Topics concerning Near and Far Eastern Art. Abstracts of Papers Read at the 21st Annual Meeting of the College Art Association at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

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TOPICS CONCERNING NEAR AND FAR EASTERN ART

Abstracts of Papers Read at the 21st Annual Meeting of the College
Art Association at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

A SELJUK KORAN STAND WITH
LACQUER PAINTED
DECORATION
Rudolph Meyer Rieffstahl

While little practiced in Persia, the art of
carving wood flourished in Seljuk Anatolia.
In the mosques are beautifully carved pulpits,
doors, shutters, railings and cenotaphs.
Particularly remarkable are the Koran stands of
which important specimens have been
preserved in the Museum in Konia and Istanbul.

During an expedition in 1926 a unique
specimen with lacquer painted decoration was
discovered in the Tekke of the Mevlevi
dervishes in Konia. The interior of the upper
panels has a lacquer painted decoration showing
a group of fourteen lions on an arabesque
scroll background, grouped around a beauti-
fully designed double headed bird. Both
animals are symbols of royal power. The
Koran stand, according to its carved inscrip-
tion, was made in 1379-1380 A.D. for the
convent of the Mevlevi Dervishes in which it
is still preserved.

The most important feature is the lacquer
decoration. Two techniques of lacquer painting
are known. Far Eastern and Near Eastern.
In the former a wooden panel is covered
with successive coats of resin of rhus verni-
cifera, in the latter a painting in wash colors
is covered with a coat of yellowish varnish.
The technique of the Konia Koran stand is
that used in the majority of Byzantine ikons
as well as that of the later Persian lacquer
bookbindings, etc.

Of particular interest is the fact that the
carved exterior of the Koran stands shows
traces of polychromy which permits the sup-
position that the majority of Seljuk wood-
carvings were formerly polychromed.

AN ARABIC WOOD CARVING
OF THE VIIIth CENTURY
Maurice S. Dimand

An important example of early Islamic art
was recently acquired by the Metropolitan
Museum of Art. It was found in Takrit in
Mesopotamia in 1929. The framework and
the inserted panels are richly decorated with
vine scrolls. The ornament is undercut, pro-
ducing an effect of light and dark. Two
styles are to be recognized; a semi-natural-
istic one in the borders and a more formal
one in the panels. The vine ornament of the
borders approaches the style of the early
Christian art. On first glance one might be
deceived by this semi-naturalistic style and
regard this woodcarving as pre-Islamic. The
inserted panels give a clue to the dating of this
woodcarving. There are several types of
leaves to be distinguished: a trefoil leaf, a
feathery leaf and a large palmette with a pair
of volutes. The latter motif has a con-
cave surface and incised lobes. The branches
bear not only leaves and bunches of grapes
but also pine cones. This purely decorative
and unnaturalistic combination of motive is a
characteristic of the Near Eastern art under
the Sassanids and became frequent in the early
Islamic period.

The continuation of local tradition in the
early Islamic art of Egypt, Syria and Mesop-
otamia is an important factor which is little
known to students not familiar with Islamic
monuments of the seventh, eighth and ninth
century. Christian artists of these countries,
serving their new Arabic masters, combined
styles and motives of many provinces. These
monuments are the mosaics of the mosque of

YALE UNIVERSITY EXCAVA-
TIONS AT DURA-EUROPOS
M. Rostovtzeff

Last year's excavations at Dura-Europos,
a Macedonian colony, then a Parthian and
finally a Roman fortress on the Euphrates,
borne on three parts of the city: the center of
the city where the market-place was probably
situated, the military building near the main
gate and the ruins of the temple in the south-
west corner of the city. The most important
discoveries are (1) in the center of the city:
central building of the Roman camp with

DETAIL FROM
PANEL OF
CARVED WOOD
ARABIC.
VIIIth CENTURY
Recently acquired by the
Metropolitan Museum of
Art

Jerusalem (dated A.D. 691), the mosaics of
the Omayyad mosque at Damascus made in
the time of Walid I (705-715), the wall
paintings of Kusair Amra, assigned to the
same period, and the prayer pulpit in the
mosque of Sidi Okba at Kairwan, in North
Africa, which was imported from Bagdad in
the IXth century by one of the amirs of the
Aghlabid dynasty. The Takrit door must be
assigned to the first half of the
VIIIth century when the hellenistic tradition
was still alive and influenced the ornament
of the early Islamic art. Most of the artists
of Syria and Iraq were Christians. Takrit
had numerous churches and monasteries
which points to a large Christian popula-
tion. It might have been a work of a local
master or imported from Bagdad. Takrit
woodcarving is an important monument of
early Arabic art of Mesopotamia, showing
Christian and Sassanian traditions and in-
dications of the beginning of Islamic orna-
ment.

many inscriptions which prove that this mag-
nificent edifice was built during Carcalla's
unfortunate expedition against the Parthians.
Near the praetorium a fine temple of a hither-
to unknown greco-semitic goddess was found.
A "salle aux gradins" with more than 30
inscriptions testifies that the temple was built
in the early 1st century, A.D. The inscrip-
tions marked the seats owned by prominent
ladies of the city. In the vicinity of the
temple the archives of the city were found
with many parchments and papyri.

(2) South-west temple. Here a temple of curious
plan, probably a fire temple was unearthed.
Many fragments of frescoes which adorned
the upper story of the temple were found.
The most important discovery however, is a chapel
dedicated to the God of the neighboring city
Anath, Aplhabad by name, whose beautiful cult-
stele was found near the chapel in perfect
state of preservation. (3) Military building
near the main gate. Quite unexpectedly,
ruins of a small Christian church built into
one of the rooms of the building were found. The church was put out of use and partly destroyed by late fortification works of mud-brick, and must be dated in the early III century. A. D., since Dura was left alone in 256 A. D. and the mud-brick fortifications were thus erected some years before this date. The apse and the walls of the church contained substantial remains of Christian frescoes. In the apse: the good shepherd and Adam and Eve. To the right, the front of the Nativity cave, the two stars and the three "magi." To the left: the miracles: (a) miracle of the lake, (b) the sick man and his bed. Near the entrance door: David and Goliath (the names inscribed in Greek). Some walls have not yet been freed from the debris. Hundreds of fragments of the ceiling were found in the church.

ORIENTAL AESTHETICS
By Ananda K. Coomaraswamy

The purpose of this paper was to provide an introduction to oriental art, Indian and Far Eastern, based directly on what has been said by orientals about art and the values of art, rather than on the deductions of western students who usually study only the aesthetic surfaces of the finished product without reference to its determination. It was at the same time a contribution to the history of aesthetics—a branch of philosophy usually treated by European students from a provincial point of view. It was pointed out that the form of the work of art is determined by general necessities, and not by the private interests of the artist: that it arises by self-identification with the given theme, which takes the form in a mental visualization which is complete before any part of the executive task can be undertaken. An analogy was drawn between the formal elements in art and conduct, each controlled by a conception of "good form." It was shown that art tends to a perfection in which the ideal and perceptual elements are identified; but that this limiting perfection represents a mode of vision only attributable to Deity, and that the human artist can only work by means of ascertained rules and in a style appropriate to the subject. It was pointed out that oriental art is an ideal or pure art in the mathematical sense, neither theoretically nor practically a copy of anything on earth; its creations are not designed as though to function biologically, but governed entirely by their own logic. It is either a scholastic art, depicting types of activity, which are contingent and not like Platonic type external to the world of thought or an imagist or mystical art expressing an immediate experience in an indivisible coincidence of formal and pictorial elements.

The corresponding aesthetic theory regards the work of art as simultaneously subserving the proximate ends of use, and the ultimate end of aesthetic ecstasy, which is indemnified in kind with perfect experience, however attained. Thus the modern categories of Fine or useless art, and Decorative or meaningless art are unrecognizable: the modern distinction of artist from artisan becomes an antinomy. Proximately, the work of art is determined by an a priori knowledge, revealed or traditional, of correct types—correct that is from the standpoint of the end to be attained; ultimately, by the self-identification of the artist with the theme. From the standpoint of the spectator, the virtue of the work of art as something to be used, and its virtue as a means to perfect aesthetic experience, depend at least as much on his own capacity and effort as on that of the artist.

FOUR HITTITE RHYTONS
By H. H. Von Der Osten

The paper prepared by Dr. H. H. von der Osten was unfortunately not read at this session because of Dr. von der Osten's unexpected absence. A portion of it follows.

The use of effigy vessels for drinking is well known in the ancient Near East from almost all periods and places. The beautiful silver rhytons of the Persian period represent the culmination of this form.

During the 1930 campaign at the Alisha Huyuk in central Asia Minor we found four nearly complete rhytons of the ancient Hittite period. The dating of these pieces is certain: they occurred at widely scattered intervals in the stratum which we have designated as "II" in the sequence of cultural layers at our mound. The occurrence of cuneiform tablets of the so-called Cappadocian type in the same stratum puts their terminus post quem around 2300 B.C., but they may be as late as 1600.