A few months ago the Metropolitan Museum was able to acquire a remarkable Saljuk incense burner in the shape of an animal, which is now on exhibition in Gallery D 3. Thirty-three and a half inches high and thirty-one and a half inches long, it is at present the largest known example of Saljuk bronze sculpture from Iran. The only other piece of Islamic bronze sculpture that is comparable in size is the famous griffin in the Campo Santo in Pisa, which is forty-one inches high. The Museum's newly acquired piece, which can be described as part lion, part cat, with the legs of a bull, was found in the ruins of Kariz, near the modern town of Tay-abad, in the province of Khurasan, about twelve kilometers from the border of Afghanistan. In the time of the Saljuks the province of Khurasan was famous for its fine metalwork. The well-known centers of this art were Herat, Nishapur, and Merv.

Of exquisite workmanship, this incense burner may be regarded as one of the great masterpieces of Saljuk metalwork. Strongly stylized, it has all the characteristics of the Saljuk style that are familiar to us in stonework, stucco, and textiles found in Iran and other provinces. The rich openwork decoration shows interlaced bands that form small compartments filled with double trefoils. In addition there are circular medallions with arabesque scrolls and bands of Kufic or angular inscriptions which are placed against a background of arabesque scrolls. The inscriptions are of historical importance, as they give us not only the date but also the names of the owner and the artist. Around the neck is the following inscription: “Ordered by the Amir, the Just, the Wise”; and continued on the breast: “Saif ad-Dunya wad-din Muhammad, al-Mawardi.” On the left front leg is the date, “Year 577,” which corresponds to 1181/1182 A.D. The three bosses are inscribed: “Peace, prosperity, happiness.”

The incense burner shows several interesting technical features. The animal was cast in several sections. The head is removable so that the incense could be placed inside and is secured to the body by an ingenious bayonet lock. The lower parts of the legs were cast separately and then fused in place. The tail, which was originally much longer, as we know from other incense burners, was cast separately. After the casting the openwork ornament was cut out and the details engraved.

Saljuk incense burners in the shape of birds or animals form an interesting group of medieval Persian bronzes. The bird illustrated on this page, also a recent accession, belongs to this group. A number of other small ones are in
Detail of the animal incense burner illustrated on the next page
Bronze incense burner with openwork decoration, dated 577 (1181/82 A.D.). Persian, Saljuk. This is the largest known Saljuk animal sculpture, almost three feet high. Rogers Fund, 1920

European and American as well as Persian collections. Among the best known is the lion-shaped incense burner (18\(\frac{1}{2}\) inches high) in the Hermitage at Leningrad, which, according to the inscription, was the work of Ali ibn Muhammad as-Salihi. Another lion-shaped incense burner is in the Louvre (11 inches high), and still another with fleur-de-lis decoration, found at Gurgan, is in the Teheran Museum (see opposite page).

There are only about six other dated Saljuk bronzes known. Of the same date as our incense burner is a ewer in the Tiflis Museum, inlaid with copper and silver and bearing the name of the artist, Mahmud ibn Muhammad of Herat. The well-known kettle in the Hermitage was made in Herat in the year 1163 (A. H. 599).

The incense burner acquired by the Museum is one more great product of Persian craftsmen of the province of Khurasan, which played such
an important role in the evolution of Islamic metalwork. The Saljuk craftsmen in Khurasan developed and perfected many processes of metalwork. Here the inlay technique first achieved its artistic prominence, and the style created in Khurasan was eventually adopted by the whole Near East. Saljuk bronze sculpture not only influenced the Near Eastern metalwork of all provinces but also the medieval bronzes of the West, particularly the aquamaniles in the shape of animals.

Our new piece is of particular interest in showing that the Saljuk artists of the twelfth century were capable of producing large pieces of bronze sculpture in the round as well as the more familiar small ones.

Lion incense burner in the Teheran Museum. The fleur-de-lis motive in the openwork appeared from time to time in medieval Islamic decoration. Height about 12 inches