The Second Millennium B.C.

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The art of the second millennium is somewhat less strikingly represented in the Museum’s collection than that of the third, with its masterpieces of Sumerian and Neo-Sumerian stone sculpture, and that of the first, which is brilliantly illustrated by our now notable collection of Assyrian ivories and Achaemenian silver and gold. By contrast, the most interesting objects on exhibit from the second millennium are, with the exception of a few ivories and one gold bowl, mainly of bronze, wood, and pottery. In spite of this somewhat humble display of material, the second millennium in the Near East is historically a fascinating one. Frequent migrations of peoples into Mesopotamia from the northeast resulted in the creation of new dynasties: the Mitanni in the northwest of Mesopotamia, the Kassites around Babylon, and the Hittites in Asia Minor. In Palestine and Syria this millennium saw the beginning of an increasing trade with Egypt to the south and Crete and Mycenae to the west, and such foreign connections revitalized the art of the Near Eastern countries.

Just before the beginning of this millennium of trade and intercommunication, there flourished in comparative isolation in Asia Minor a civilization whose art does not relate it to the Near East of the third millennium nor closely to the Hittites who were to occupy the same area in the second millennium.

Because there are no written records from this period in Anatolia, the numerous archaeological finds that have been made are somewhat vaguely attributed to a people whom we know only as pre-Hittite. Until recently the material evidence—gold, silver, and copper—of these pre-Hittites was almost entirely the result of careful excavations at the single site of Alaca Höyük in central Anatolia. During the past few years the Turkish government has excavated other pre-Hittite graves, and the amount of material has grown accordingly.

The Museum now possesses a splendid gold ewer and a rich collection of bronze ceremonial objects and weapons. These last include musical instruments, sistra and cymbals, as well as brutally shaped mace heads and a number of swords and spear heads. The original provenance of these bronzes is unknown, but the resemblance of the sistra to others from the Turkish excavation at Horoz Tepe, just south of the modern capital at Ankara, certainly suggests that our pieces, if not from the same site, are approximately of the same date, around 2100 B.C. The Museum’s collection well illustrates the skill of the pre-Hittite metalworker which still remains almost entirely unrepresented in museums outside of Turkey.

Some of the objects first acquired by the Museum for the ancient Near Eastern collection belong to the period from about 2000 to 1000 B.C. Notable among them are some splendid ivories much influenced by Egyptian art and made in Syria at the end of the thirteenth century. These were given in 1932 by Mr. and Mrs. George D. Pratt, and are early examples of a craft that was to make this area famous well into the first millennium. The ivory carvings produced in Syria and Phoenicia were for centuries the models and inspiration for those of the other Near Eastern countries.

Pottery vessels and metal instruments from the excavations of H. D. Colt at Lachish in Palestine in 1934 are also examples of second millennium culture in this part of the world, but until the past few years little had been added to this original collection. One notable recent acquisition, however, greatly increases the interest of our collection of art from this eastern edge of the Mediterranean.

From the dry regions of Upper Egypt but unquestionably the work of a Syrian artist is a female figurine made of wood, a material which is only rarely preserved in the moister climate of
Palestine or Mesopotamia. The figurine has lost her arms except for a piece of a hand which supports a breast, and much of the front of the body has been eaten away by the white ants that frequently destroy what the Egyptian climate has carefully preserved for millennia. This Syrian figurine is from a period somewhere around 1400 B.C., slightly earlier perhaps than the ivory women from Megiddo in Palestine who are quite

similar in size and position but lack the magnificent coiffure of our wooden example. Her smiling face, with large staring eyes which were originally inlaid, is framed in an incredibly careful and decorative representation of hair. The band around the head is used in the back to support the long locks which are tucked up under-neath it. The same hairdo can occasionally be seen in outline on Mitannian seals of the fifteenth century B.C. from the lands just east of Syria, and a less wavy version appears on a repoussé gold lady from Assur in north Iraq, possibly of the fifteenth century B.C.1 Such elaborate methods of hairdressing were also common in Mesopotamia in the third millennium and illustrate a certain continuity in feminine interests from deep antiquity to the present day.

The Museum's collection is not rich in second millennium objects from Mesopotamia proper. Although there are some outstanding Babylonian pieces, this region is not so well represented as Iran. For a considerable part of the second millennium Mesopotamia was weakened by invasions, whereas during the same era the ruling dynasty in Elam flourished exceedingly.

Unfortunately this brilliant period is most inadequately represented in our Museum, there being little but a small bronze female figurine probably from Susa. Demurely and fully clothed, her arms raised in a gesture of worship, she is a votive figurine, undoubtedly part of a deposit in the temple of Inshoushinak at Susa. Extremely similar bronze and gold figures from this thirteenth century deposit are in the Louvre. Two small holes pierce our figurine’s skirt, in the front below the left arm and in the back at the bottom of the hem. These were probably made by pins to hold a sheath of gold, a widespread practice in the second millennium B.C. A Syrian figure in our collection from this same period still has its gold clothing intact.

This small lady was made during the last period of power in Elam, after which other centers of culture developed in the north of Iran. This area has proved to be one of the richest sources of Iranian antiquities during the past few years. Various kingdoms or tribes ruled in this part of Iran, and it is unfortunate that our knowledge is often too slight to connect with any known people or dynasty the works of art which have been found.

Especially noteworthy are two new additions to our collection of the art of this time: a pair of bronze standards, presumably from the area in the north of Iran around Azerbaijan to the west of the Caspian Sea. The date of these pieces is perhaps around the turn of the millennium. Both

| Fig. 12. Gold ewer. Pre-Hittite, about 2100 B.C. Height 7 inches | Dick Fund, 1957 |
Fig. 13. Bronze musical instrument. Pre-Hittite, about 2100 B.C. Height 13 inches
Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1955

Fig. 14. Bronze standard. Pre-Hittite, about 2100 B.C. Height 6 3/4 inches
Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1955
Fig. 15. Wood female statuette. Syrian workmanship, found in Upper Egypt, about 1400 B.C. Height 10 inches. Rogers Fund, 1958.
show a short-skirted striding figure with turbaned head and wearing upturned boots. He is flanked on either side by crouching goats which are in turn followed by crouching dogs. The ring itself is decorated with ridges bearing engraved chevrons alternating with plain areas with engraved rosettes. The inner surface of the ring is slotted to hold a central ornament, possibly a rosette like one on a standard from Assur or some more complicated figural design similar to those on two standards, one in the Royal Ontario Museum, the other in the Louvre. The standing figure holds against his chest some form of offering or perhaps a weapon, and in this
gesture, as well as in his bearded and turbaned head, he is not unrelated to the small gold male figurines from the temple deposit of Inshoushinak at Susa. His short, spotted skirt, upturned shoes, and the snake-headed plinth on which he stands are, however, all features lacking in the figures from this treasure in the south.

Standards like these were commonly used in Assyria in the ninth century B.C. and appear on the magnificent stone reliefs of Ashurnasirpal. The Toronto and Louvre pieces, which are not identical to ours, have for this reason been dated in the ninth century B.C. The relation of our piece to the earlier Elamite figurines may mean that it is closer to 1000 than to 800 B.C., but for the time being our knowledge of the art of this area and period is meager and the chronology of such pieces remains uncertain.

Metal is not, however, the only medium in which the Iranian artist excelled. From earliest times this country produced some of the finest pottery of the ancient world. This part of the Museum’s collection is now fairly representative, and almost all of it has been acquired in the last dozen years. Some of the most recent purchases are a series of vessels in animal shape, a fashion which, although known in the third millennium, was extremely widespread in the second. Our
newest examples come from northwest Iran and belong to the end of the second millennium. Such animal vessels are now quite common among dealers in Near Eastern antiquities, and the Museum has responded to this sudden profusion by the recent addition of four such vessels to its collection. Our interest in this type of pottery, however, dates back to 1943 when we first purchased from the American Institute of Iranian Art two cow-shaped pots which came from the excavations conducted by Erich Schmidt at Chekka Sabz in Luristan. We now have a group of four cows, one zebu, and, of slightly later date, one duck. Although the provenance of some of these is uncertain, it is sure that the two most recently acquired beasts—the zebu and the cow—are from northwest Iran. Both may be of somewhat the same date, late in the second millennium, but they vary considerably in style.

The small bull with his tubular snout and his spout at the end of his tail is close to examples from Luristan and Sakkiz. The large gray zebu, on the other hand, with his cavernous mouth, is one of many now available that perhaps come from the area of Gilan just west of the Caspian Sea. The appeal of this sort of art, minor as it is, to a public familiar with the works of modern artists is immediate and understandable, and is undoubtedly the reason why many private collectors have found it so desirable.

In addition to the examples mentioned above, the Museum has many minor works of art of this millennium: cylinder seals of the Mitannian, Syrian, and Babylonian periods, as well as Babylonian clay plaques and figurines. These are either on display or are available for study, and, although certain areas are not very well represented, the examples we have are valuable in helping to complete the picture of Near Eastern art from 2000 to 1000 B.C. During the next millennium the contacts with the outside world grew, the arts flourished, and the Near Eastern craftsman produced skillful works in gold, silver, and ivory. Such objects, some of which are illustrated on the following pages, now form one of the brightest parts of the ancient Near Eastern collection.


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**Fig. 20.** Clay vessel in the shape of a bull. From northwest Iran, about 1000 B.C. Height 5 3/4 inches Rogers Fund, 1956