of modernism and contact with the west, there are in India many customs and rituals in regard to conduct which, if not protected by the priestly class or by communal sentiment, or preserved in some other way, will soon be gone. This is especially true of the rites which have to do with agriculture. The author has made a monumental collection of these to preserve them and "to show how far the concept of a supernatural cosmic power dominates popular practice." He has taken only first-hand explanation of these practices and has tried to represent local belief faithfully.

*Researches in Manichaeism, with Special Reference to the Turpan Fragments.* By A. V. Williams Jackson. Columbia University Press, New York, 1932. xxxviii+393. (\$5.00)

In this book the author has collected much out-of-the-way material on the religion of Mani. After the general, introductory sketch, are translations from original Manichaean documents in Turfan Pahlavi, or Middle Persian, with full philological and critical notes. Two translations from Book Pahlavi are from anti-Manichaean texts by Zoroastrian believers who sought to refute Mani, and another translated from the Syriac of Theodore bar Khoni, the Nestorian Bishop of Kashkar (800 A.D.) Only such parts of these latter are given which throw light on the religion of Mani. Several short monographs on the subject complete the volume. This book is an important contribution to literature of Manichaeism.

*Treasure-House of the Living Religions.* Compiled and edited by Robert Ernest Hume. Charles Scribners' Sons. New York. 1932. Pp. xx+493. (\$3.00).

Here is a veritable "treasure-house" of the religious wisdom of the world, arranged in systematic plan and classified according to phases of religious thought and life—Man's relation to the Supreme, Man's relation to man—so that one can grasp at a glance those aspects of the various living religions which are universal. Eleven religious systems have been chosen, each of which has survived more than 100 years and has maintained an art and a literature of its own. They include Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism and Christianity, Sikhism, Shinto, Taoism, Zoroastrianism. All of these have been able "to maintain the continuity of their religious teachings as well as adapt themselves to changing conditions, because of their reverence to sacred scriptures in whose ancient formulas each succeeding generation may perceive fresh applications to eternal truths." At the close of the book Dr. Hume has arranged a Program of Joint Worship—arranged as a responsive reading.

In the preparation of the book, Dr. Hume has used great care in the selection of passages and translations; and he has produced both an anthology of the sacred scriptures and a source book for the comparative study of religion.

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. The Cloth Merchant. Line drawing attributed to Riza Abbasi XVII Century. From the collection of Frau M. Sarre-Humann, Berlin .....	<i>Frontispiece</i>
2. Prehistoric pottery from Susa. About 4500 B.C. The Louvre, Paris	5
3. Ibex in bronze, enriched with gilt. Achaemenian. About 400 B.C. Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin.....	8
4. Isfahan. Dome of the Masjid-i Shah. 1085. Photograph by Pope....	13
5. Silver Plate with relief design of a royal lion-hunt. Sasanian. IV Century A.D. Hermitage Museum, Leningrad.....	16
6. The Ascent of Muhammad to Heaven. XVI Century. British Museum, London .....	23
7. Cup of painted earthenware, Rayy, XII Century. Collection of Mrs. Mellhenny, Philadelphia.....	32
8. Pottery bowl, probably from Amul. X-XI Century. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Sam A. Lewisohn, New York.....	35
9. Silk Tissue. VI-VII Century. In each design, two kings are represented riding winged griffins, between them a sacred tree. Schlossmuseum, Berlin .....	41
10. Silk tapestry. XVI Century. Collection of Mrs. William H. Moore, New York .....	48
11. Isfahan, Masjid-i Jami. Small dome chamber of Malek Shah. 1088. Photograph by Pope.....	55

# THE NEW ORIENT SOCIETY OF AMERICA

THE NEW ORIENT SOCIETY OF AMERICA is now completing its first year, and and it can look back upon a successful time during a difficult economic period. At the annual meeting of November 18, the following Officers and Directors were elected:

PROFESSOR JAMES H. BREASTED.....Honorary President  
Director Oriental Institute, University of Chicago  
DR. BERTHOLD LAUFER.....Honorary Vice-President  
Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Illinois  
PROFESSOR WILLIAM R. SHEPHERD.....President  
Columbia University, New York, N.Y.  
MR. JOHN PAYNE KELLOGG.....Treasurer  
MISS CATHERINE COOK.....Secretary

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

PROFESSOR JAMES H. BREASTED  
MR. EDWIN H. CASSELS  
MR. HENRY FIELD  
MR. JOHN PAYNE KELLOGG  
DR. BERTHOLD LAUFER  
PROFESSOR A. T. OLMSTEAD  
PROFESSOR MARTIN SPRENGLING

Six monographs, listed below, have been published. During 1933 we will publish the second series of six monographs as special numbers of *The Open Court*. These monographs will deal with various cultural aspects of the New Orient, and will be edited by leading American scholars.

## FIRST MONOGRAPH SERIES PUBLISHED BY THE OPEN COURT

- January, 1932. *The Heritage of Western Asia.*  
Edited by Professor Martin Sprengling, University of Chicago.
- July, 1932. *Syria-Palestine.*  
Edited by Professor A. T. Olmstead, University of Chicago.
- March, 1932. *The Heritage of Eastern Asia.*  
Edited by Professor A. E. Haydon, Department of Comparative Religion, University of Chicago.
- September, 1932. *Egypt.*  
Edited by Professor Halford L. Hoskins, Department of History, Tufts College, Massachusetts.
- May, 1932. *Modern Turkey.*  
Edited by Professor A. H. Lybyer, University of Illinois.
- December, 1932. *Arabia.*  
Edited by Professor Martin Sprengling, University of Chicago.

## SECOND MONOGRAPH SERIES TO BE PUBLISHED DURING 1933

- January, 1933. *Persia.*  
Edited by Professor Arthur Upham Pope, Director of the Persian Institute.
- September, 1933. *India.*  
Edited by Professor Walter E. Clark, Department of Sanskrit, Harvard University.
- March, 1933. *Russian and Central Asia.*  
Edited by Dr. Berthold Laufer, Curator, Department of Anthropology, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago.
- October, 1933. *China.*  
Edited by Dr. Berthold Laufer, Field Museum of Natural History.
- May, 1933. *Japan.*  
Edited by Professor Quincy Wright, Department of Political Science, University of Chicago.
- December, 1933. *Northern Africa.*

Those who are desirous of becoming members of the New Orient Society of America are invited to apply for particulars of purposes and privileges of membership to the SECRETARY, CATHERINE E. COOK.

**The New Orient Society of America**

337 E. CHICAGO AVE.

CHICAGO







THE CLOTH MERCHANT

Attributed to Riza Abbasi, Seventeenth Century  
(Collection of Frau M. Sarre-Humann, Berlin)

*Frontispiece to The Open Court*

# THE OPEN COURT

---

Volume XLVII (No. 1) January, 1933

Number 920

---

NEW ORIENT SOCIETY MONOGRAPH: SECOND SERIES

NUMBER ONE

---

## THE ARTS OF IRAN

BY ARTHUR UPHAM POPE

OUR CULTURE is doomed to remain parochial and even be menaced with a certain triviality so long as we continue to believe that the destinies of mankind are to be determined solely by European ideas and experiences. The calamities and disasters of the last few years have demonstrated that our whole grasp on realities has been insecure; that our vision of highest values has been obscured by passion and darkened by ignorance. If, then, we are to save ourselves and build again a world in which specifically human values shall have their rightful place and in which the enterprise of life shall be determined by the widest and richest experience, we must again take counsel of those sources of civilization which are to be found in the Orient, where man first lifted himself out of chaos and established a rational order. They nourished us at the beginning; without them we cannot sustain the ardors of racial manhood nor entertain sound hopes of attaining any reasonable goal.

The civilization of Asia has found its most intelligible and eloquent expression in its art. Barred as are most of us from that insight into the living reality of Oriental life which can be provided only by the mastery of many languages, we may all of us nevertheless, through the arts of the various Asiatic nations, participate in their culture, seeing as by a great light what experiences they found most precious and most enduring, and what were their standards of perfection, ideas which we today need to apprehend, appreciate, and in part at least, to employ.

The art which issued from the Iranian plateau, though it rarely touched the spiritual depths common in India or the poetic exaltation of the greatest Chinese art, nonetheless brought new values, new techniques, and new ideas to the envisagement of perfection.

Persian art is primarily an abstract art. Western art has, since the days of Greece, looked to the natural object as the supreme source of authority, but the art of Persia always stands a little apart from the actual physical fact in a somewhat contemplative mood, giving priority to the demands of the mind, the wealth of its fancy, and its principles of order and symmetry. To be sure, in all art of excellence the subjective contribution is real and important. But in the West this contribution has often been highly personal, peculiar to the individual and his special experiences, expressive of his private emotions. In the Orient, on the other hand, and especially in Persia, the emphasis is upon the universal form and the communal feeling. In short, western art tends to be more a perceptive art; Persian art, a conceptualized art. The one turns to the specific, highly individualized presentation, the other gives us by natural preference the generalized image.

The distinction proposed some years ago that the art of the Orient was primarily one of color, while the art of the West was essentially an art of form, has almost nothing to commend it. It would indeed be difficult to formulate a more misleading generalization; for the art of the Orient has from its beginning been primarily an art of form. It is an art of form not in the somewhat superficial sense of having merely a special interest in plasticity, but rather in the sense that it finds beauty and expressiveness in the composition and varied relations of abstract or non-representative elements. But these contrasts always over-simplify the problem, and even the insistence that the distinction is really between the generalizing art of the Orient, of which Persian art is perhaps the most notable example, and the particularizing art of the West, in which Greece was supreme, immediately calls to mind many exceptions. For certainly Oriental art has no monopoly of form. As a matter of fact, no production is entitled to rank as a work of art which does not respect and in some degree employ abstract form, and the art of the West, from Phidias to Bach, reaches its greatest height when it embodies just those universalizing tendencies so characteristic of Persian art. But the distinction, although sometimes difficult, is real. It is primarily one of interest, of intention, of emphasis. Thus interpreted, it is correct to say that in contrast to the trend of European art, the art of Persia is an art of form, seeking to see the in-

dividual *sub specie aeternitatis*, finding perfection only in the universalized particular.

This abstract or generalizing tendency in Iranian art has endowed it with a certain intellectuality. In Islamic times Persian art has often attained a lyrical and imaginative quality only possible to a nation of poets, but before that and through it all, there has been a dominant rationality which, if less perfect and serene than that of Greek art, has a certain kinship with it and like the Greek, reflects a passion for lucidity. The obscure and eccentric have always been offensive to the Persian mind; its nimble imagination is always definite so that if it has strayed beyond the actual world, it has been into well-ordered realms of invention.

To the European, heir to the Greek tradition and its habits of seeing and thinking, an art that is primarily intellectual and abstract, careless of the individual, which seems to us the measure of all things, might be thought cold and deliberate, a fabricated, impersonal art without color, spontaneity, or passion. Yet our own arts of architecture and music ought to show us that there can be more substance and more feeling in a non-representative art than in one confined to the superfluous reproduction of objects. Indeed, Persian art has a real kinship with music and might be called "visible music," for it is in the tonality, melody, harmony, and the subtleties of musical structure that we find the most revealing analogies to much of Persian art and one of the surest keys to its peculiar excellencies.

Moreover, an abstract art is not necessarily an art removed from sensibility or indifferent to the lust of the eye, but rather one that has a more serious aim than invitation. If Persian art has something in common with the Platonic ideas, it has more in common with poetry which makes a continuous and vivid appeal to sense impression. It is often severely logical, but it always is logic, made not only visible but also manifest to every other sense that can be awakened through sight. An abstract art like that of Persia may turn away from the world of natural fact to take counsel of perfection and obey the dictates of the legislative mind, but thereafter it returns to the world of sense to clothe its report in a palpable glory.

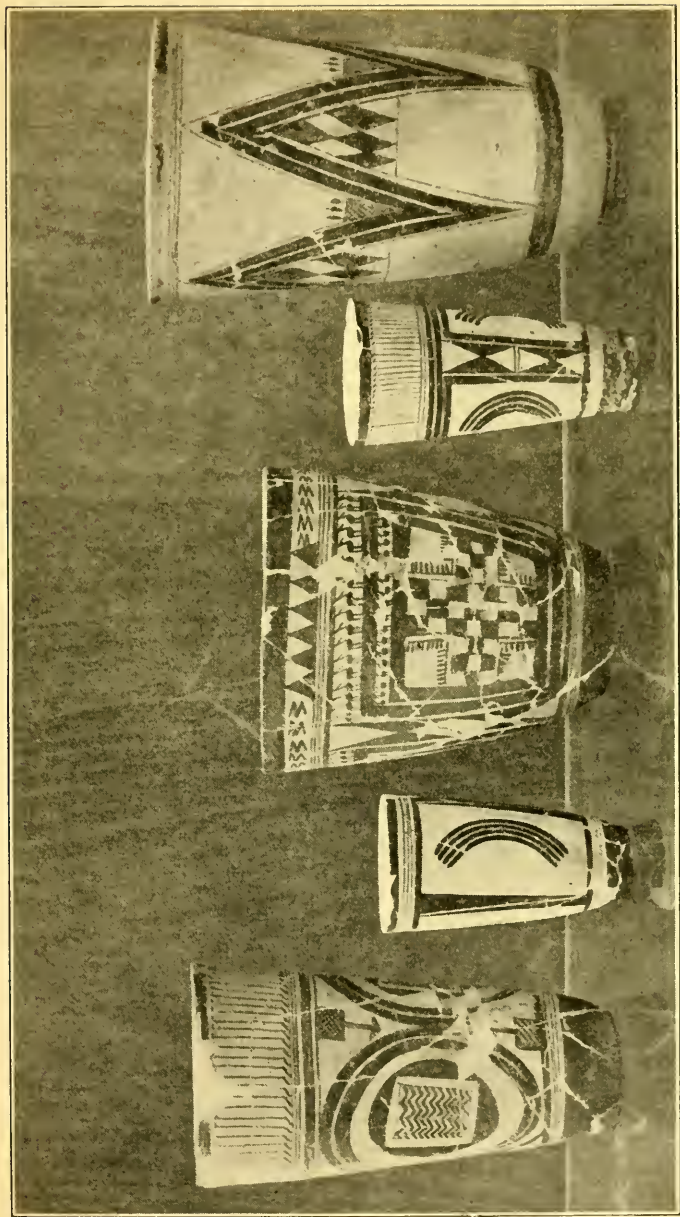
Persian art is very ancient, probably the most ancient the world has known, and in its long career it has created a great variety of

styles. Thus the history of Persian culture has often been thought to consist of a series of sharply contrasting epochs. There is the pre-historic and pre-Aryan period, beginning well before 4000 B.C. The Achaemenid period is the first of which we have ample documentary record. This was the time of the great kings, Cyrus, Darius, Artaxerxes, lasting from 550 B.C. until they were overthrown by Alexander in 334. The Greek domination which Alexander imposed was in turn succeeded by the semi-Iranian dynasty of the Parthians, of whose art we know so very little. We commonly think that a wholly new epoch was initiated with the Persian revival under the Sasanids, who created a mighty empire at the beginning of the third century, rivaled by no contemporary civilization except that of its competitor, Byzantium. We all know that in the middle of the seventh century there burst out of the desert sands of Arabia a swift and furious storm that swept this mighty dynasty down to utter ruin and brought the Persian people a new religion and a new type of social and political organization. An entirely new epoch was presumably begun, that of the Islamic period. This in turn was followed by a succession of sharply contrasting cultures, the Seljuk in the eleventh century, the Moguls in the thirteenth, the Timurid in the fourteenth, the Safavid in the sixteenth.

But the history of Persian art when understood is no mosaic. These periods merged one into another, each borrowed from the preceding, and all remained true to the dominant conceptions that were formulated in the beginning. We find not merely the same themes extending over centuries and bridging the scattered epochs, the same decorative motives recurring, but also the same point of view persisting throughout, the respect for pure and abstract beauty, the distaste for vulgar naturalism, a constant and passionate preference for the music of the spheres.

The first period of Iranian art is exemplified in pottery of great beauty and distinction, the earliest artistic pottery known, and in many respects not yet equaled.<sup>1</sup> It is hand-made, very thin, decorated with abstract designs of extraordinary force and distinction, in a style so thoroughly matured that it must have been the culmination of many centuries of artistic experience (Page 5). The ibex,

<sup>1</sup>This pottery goes by the awkward name of *Susa I*, meaning that it was found at the lowest level in the excavations conducted by the French archaeological mission at Susa.



PREHISTORIC POTTERY FROM SUSA

About 4500 B.C.

(The Louvre, Paris)

the flamingo, the running hound have been, by the aesthetic perception of these early Iranian potters, transmuted so that they are no longer naturalistic objects but are conventionalized and interpreted, the essence of their character concentrated in a single abstract form, thus attaining to a new quality of beauty in contour, in movement, and in the mind-imposed harmony of their relations.

This Elamitic civilization, perhaps engendered as early as 4500 B.C., centered in the city of Susa, but this was not necessarily its first abode, and it was widely extended over Asiatic soil, so that pottery of this general character and probably in some way connected with it has been found in Afghanistan, in Eastern Mongolia, and as far west as the Nile. In every case, however, saving the extensions of the Iranian plateau and its cultural relations into the upper Mesopotamian valley, the quality, the variety, and the artistic and technical competence of this type of pottery rapidly diminish in proportion to the distance from the Iranian center, until contemporary editions in the Nile Valley are comparatively small, thick, clumsy, and monotonous compared with their Persian originals, and we find the same, only in less degree, as we go east or north.

Just how the arts developed in Persia between the early civilizations like that of Elam on the one hand and the historical period on the other, we do not yet know, but expeditions now at work in Persia are making almost daily discoveries, often of sensational importance, which are helping to fill the gap in our knowledge. At Damghan, in northern Persia, American expeditions working under the direction of Dr. Erich Schmidt, have proven the existence of elaborate civilizations with admirable technical resources in building and in the industrial arts, that vary in date from at least 3500 to about 2000 B.C. Beautiful copper weapons with silver handles have been found, pottery of handsome shapes, and terra cotta figurines which seem to have some connection with those of the early civilizations of the Indus Valley at Harapa and Mohenjodaro, which Sir John Marshall has disclosed. In addition, there are splendid copper vessels, fine jewelry, and especially delightful animal figures carved in semi-precious stones, to say nothing of various handsome gold ornaments.

At Asterabad Dr. Wulsin discovered the solid remains of a vast brick platform two meters thick, covering several acres and yet



datable about 2000 B.C. The huge platforms which the Hittites and Assyrians constructed and on which they placed their colossal palaces were, until last year, thought to be of their own devising. Now it is more than possible that these prodigious structures originated in Persia. While the potters of Susa demonstrated their mastery of abstract, those of Damghan and Asterabad developed an amazing repertoire of robust and sensitive forms which were perhaps all the more effective because in a plain gray or black ware, polished but either without any ornament at all or with only simple, almost invisible, burnished designs.

Again the dramatic discovery of the magnificent Luristan bronzes only three years ago revealed an animal art of superlative force and vitality which extends over a period from at least 2000 years B.C. to the beginning of Achaemenid times.<sup>2</sup> Here also in these bits, horse trappings, repoussé cups, and other vessels, effigies, ornaments, and weapons, we find the Persian sense for decoration, the verve which has caught and reproduced the quality of animals or has transferred them to some symbolic intent without damaging their essential character and without losing sight of their beauty of pattern.

The designation Persian for the early civilizations of Susa, Damghan, and Asterabad must be used with circumspection, for these first civilized inhabitants of the country were not identical in race with the Aryan Persians, who have possessed the country since about 2000 to 1500 B.C. Nonetheless, we are justified in speaking of them all as Iranians, for the best scientific opinion of the day is inclined to find the cultural unit less in the bond of blood or even language than in continuity of tradition, techniques, habits, and ideas.

The first historical and adequately documented period of Persian art begins with the Achaemenid kings—Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes, Artaxerxes—covering a period roughly from 550 to 330 B.C. With these mighty monarchs Persian art entered on its first period of

<sup>2</sup>Certain scholars were so taken aback at this shock to their theories of the pre-Achaemenian vacuum that they hastily tried to explain the Luristan bronzes away as a subsequent development, two or three attempting to put them as late even as the Christian era. But the discovery of dated pieces beginning as early as 2600 B.C., the analysis of the relations between early Luristan bronzes and Elamitic bronzes, and other finds at Susa, and certain similarities with some Sumerian arts, have left no further room for doubt, so that judgment is now unanimous on this dating.



IBEX IN BRONZE  
Achaemenian. About 400 B.C.  
(Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin)

grandeur. Colossal palaces rivaling the temples of Egypt in size, but surpassing them in elegance and rationality, were built at Susa, Ecbatana, (Hamadan), Persepolis, and other places. The minor arts, especially animal sculpture in gold and bronze (Page 8), reached a combination of opulence, dignity, and artistic force which has certainly never been surpassed, as the Oxus Treasury in the British Museum, the pieces in the Hermitage, and a single bronze ibex in the collection of Oscar Raphael of London, amply prove.

Until a few years ago it was thought that Achaemenian art had suddenly burst upon the world in full splendor without any previous preparation or tradition, that it was only a court art, created for the enjoyment and the greater glory of a few mighty kings who, having little at home with which to work, gathered ideas and subservient artists from the four quarters of the earth. This was a superficial view. Thoughtful consideration of the qualities of Achaemenian art shows that it was not pieced together from haphazard borrowings forced into a mechanical assemblage, not a mere artificial eclecticism. There are features both in construction and decoration which the art of the great Achaemenian kings borrowed from the Hittites, from Assyria, and from Egypt, but when fitted to Persian purposes they were endowed with a new and highly individual quality.

Achaemenian art might be said to differ from Assyrian art, which it most closely resembles, quite as much as Greek art differs from Roman art and in somewhat the same way. Assyrian animal sculpture at its best is based on superbly competent observation. It often achieves an intense realization of its subject. But in general Assyrian sculpture is overintent on detail which it renders with an incoherent particularism that contrasts sharply with the simplified and generalized Achaemenian sculpture in which a tranquil unity reigns supreme, exhibiting that magical combination of energy and repose, which is at the same time both decorative and poetic.

The Achaemenian kingdom, which with a combination of energy, courage, and wisdom had created the first great empire, crashed in ruins before the superior technique of Alexander and his Greeks, and Greek culture swept across the Eastern world. The Persians surveyed the Greek contributions warily, choosing some, but with quiet disdain setting aside the rest. For the Persians could never

have found the perfect naturalism of Greek sculpture, however technically supreme, other than artistically a little immature, something altogether lovely, incomprehensibly perfect, but something, from the Iranian point of view, too much a re-duplication, however idealized, of the present world, with some, but too little comprehension of the transcendental world. Greek art did reinforce the native disposition to elegance and lucidity. It supplied certain patterns and themes which were employed in Persian art and literature for more than a thousand years. But Persian art remained true to its original character.

Of the Parthian period, which came close on the heels of Alexander and his successors, we know almost nothing. Greek motives were being assimilated and as the decorative art of Hellenism entered upon a slow death, sterile, perfunctory, unimaginative, it was the Parthian designers and their greater successors, the Sasanians, who seized upon the inheritance and by fresh imagination, taste, energy, and a robust sense for gorgeous rhythms, transferred these brittle patterns into new and powerful and fluent schemes. In early Sasanian times under the great Iranian revival, which definitely turned its back on Hellenic contributions and sought to drive along the path of its own national genius, was forged a new repertory of ornament which slowly made its way across Asia and became the basis of much of the ornamentation of Romanesque and Gothic times.

Sasanian silver vessels are magnificent (Page 16), and Sasanian silks set the standard and the dominant style in the textile arts for centuries, but despite the impressive nobility of these decorative arts, the Sasanians were perhaps greatest in the field of architecture. The Sasanian kings constructed a series of colossal palaces, roofing huge spaces with mighty vaults and clothing the walls with majestic ornament. Many of the essential problems of vault and dome construction were first comprehended by the builders of Sasanian times, and it was upon their achievements that much of the architecture of the Romanesque, Gothic, and even the Renaissance periods was based. The transverse vault and the squinch, the finest solution of the problem of setting a hemispherical dome upon a cube, a problem that wholly thwarted the Romans, were first formulated by Persian architects of the Sasanian period. Brick architecture was developed with a boldness and used on a scale that has not

since been approached, and a new chapter in the incrustation movement was gloriously written in ornamental brick lays and magnificent polychrome stucco, such as has recently been found at Damghan, Kish, and Ctesiphon.

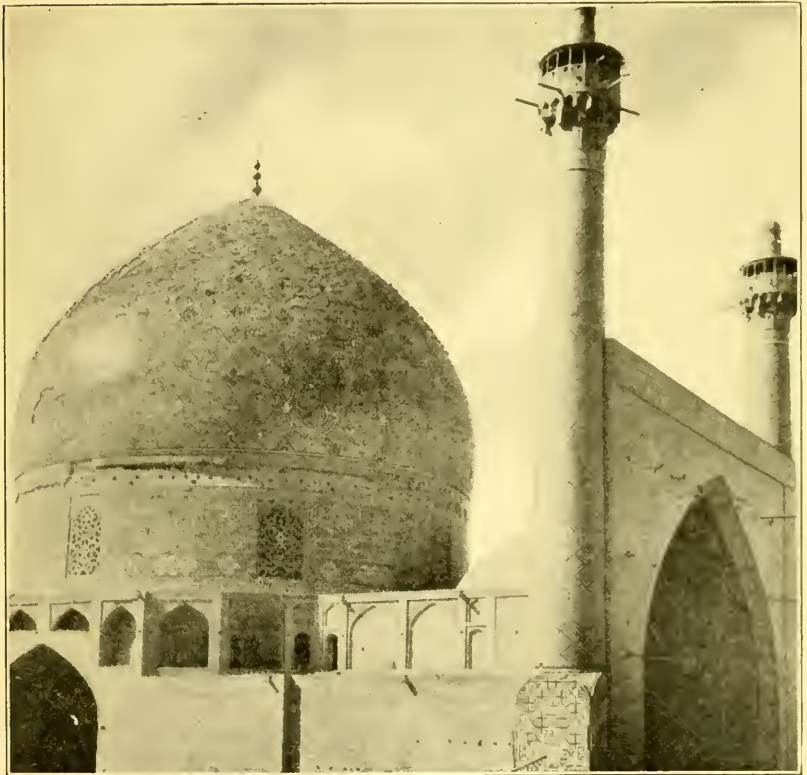
Almost at the height of its glory this rich and powerful Sasanian culture was shattered by a storm that swept out of the deserts of Arabia. Islam burst upon a proud and self-satisfied world with a new faith and a new inspiration, which caught men's imaginations and carried them, more voluntarily than we suppose, into the fold of a new belief and a new devotion. The uncouth Arabs brought with them nothing of architecture and less of art, a simple desert poetry, a noble religion, a magnificent language, and burning zeal. These qualities, united to the ancient traditions of the conquered countries, capitalized for new tasks the skill, taste, and experience of sophisticated races and so created a new epoch in world art. It is well within the fact to say that on the whole the new art of Islam owes more to Persia than to any other single source. As the Islamic empire waxed mighty and complex, it could be held together only by the transference of the seat of power eastward from Damascus to Baghdad, and the Caliphate, made famous by Haroun ar Rashid and the Thousand and One Nights, was in idea, technique, and personnel almost wholly Persian. It was here, in the eighth and ninth centuries, that the characteristic forms of Muhammadan art were shaped, primarily under the tutelage of Persian masters.

During the late Abbasid and early Seljuk periods some of the basic elements of Persian architecture found their first adequate formulation. The pointed arch, which had been taken over from India, was made the unit of construction in Persia, and in the early mosques, like the Masjid-i Jami in Isfahan, or the Masjid-i Jume' in Shiraz, we find the beginning of a beautiful vaulting system, with ribbed domes, buttresses and elementary tracery, all very much in the Gothic manner though centuries earlier.

The growing luxury and waning faith, the slackening powers at the beginning of the eleventh century, were forcibly revived by the incursion of the Seljuk Turks, who in 1055 seized power but at the same time yielded to the potent dominion of both the religion and the culture of Persia. They became zealous in the faith and equally enthusiastic for the newly discovered literature and art. Mighty monuments were now created, mighty in conception. The

great dome chamber of the Masjid-i Jami in Isfahan, built about 1078, rivals the outstanding Romanesque churches of western Europe for sheer power. For beauty and severity of logic, for transparent consistency, for concentration and fulfilment of a single theme and the ingenious and harmonious blending of every element, the little dome chamber of Malek Shah is nowhere surpassed (Page 13). Structurally it is the most perfect example of the fully developed squinch, that ingenious series of arches and panels by means of which the corners of a square chamber are brought inwards to support the ring of the dome, and aesthetically there is no dome chamber anywhere in which the hemispherical dome is so perfectly united with the square chamber below. The dome itself seems to grow out of the substructure with that easy inevitability that marks only the work of masters. It is more complex in elevation than any preceding Persian structure, and yet transparently simple, consisting of variations and development of the single theme of the pointed arch. Panels balance panels, or are included within larger panels of the same contour, which are again included within others still larger that stretch up above the zone of transition, are crowned there with a circle of little panels again repeating the same outline and thus merge into the dome, the supreme and final expression of the original theme, an achievement worthy to rank with Hagia Sophia.

After the ghastly Mongol invasion, almost before the dust had settled from a thousand tragic ruins, building was recommenced with that startling vitality and creative energy which has made the Persians something of a mystery. Other nations have succumbed before disaster but the Persians, suffering calamities unprecedented and unapproached for wanton destruction, have stubbornly refused to be annihilated, resolutely taking, instead, each holocaust as an occasion for initiating a new epoch. And so we find the fourteenth century, which should have been one of desolation and resignation, actually proving to be one of the greatest building periods in western Asia. Mosques, colleges, shrines, palaces, and mausoleums rose on every hand. New elements from China and Central Asia appeared in the decoration. There was a rich development of relief patterns in brick, and colored inlays of enameled brick grew more common, but the scale, which in such buildings as the mausoleum of Uljaitu (1307-17) is colossal, remains Persian, and the



MASJID-I SHAH, ISFAHAN  
The Small dome chamber of Malek Shah  
(Photograph by Pope)

fundamental simplicity and consistency of the new forms repeat numerous preceding triumphs of Persian builders.

Even in the seventeenth century, under the vigorous reign of Shah Abbas, architectural masterpieces were still being constructed, especially in Isfahan. There are thoughtful architects who would rank the Masjid-i Shah among the first dozen of extant structures (Page 13), and it would be hard to find an interior to match the crystal perfection of the interior of the Mosque of Sheikh Lutf Ullah. It is a superficial view that has seen in the ornamentation of these Persian mosques merely a *tour de force* of lavish color and intricate patterns. Such a mastery of ceramic technique, such ability to handle a brilliant polychromy on so huge a scale might easily have led to displays of virtuosity that ignored the fundamental rights of the architecture thus embellished, but whoever looks closely will see that the grandeur and simplicity characteristic of Persian monumental architecture are not compromised or tormented by meaningless complications. Even at midday the ornament is so adroitly arranged in panels, the main structural lines are so carefully emphasized, that the simple bulk of these splendid buildings is never really broken by the gorgeous raiment they bear so easily, and watched toward the close of day, as the light falls and the colors flee, we see remaining, forms majestic and serene, moulded of shadows, large and quiet, of matchless proportion and of perfect architectural integrity.

While architecture was rapidly degenerating in the rest of the Islamic world, it maintained its quality in Persia well into the eighteenth century. The college and mosque built by Shah Sultan Hussein in honor of his mother is comparable to the Masjid-i Shah, and the bridge Kajoo, which he built or rather rebuilt, exploits the beauties of a river site more intelligently and thoroughly than any public bridge in Europe.

For all that Persian art is abstract, seeking always to impose upon its material a highly imaginative poetry and an equally universalized logic, nonetheless the Persian artists never lost their hold on concrete realities. Never have the Persians been contemptuous of the humble and earthly material. They have never known the disdain for common substance with which an egotistical Europe has flattered its conceits. Inherent in Zoroastrianism, reaffirmed in cer-



tain aspects of Islam, deeply grounded in their poetry, literature, and natural point of view is the sense of the oneness of man with his environment. This has dictated in the arts a respect and a sensitiveness for the character of the material to which they have always, save in moments of self-conscious virtuosity, held true. The artist's task, in continuation of the work of his forebears and in coöperation with his contemporary colleagues, is so to develop the material with which he works that its own character be made plain and its own inherent possibilities be carried to their destined perfection. His duty and his privilege is to make clear and manifest what was hidden in the substance.

It is this point of view that sustained the achievements of Persia in the ceramic arts. For this art reached its perfection, not in the stately vases of Greece, where decoration and shape are scarcely ever united, nor even in the beautiful and much praised Chinese porcelain, so hard and glittering, so often incongruously pictorial, but rather under the hands of the Persian potters. Here all the elements blend confederate to the golden end of beauty. The vessel is of clay, nor does it seek in shame to hide its humble origin. It proclaims in its thin and fragile shape a shy and tentative quality wholly becoming to the character of the material of which it is composed, revealing unsuspectedly lovely qualities that we scarce dreamed the simple earth held enclosed within it. The decorations, too, fit the shape. They reënforce and emphasize it, and their character, so gay, so easy, with poetic grace, suit the light and fragile material (Page 32). This sense of perfect propriety between all the elements of an art has been typical of Persian art throughout its long life.

Persia's achievements in metal were scarcely inferior to her accomplishments in faience. Fewer examples remain. They were slower and more expensive to make, especially if decorated with inlays of gold and silver. They disintegrated more easily, under the soil, and man's cupidity above could too often transmute them into more practical property. The precious metals are not far removed from cash, and a broken bronze basin, although an artistic masterpiece, may in time of stress be of less worth than a weapon of the same material.

The spirited Luristan animal bronzes, the more magnificent gold and bronze ornaments of Achaemenid times, the bronze vessels of the Sasanids, colossal in scale, if not in measure, their gold and sil-



SILVER PLATE

The relief design is of a royal lion hunt.  
Sasanian, Fourth Century A.D.  
(Hermitage Museum, Leningrad)

ver plates with the massive figural reliefs (Page 16), all of these so different, all so alike in their force and spirit and in their masterly use of generalized forms, together constitute a series that cannot be equaled. The relation of Persian medieval bronze work to that of northern Mesopotamia, particularly Mosul, is hard to determine, but it seems probable that an ancient metal industry in that region was spurred to its remarkable artistic productivity by the influx of Persian workmen in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The metal workers of Herat, Rayy, Isfahan, and Shiraz were famous in medieval times, but it is not yet possible to characterize these various schools.

On Persian carpets volumes of rhapsody and speculation have been composed, and indeed, of the finest of them it is difficult to speak temperately. Carpet weaving was a very ancient art. We know from the Kozlov finds, as well as from those of Sir Aurel Stein, that pile carpets, rich and deep in color and texture, were in use at the beginning of the Christian era, while by the tenth century at least, as many documentary references show, carpets were numerous, beautiful, and highly prized. Although the oldest extant Persian carpet can scarcely date from before 1500, yet from the miniatures of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, we can reconstruct in detail the carpets of that period. The great court carpets of the sixteenth century were thus heirs to a long and notable tradition: they are, strictly speaking, modern, although in them the craft reached an incomparable and unchallenged perfection.

The artistic greatness of Persian carpets is founded on a variety of qualities. In the first place, the wealth of pattern, which if rendered on paper or even in thin silk would be trivial and ineffective in such a large size, assumes substance and importance when embedded in their dense, substantial texture. In the second place, the material itself contributes important values, the sheen of the silk, the living luster of the wool, flatter and delightfully excite the sense of touch. Again, even more is contributed by the color. The dyes, which in depth and purity are incomparable, are combined with an art known only to the Orient and carried to utmost perfection only by Persia. Scattered color chords are held in perfect harmony in the Eastern Persian weavings by an adroit use of color contrasts, or in the early medallion carpets of the northwest, by a carefully

planned balance of tones, or in some of the seventeenth-century carpets like the so-called Polonaise, by an almost evanescent chromation, or in the more intricate of the vase carpets, by the union of different colors through gradual, almost invisible transitions.

Finally, and perhaps most important, is the pattern designing itself. Into this has been crowded the accumulated experience of centuries, an original talent for abstract design, refined taste, clear thinking, a lively imagination, and the easy mastery of all the elements that come only from long and strict discipline. Few will trouble to make the analysis of these patterns without which their real character can be only vaguely apprehended; but those who do are rewarded by the sudden revelation of an artistic invention of unsuspected depth, beauty, and power, whose analogies with music, especially the fugue and the sonata, are genuine and revealing. In the finest carpets we find united most of the peculiar excellencies of Persian art, so that if one art must stand for the whole Iranian achievement, it might perhaps best be the art of carpets, provided that only the supreme examples are considered.

The Persians themselves might be more inclined to select calligraphy as their most typical art, a severity of judgment a little puzzling to most western minds. But only a few in the West have given thoughtful attention to the aesthetic possibilities of the world's finest script. Masters whose whole tradition trained them to see the quality and expressiveness of abstract forms, could compose pages that the initiate find of almost hysterical beauty. Indeed, no sensitive observer can be indifferent to the lordly Kufic inscriptions of the early centuries or the powerful yet flexible marching rhythms of the later, more fluent Nashki, rendered in dazzling white on deepest blue, to form the friezes and string courses of so many monuments, a welcome variation from our hammock-like swags and other monotonous and perfunctory ornament.

In the realm of painting Persia served a long apprenticeship. The great palaces of the Sasanians were covered with frescoes on a huge scale, of which, however, but a few glowing shadows remain. It was in this long discipline of decorating the vast walls of the enormous hall in suitable array that the Persians learned their grand style and developed canons and principles of painting which, despite the prohibition of theologians, continued to mould taste and prac-

tice for many generations. Finally, with Persia's love of exquisite craftsmanship, this school of painting found perfect flowering in the jewel-like miniatures, there to set a world standard unapproached by all other effort. The best of the miniatures are masterpieces of decoration. Richly, multiple colors are applied in intricate and harmonious patterns, gratefully varied, with open spaces of azure sky or golden desert, concentrated clusters of brilliant clear pigments, gracious lines, and lively movement, yet stately and decorous, as becomes the Persian tradition at all times.

If this art sometimes smacks too much of secular luxury, of unemotional intensity, nonetheless when inspired by some great theme, the Persian painter often bursts the common bounds, and equipped with the wide resources of his craft and its great traditions, projects a masterpiece, blazing with feeling and emotion. Religious ecstasy, with all its gorgeous and historic excitement, has scarcely ever been more effectively expressed than by an early sixteenth century artist, Aga Mirek, when he made bold to portray the Prophet's ascent to Paradise (Page 23). Carried with even and steady flight through the ether by his faithful mythical horse, Buraq, the Prophet, in undeviating upward flight, breaks through the vast blue dome, sweeping onward, guided by the Archangel himself, surrounded by a swirling wreath of angels bearing gifts. He passes on into the Infinite. The flame-like halo has burst into a quivering mass of flame that mounts to the zenith. The stars glow brightly, while below the ceiling of bright clouds, far down the receding abyss, spins the diminished earth.

The Persian instinct for beauty expressed itself in many other ways and arts. It was limited only by the materials available and the opportunities they presented for use or enjoyment. But through all the arts of Iran ran the same theme, beauty of form for its own sake. They were almost all distinguished by the lucidity and precision that were as much a mark of the Persian as of the Greek mind, and which were never submerged however riotous the color or emotional the appeal. They were throughout guided by the most mature traditions, fashioned always with exemplary and conscientious skill, and strictly controlled by an exacting taste that imposed a characteristic integrity and decorum. Persian art had its experiments, extravagances, pretensions, and failures, but perhaps in some-

what less than the usual proportion, thanks to the simplicity of its ideals and their relevance to the culture which they so authoritatively expressed. It was indeed this highly distinctive culture that sustained Persian art through fifty centuries and gave it its special quality, for the greatness of Persian art comes largely from the fact that it has given permanent and living expression to a racial tradition of universal significance which has been an essential factor in world civilization, and whose validity and creative power are indispensable for the future.