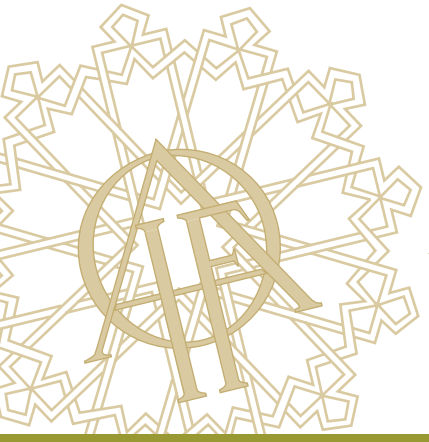
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Doris Behrens-Abouseif

A Late Mamluk (?) Basin with Zodiac Imagery.

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Doris BEHRENS-ABOUSEIF

A LATE MAMLUK (?) BASIN WITH ZODIAC IMAGERY

A brass basin at the Türk ve Islam Eserleri Müzesi in Istanbul (TIEM)[1] engraved with unconventional zodiac representations deserves attention.[2] The unpublished basin is made of tinned copper and has a diameter or 40 cm at the top. Twelve engraved medallions decorate its exterior, representing the signs of the zodiac [fig. 1]. The interior is devoid of any decoration. Its condition is not perfect, given the various dents on the basin and that the lowest part of the decoration band is not visible behind a thick black layer. Centuries of use have flattened the engraving and the metal has been broken and patched behind the medallion of Taurus. An owner's signature at the rim reads Ḥājī Yūsuf. The basin was acquired in Diyārbakir. The following investigation attributes this basin to the late Mamluk period.

Zodiac representations were common in Islamic metalwork between the 12th and the early 14th centuries. Although it is in Khorasan that astrological symbols were most intensively used, there are also magnificent examples from 13th century Mosul and from Egypt and Syria during the Ayyubid and Bahri Mamluk periods. Since this was also the period when metalwork was characterized by the technique of silver inlay,[3] the most spectacular examples of zodiac representations in metal are executed in this technique. Among the most prominent Mamluk pieces are a late 13th century candlestick at the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore,[4] a bowl in the Museo Nazionale del Bargello in Florence attributed to the late 13th or early 14th century,[5] and a bowl in the Louvre attributed to the 14th century.[6] There is furthermore an engraved copper bowl, without inlay, at the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin attributed to Syria or Iraq ca. 1400[7] [figs 2, 3]. The physiognomies and headdress of the figures suggest

1. No. 1384.

2. I thank Dr. Nazan Ölçer, the head of the TIEM, for her great help during my work at the museum.

3. Baer, E., *Metalwork in Medieval Islamic Art*, New York, 1983, p. 4, 248.

4. Atıl, E., *Renaissance of Islam. Art of the Mamluks*, Washington, 1981, p. 67

5. *Eredità dell'Islam. Arte Islamica in Italia*, Milano, 1993, p. 305f.; Baer, p. 260.

6. *The Arts of Islam*, The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1976, p. 189, Nr. 215.

7. *Islamische Kunst. Verborgene Schätze*, Berlin, 1986, p. 103.

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a Mamluk origin. Despite the high quality of these objects, astrological symbols did not play a dominant role in Mamluk metalwork.

During the 15th century Mamluk metalwork declined until its revival under the reign of Sultan Qāytbāy (1468-1496),[8] with the creation of new patterns, techniques and, in some cases, new forms. Silver inlay was scarce and inscriptions occupied a subordinate place within the decorative layout. Tinned copper became more frequent than brass. The variety of metalwork styles inherent to this period is unparalleled. It is therefore often difficult to identify and locate pieces that are not inscribed or dated.

Apart from the fact that it was not made to be inlaid, on account of its shape and decorative devices, the TIEM basin does not belong to the silver-inlay period, but to a later date. The disappearance of astrological themes from Islamic metalware after the 14th century emphasizes the interest of this piece. Prior to dealing with the problematic iconography of the the zodiac medallions, the general design and the background decoration should be initially discussed. Their stylistic origins, which seem to be clear, should contribute to our identification of this unusual basin.

THE DESIGN.

The basin has a curved base and rounded sides which narrow slightly towards the top. This shape was common in Iranian as well as in Mamluk metalwork. It is closer to the Mamluk type however, the Iranian being narrower at the top.[9]

The decorated surface of the basin is composed of a band consisting of three registers with the zodiac medallions set within the middle register. The upper and lower registers, which are identical, are in the shape of plaited ribbons, each one interrupted by 12 loops set at mid-distance between the zodiac medallions. This kind of ribbon was used on 14th century metalwork from western Iran and Fars, and it is characteristic of late Mamluk metalwork.[10]

The zones between the 12 medallions in the middle register are decorated with two basic alternating patterns, 6 of them bear inscription bands and the 6 others are incised with decorative motifs. The inscribed zones consist of two bands, an upper and

8. Allan, J., "Shaʿbān, Barqūq, and the Decline of the Mamluk Metalworking Industry", *Muqarnas* II (1984), p. 85-94.

9. Melikian-Chirvani, A.S., *Islamic Metalwork from the Iranian World*, London, 1982, p. 149, 201, 222; Ward, R., *Islamic Metalwork*, London, 1993, p. 112.

10. Atıl, E., *Renaissance*, p. 105, 107; Allan, J.W., "Later Mamluk Metalwork II – A Series of Lunch-Boxes" *Oriental Art*, XVII/1 (1971), p. 156-164: p. 159, fig. 4, p. 163, fig. 8; *Masterpieces of Islamic Art in the Hermitage Museum*, Kuwait, 1990, p. 88; Bodur, F., *Türk Maden Sanati. The Art of Turkish Metalworking*, Istanbul, 1987, p. 109.

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a lower one, the space between them is decorative. Each inscription is to be read individually from top to bottom for each zone. The horizontal space between the inscriptions is engraved as follows:

plaited medallion:	between:	Aries and Taurus [fig. 1]; Libra and Scorpio [fig. 12];
Y-pattern:	between:	Leo and Virgo [fig. 10]; Aquarius and Pisces [fig. 15];
interlace pattern:	between:	Gemini and Cancer [fig. 8]; Sagittarius and Capricorn [fig. 13].

This interlace pattern consists of a criss-cross of chains with angular loops. A similar one, though more complex, can be seen on a ewer in Lyons[11] and on two basins in Palermo,[12] all three of the Qāytbāy period.

As for the 6 non-inscribed zones, they display 3 alternating patterns. One shows a repetitive pattern consisting of a trefoil set in a heart-shape, [fig. 10] another one is a net motif consisting of intersecting octagons [fig. 15], reminiscent of the structure of medieval armories; and the third is a horizontal composition in the shape of 3 superimposed plaited medallions [fig. 12]:

trefoil in heart-shape:	between:	Pisces and Aries; Virgo and Libra,
intersecting octagons:	between:	Capricorn and Aquarius; Cancer and Leo,
superimposed plaited medallions:	between:	Taurus and Gemini; Scorpio and Leo.

The repetitive trefoil set in a heart-shape and the net motif do not seem to have been used in Iranian metalwork but they occur occasionally in Mamluk art. They appear together on a late Mamluk lampshade in the Gayer Anderson Museum in Cairo, recently published.[13] There, the patterns are executed in open-work and are set in alternating arrangement typical of late-Mamluk metalwork [fig. 4]. Noteworthy is also that both patterns are found on Mamluk shadow play figures. The shadow play

11. Melikian-Chirvani, "Venise, entre l'Orient et l'Occident", *Bulletin d'études orientales*, XVII (1974), p. 1-18, figs. 10, 11; "Cuivres Inédits de l'Époque de Qā'itbāy", *Kunst des Orients*, VI/2 (1969), p. 99-133, fig. 23.

12. *Eredità dell'Islam*, p. 319, 322f.

13. Behrens-Abouseif, *Mamluk and Post-Mamluk Metal lamps*, Cairo, 1995 (in press); for the net motif s. also Allan, J.W., *Metalwork of the Islamic world. The Aron Collection*, London, 1986, p. 100, 105.

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figures published by Kahle show both interlace patterns of the TIEM basin, the intersecting octagons,[14] and the criss-cross pattern.

THE INSCRIPTIONS.

Between Aries and Taurus:
upper: *al-ʿizz wa'l-naṣr wa'l-i*
lower: *qbāl wa'l-ʿumr wa'l-judd wa'l-a(mr?).*
Between Gemini and Cancer:
upper: *al-ʿizz wa'l-naṣr wal-i*
lower: *qbāl wa'l-ʿumr wa'l-majd wa'l-amr* (glory, victory, prosperity, longevity, splendor, power).
Between Leo and Virgo:
upper: *al-ʿizz wa'l-naṣr wa'l-i*
lower: *qbāl wa'l-ʿumr wa'l-judd wa'l-majd* (glory, victory, prosperity, longevity, luck, splendor).
Between Libra and Scorpio:
upper: *al-ʿizz wa'l-naṣr wa'l-*
lower: *iqbāl wa'l-ʿumr wa'l- (majd)? wa'l-amr.*
Between Sagittarius and Capricorn:
upper: *al-ʿizz wa'l-naṣr wa'l-iqbāl*
lower: *wa'l-ʿumr wa'l-judd wa'l-majd wa'l-amr.*
Between Aquarius and Pisces:
upper: *al-ʿizz wa'l-naṣr wa'l-i*
lower: *qbāl wa'l-ʿumr wa'l-majd* (glory, victory, prosperity, longevity, splendor).

The script is *thuluth* on a background filled with small scrolls. Votive inscriptions of this type were widespread on Iranian and Mosul metalware until the 13th century but they were less common thereafter. Their occurrence in Mamluk art is rare.[15]

THE ZODIAC MEDALLIONS.

As the medallions occupy the major part of the decorated surface, they inhere a certain monumentality, characterizing also Mamluk zodiac representations, such as those on the bowls at the Louvre, the Bargello and the Berlin museums.

14. Kahle, P., "Islamische Schattenspielfiguren aus Egypten", *Der Islam*, I/II (1910-1911), p. 264-299, 143-195, s. II, figs. 46, 50, 52, 66, 75.
15. *Eredità dell'Islam*, p. 311.

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This zodiac's iconography is of the type commonly used in Islamic metalwork, *i.e.* the image of each sign includes the personified symbol of the corresponding planetary lord: Aries with Mars, Taurus with Venus, Gemini with Mercury, Cancer with the Moon, Leo with the Sun, Virgo with Mercury, Libra with Venus, Scorpio with Mars, Sagittarius with Jupiter, Capricorn with Saturn, Aquarius with Saturn, Pisces with Jupiter.[16] On the pen-box signed by Ibn Sunqur,[17] the Vaso Vescovali, the Bargello and the Berlin bowls the seven planets were represented separately in addition to the 12 zodiac signs. The Baltimore Mamluk candlestick bears only the zodiac signs and the Louvre bowl only the planets.

The zodiac signs are presented in their usual sequence arranged from left to right.

Aries: [fig. 5] Mars, as lord of the domicile, seated cross-legged above a pair of rams. He is bearded and wears a headgear that looks like a turban, a halo encircles his head. In his right hand he holds a sword and in his left an object which should represent a severed head, but which is difficult to identify here.

Traditional representation of Aries: Mars riding a ram or walking alongside it.[18] Unlike Aries on the Vaso Vescovali, there is no dragon to symbolize the eclipse of the sun.[19] According to Baer the Mamluk traditional representations of Mars show him in profile, which is not the case here.[20]

Taurus: [fig. 6] Venus, the goddess of the domicile, playing the luth is seated cross-legged, above a pair of humped bulls. She wears a veil whose ribbon, looped in the middle, flies behind her head.

Traditional representation of Taurus: Venus with one bull, mostly in a riding position.[21]

Gemini: [fig. 7] Two mythical male figures with dragon tails knotted together, wearing five-pointed crowns. The knot between the two figures gradually forms a staff erected in the middle of the image. The bearded and crowned figures hold the staff with one hand and the club with the other.

16. In Iranian art, however, zodiac signs are sometimes shown without their respective planetary. Baer, *Metalwork*, p. 251.

17. Atıl, E., *Renaissance*, p. 61; Baer, *Metalwork*, p. 253.

18. Melikian-Chirvani, *Iranian World*, p. 174, 185; Hartner, W., "The Vaso Vescovali in the British Museum: A Study in Islamic Astrological Iconography", *Kunst des Orients*, 9/1-2 (1973-1974), p. 99-130, p. 114; Baer, *Metalwork*, p. 253; Allan, J.W., *Islamic Metalwork. The Nuhad Es-Said Collection*, London, 1982, p. 50; Atıl, E., *Renaissance*, p. 61.

19. Hartner, W., "The Vaso Vescovali", p. 114.

20. Baer, *Metalwork*, p. 249.

21. Melikian-Chirvani, *Iranian World*, p. 174; Baer, *Metalwork*, p. 253; Allan, *Es-Said Collection*, p. 50; Atıl, E., *Renaissance*, p. 61.

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Traditional representation of Gemini: Only one of the twins is represented, the other figure stands for Mercury, the lord of the domicile, depicted as a scribe.[22] The staff is topped with a mask in the shape of a man's head or a dragon, both symbols of the eclipse.[23] Birds are sometimes found in the image.[24] On the Berlin bowl a double-headed figure personifies Gemini. In Iranian metalwork, Gemini may appear in the form of two bird-headed figures.[25]

Cancer: [fig. 8] A female figure with a three-pointed crown, holding a crescent symbolizing the moon, is seated cross-legged above a crab.

Traditional representation of Cancer: A crab holding a crescent between its claws, or pinching a figure holding the crescent.[26]

Leo: [fig. 9] A female figure bearing a three-pointed crown, sits above a pair of lions. In her right hand she holds a solar disk with 32 rays and in her left hand a palmette.

Traditional representation of Leo: A lion walking in front of a solar disk without a figure. However, on some representations a male figure holds the solar disk.[27]

Virgo: [fig. 10] Two male bearded figures: one, Mercury, is seated cross-legged wearing a headgear and holding a pen and a scroll. The other is standing in profile and wears a turban; this being the only profile representation on the basin. He holds a two-eared stalk symbolizing *Spica* (Arabic: *sunbula*), the main star of the constellation.[28] Another two-eared stalk stands on the left hand side of the medallion, on the right hand side of Mercury.

Traditional representation of Virgo: One of the two figures symbolizes Virgo, the other stands for Mercury.[29] Iranian metalwork shows Mercury alone and in some cases Virgo is symbolized by the two-eared stalk.[30] On the Berlin bowl a seated figure, similar to Virgo with the Scales, holds a stalk in each hand.

Libra: [fig. 11] Venus, goddess of the domicile, is seated cross-legged carrying the Scales on her head and holding its vessels in her hands. She is wearing a five-pointed crown.

22. Hartner, "The Vaso Vescovali", p. 110.

23. Melikian-Chirvani, *Iranian World*, p. 174, 185; Hartner, "The Vaso Vescovali", p. 110; Allan, *Es-Said Collection*, p. 50.

24. Hartner, "The Vaso Vescovali", p. 114.

25. Melikian-Chirvani, *Iranian World*, p. 69, 94.

26. Baer, *Metalwork*, p. 253; Allan, *Es-Said Collection*, p. 50; Atıl, E., *Renaissance*, p. 61.

27. Hartner, "The Vaso Vescovali", p. 115f.; Melikian-Chirvani, *Iranian World*, p. 174, 185; Baer, *Metalwork*, p. 249f., 253; Allan, *Es-Said Collection*, p. 50; Atıl, E., *Renaissance*, p. 61.

28. Hartner, "The Vaso Vescovali", p. 116.

29. Melikian-Chirvani, *Iranian World*, p. 185; Hartner, "The Vaso Vescovali", p. 110, 114.

30. Melikian-Chirvani, *Iranian World*, p. 94, 174; Allan, *Es-Said Collection*, p. 50.

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Traditional representation of Libra: Venus seated under the Scales, playing the luth or the lyre.[31] A western Iranian version shows a man instead.[32] the Libra image of the TIEM basin is different from all versions of this zodiac sign enumerated by Baer,[33] except for the Berlin bowl where Libra is represented with the same composition, also with Venus wearing a five-pointed crown.

Scorpio: [fig. 12] Two bearded men stand on each side of a scorpion holding it with one hand, a sword in the other. The figure on the right wears a five-pointed crown.

Traditional representation of Scorpio: Mars, as a male figure, is represented with two scorpions.[34] On the Berlin bowl he is represented holding a scorpion in one hand and a sword in the other.

Sagittarius: [fig. 13] A pair of symmetrical bearded centaurs, wearing five pointed crowns and armed with bows. Each bow bears the head of a bird. Another bird flies above their heads.

Traditional representation of Sagittarius: A centaur aiming with his bow at a dragon attached to its tail, his human forepart representing Jupiter.[35] A 13th century Mamluk basin, however, totally omits the dragon.[36]

Capricorn: [fig. 14] Saturn, bearded and with headgear, is seated above a pair of ibexes and holds a club in his right and a palmette in his left hand.

Traditional representation of Capricorn: An old man riding an ibex or standing next to it.[37] Sometimes the ibex stands alone.

Aquarius: [fig. 15] Two bearded water-carriers with five pointed crowns stand on either side of a well holding the pail's rope, which goes over a pulley. A fish swims at the bottom of the medallion.

Traditional representation of Aquarius: An old man, Saturn, the lord of the domicile, draws the pail from the well.[38]

31. Hartner, "The Vaso Vescovali", p. 116; Baer, *Metalwork*, p. 253; Allan, *Es-Said Collection*, p. 52; Atıl, E., *Renaissance*, p. 61.

32. Melikian-Chirvani, *Iranian World*, p. 174.

33. Baer, *Metalwork*, p. 255.

34. Melikian-Chirvani, *Iranian World*, p. 174, 185f.; Hartner, "The Vaso Vescovali", p. 110, 116; Baer, *Metalwork*, p. 253; Allan, *Es-Said Collection*, p. 52.

35. Hartner, "The Vaso Vescovali", p. 116f.; Baer, *Metalwork*, p. 253; Allan, *Es-Said Collection*, p. 52; Melikian-Chirvani, *Iranian World*, p. 94, 174, 186.

36. Allan, *Es-Said Collection*, p. 78.

37. Melikian-Chirvani, *Iranian World*, p. 174, 186; Hartner, "The Vaso Vescovali", p. 110, 116; Baer, *Metalwork*, p. 253; Allan, *Es-Said Collection*, p. 52; Atıl, E., *Renaissance*, p. 61.

38. Melikian-Chirvani, *Iranian World*, p. 94, 176, 186; Hartner, "The Vaso Vescovali", p. 116; Baer, *op.cit.*, p. 253; Allan, *op.cit.*, p. 52; Atıl, E., *op.cit.*, p. 61.

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Pisces: [fig. 16] Jupiter, the lord of the domicile, is seated cross-legged flanked by a pair of crowned mermaids whose fishtails are opposed. The upper parts of their bodies are clothed, the lower fish-like parts are engraved with cross pattern, this being the only occurrence of this pattern on the basin. All three figures have their arms crossed and hidden in their sleeves.

Traditional representation of Pisces: Jupiter flanked by a pair of fish. On Iranian metalware he holds the fish, whereas in the iconography of Egypt and Syria his arms are crossed and his hands within his sleeves.[39] On the Berlin and the Louvre bowls Jupiter is depicted both ways; as a personification of Pisces he holds a pair of fish but as a planet symbol he holds his hands within his sleeves.

ANALYSIS.

The artist of the TIEM basin seems to have been guided to a great extent by a sense of symmetry and monumentality. He preferred to draw bold lines, as in a pencil sketch, rather than produce minute details as those on inlaid metalwork. Unlike the inlaid work of the 14th century, the surface of the garments here is not decorated. The image is nevertheless most elegant, the lines having been firmly drawn by an experienced hand, especially as far as the depiction of the animals is concerned, whose quality is superior to that of the animals in Mamluk miniatures. The curves that delineate figures and animals seem to be integrated in a large arabesque. The background of the medallions and of the inscriptions is filled with scrolls.

Except for Venus, the Moon and the Sun, all figures in the zodiac signs are bearded males with small moustaches and with Asiatic features. All figures are seated cross-legged in frontal posture, except for the Virgo and Scorpio medallions. In the first Mercury's body is shown up to the knees together with a bearded man who is standing with his face depicted in profile, in the latter the two male figures are standing.

Four medallions (Aries, Leo, Capricorn and Taurus) show a figure above two adorsed animals, in Pisces the central figure is flanked by a pair of mermaids. Five other medallions (Gemini, Scorpio, Aquarius, Virgo and Sagittarius) present a pair of symmetrical figures, three of them with a central object. Only Libra and Cancer are personified by single figures.

Compared with the traditional zodiac representations, significant omissions are apparent, such as the luth or the lyre in the Venus representation of Libra. In Gemini the mask of the demon, or the dragon's head, is not included on the central staff.

39. Melikian-Chirvani, *Iranian World*, p. 186; Hartner, "The Vaso Vescovali", p. 116; Baer, *op. cit.*, p. 253; Allan, *op. cit.*, p. 52; Atıl, *op. cit.*, p. 62; Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 90 f.; *Waḥdat al-fann al-islāmī*, Riyad, 1405/1985, p. 105.

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Unlike the Wade Cup, the Vaso Vescovali or the Ibn Sunqur pen-box, dragons symbolizing the eclipse are missing altogether.[40] Birds were sometimes associated with the traditional image of Gemini,[41] but not with Sagittarius; in the Sagittarius image of our basin, a bird's head appears in each of the centaurs' bows and a third is flying above them, whereas the traditional dragon's head and the knot at the centaur's tail are missing. The figures have been treated in an abridged form without the additional attributes that characterize the usual zodiac signs.[42] Venus playing the luth or the lyre is usually represented in Libra, not in Taurus, as is the case here.

The most essential variation to be noted from the traditional zodiac iconography is the doubling of the symbols. In the cases of Scorpio, and Aquarius the human figures symbolizing the planets are not personified by a sole figure, but rather by a pair of figures. In the cases of Aries, Taurus, Leo, Capricorn and Sagittarius the symbolic animals, the ram, the bull, the lion, the ibex and the centaur, are represented likewise in pairs instead of single. The layout of Leo, Capricorn, Aries and Taurus medallions illustrating a figure seated above a pair of adorsed quadrupeds, as if riding a chariot, recalls the image of Alexander carried by a pair of griffons on the Innsbruck plate.[43] It also recalls the cover of the Iranian Vaso Vescovali where the seven planets are symbolized by figures seated on a kind of bench supported by a pair of horses resembling a stylized chariot.[44] In the painted ceiling of the Cappella Palatina the Sun and the Moon are depicted as driving chariots pulled by a pair of horses.[45] The chariot motif occurs in Roman as well as in Sasanian art.

In Cancer, the image is dominated by the figure of the Moon which seems to be throning on the crab, untouched by its claws. Contrary to the traditional image, the crab here is not the central figure, as it has been subordinated to the Moon. This feature is reminiscent of Cancer on the Baltimore candlestick.

The hair of some of the figures is not hidden under their headdress, but appears in the form of two strands or pigtails. This is the case with Venus in Libra, the Sun in Leo, the mermaids in Pisces. This also applies to some male figures, such as Jupiter in Pisces and Mars in Aries, who also bear this feature. Others have only one pigtail as the centaurs in Sagittarius, Mercury in Virgo and the figures in Aquarius and in Scorpio. A 14th century Mamluk manuscript on chivalry at the British Museum shows

40. Hartner, "Zur astrologischen Symbolik des Wade Cup", *Aus der Welt des Islamischen Kunst. Festschrift für Ernst Kühnel*, ed. R. Ettinghausen, Berlin, 1959, repr. in *Oriens-Occidens*, Hildesheim, 1968, p. 405-414; Rice, *The Wade Cup in the Cleveland Museum of Arts*, Paris, 1955; Hartner, "The pseudoplanetary Nodes of the Moon's Orbit in Hindu and Islamic Iconographies", *Oriens-Occidens*, p. 349-404: p. 383, 384.

41. Hartner, "The Vaso Vescovali", p. 114.

42. Baer, *Metalwork*, p. 249.

43. Sourdel-Thomine, J. & B. Spuler, *Die Kunst des Islam* (Propyläen Kunstgeschichte), Berlin, 1973, Nr. XLII, p. 303f.; *Europa und der Orient*, Berlin, 1989, fig. 648, p. 557.

44. Hartner, "The Vaso Vescovali", p. 119f.

45. Gabrieli, F & U. Scerrato, *Gli Arabi in Italia*, Milano, 1979, figs. 79-80.

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men with this hair style.[46] Another feature which the figures of the basin share with those of the B.M. manuscript is the representation of the garment flapping open from the waist to reveal underwear; this can be seen on both figures of Gemini.

THE MERMAIDS.

Compared with the traditional Islamic zodiac representations, that of the TIEM basin offers indeed a very free artistic interpretation of the subject. Above all this applies to the representation of two mermaids, instead of fish, in Pisces which is remarkable and exceptional. Mermaids, whose origins go back to Greek tradition, are seldom found in Islamic art, although Qazwīnī does mention them. Ettinghausen has dealt in detail with the subject of water creatures in Islamic art;[47] his documentation shows various medieval forms of hybrid creatures, some of which having the shape of a fish with a human head. In an illustration of Qazwīnī's *ʿajā'ib al-makhlūqāt* a woman's body is shown coming out of the back of a fish.[48] Among the Mamluk shadow play figures published by Kahle, some are in the shape of a fish with a male human head.[49] Nevertheless, none of Ettinghausen's examples is similar to the mermaids on the TIEM basin, where the upper part is entirely that of a human female with the lower part ending in a fish-tail. Mermaids of this type are however depicted on the ceiling of the Cappella Palatina as well as in the painting of the cathedral of Cefalù, which are Islamic and have similarities to Fatimid art;[50] according to Gabrieli and Scerrato, there is only one representation of this type of mermaid in Islamic art; it is found on a 12th century marble relief in the Islamic Museum in Cairo, which also includes other mythical animals [fig. 17].[51] The mermaid motif has an old tradition in Egypt, as it occurs in Coptic art. We find it on a stone relief where two mermaids appear in a frontal position and in a symmetrical arrangement on either side of a tree; one hand holds a fruit hanging from the tree, the other a branch. Their upper body is naked, the lower fish part has scales with their tails opposed.[52] Another 6th century example shows the birth of Aphrodite as she comes out of the waves in a shell flanked by two mermaids with curled

46. Smith, G.R., *Medieval Muslim Horsemanship*, London, 1979.

47. Ettinghausen, R. (with Grace Guest), "The Iconography of a Kāshān Lustre Plate", *Ars Orientalis*, 4 (1961), p. 25-64, Reprinted in *Islamic Art and Archaeology. Collected Papers*, ed. M. Rosen-Ayalon, Berlin, 1984, p. 579-640.

48. Ettinghausen, "Iconography", p. 51 and fig. 57.

49. Kahle, II, figs. 80, 81.

50. Gelfer-Jørgensen, M. *Medieval Islamic Symbolism and the Paintings in the Cefalù Cathedral*, Leiden, 1986, p. 147, 167f.

51. Islamic Museum Nr. 7049; Gabrieli & Scerrato, p. 379, 393.

52. Gelfer-Jørgensen, *op. cit.*; Wessel, K. *Koptische Kunst. Die Spätantike in Ägypten,* Recklinghausen, 1963, fig. 44.

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tails.[53] The mermaid motif could have persisted on the level of folk art and thus inspired the artist of the TIEM basin.

The mermaids are not the only common feature between the zodiac representations of the TIEM basin and the ceiling paintings at the Cappella Palatina; the symmetrical arrangement of figures, the pair of adorsed quadrupeds and the figures holding a palmette appear several times on the paintings of the ceiling.[54] The symmetrical representation of a pair of adorsed animals within a medallion is also a characteristic feature of Seljuk mirrors[55] as well as of textiles produced between the 10th and the 13th centuries in the Mediterranean world.[56] A similar composition characterizes the mantle of Roger II with its pair of adorsed felines ramping along the curve of the mantle on either side of a central tree.[57] A Fatimid marble vessel, *kilga*, at the Islamic Museum in Cairo is carved with a pair of winged adorsed felines, with their wings intersecting. The representation of Gemini on our basin with two figures holding a central staff and those of Aquarius are reminiscent of an Umayyad or Abbasid silk fragment with two confronted figures holding a tree.[58] An example, less remote chronologically, is a Mamluk basin showing two adorsed rampant sphinxes within a medallion;[59] the curves of the sphinxes' bodies with their arabesque-like contours and interlocked wings are akin to the animal representations of the TIEM basin.

Given that zodiac representations disappeared from Islamic metalwork after 14th century, and that there is little doubt that this basin is of a later date, we are obviously dealing with an exceptional case, whether the basin be attributed to Iranian or to Mamluk art. An alternative attribution, *i.e.* to Anatolia or Mesopotamia, seems at the present state of our information, unlikely. Due to the presence of human and animal representations on the basin, which never ceased to be used in Iranian art, but are rare in late Mamluk art, and to the horizontal composition of the basin's decoration which, as mentioned, occur on 14th and 15th century Iranian vessels, we have to consider an Iranian origin for the TIEM basin.[60] It should be pointed out however, that the basin has no feature that is specific or exclusive to Iranian art. Moreover, human representations on Iranian metal vessels of the 14th and 15th centuries are very different in style; they tend to be more slender and rather elongated, linear rather than curved and detached from the medallion in which they are included.[61]

53. Rutschowscaya, M.-H., *La Sculpture Copte,* Petits Guides des Grands Musées (Musée du Louvre), No. 84 fig. 8.

54. Gabrieli & Scerrato, figs. 51, 52, 53, 56, 59, 76, 79, 80, 86, 90 and 45, 55, 75.

55. Melikian-Chirvani, *Iranian World*, p. 130 f.

56. *Europa und der Orient*, p. 557; Baer, *Sphinxes and Harpies in Medieval Islamic Art*, Jerusalem, 1965, p. 56ff.

57. Bauer, R. "Il Manto di Ruggero II", *I Normanni, Popolo d'Europa, 1030-1200*, Rome, 1994, p. 279-87.

58. *The Arts of Islam*, p. 73.

59. Baer, *Sphinxes,* p. 19, fig. 35.

60. Melikian-Chirvani, *Iranian World*, p. 22, 237.

61. Allan, *es-Said Collection,* p. 107; Melikian Chirvani, *Iranian World*, p. 194 f., 210 ff.

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Despite differences in style, the TIEM basin has a feature in common with the Bargello and the Berlin bowls which are both Mamluk. In all three cases the figures tend to fill the entire surface area of the medallions, with their curved outlines adapted to the circular frame. The representation of Jupiter in Pisces holding his hands in his sleeves, which occurs also on an Ayyubid pen-box at the Museo Civico in Bologna,[62] on the Bargello and the Berlin bowls, differs from the common Iranian version where Jupiter's hands are visible, whether holding a fish or a vessel. With the Berlin bowl, the TIEM basin has the common feature that it is made of tinned copper instead of inlaid metal; the treatment of the figures on both objects is consequently more linear than surface oriented as in the case of inlaid metal. Furthermore, on both vessels scrolls are engraved to fill the background of the medallions.

In addition to the mermaid motif which suggests an Egyptian influence, the TIEM basin has decorative patterns that seem to be exclusive to late Mamluk metalware, such as the intersecting octagons and the trefoil in a heart-shape. The unconventional character of the zodiac iconography however, the archaic epigraphs and the parallels with early medieval textiles, reveal a certain eclecticism which blurs our view of this object. It appears as if the artist was searching for ideas everywhere in order to produce a very individual work of art. Late Mamluk metalware is by all means full of surprises.

62. Baer, *Metalwork,* p. 258f.

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Fig. 1. The TIEM basin.





Fig. 2. Mamluk basin in Berlin (Courtesy Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin).

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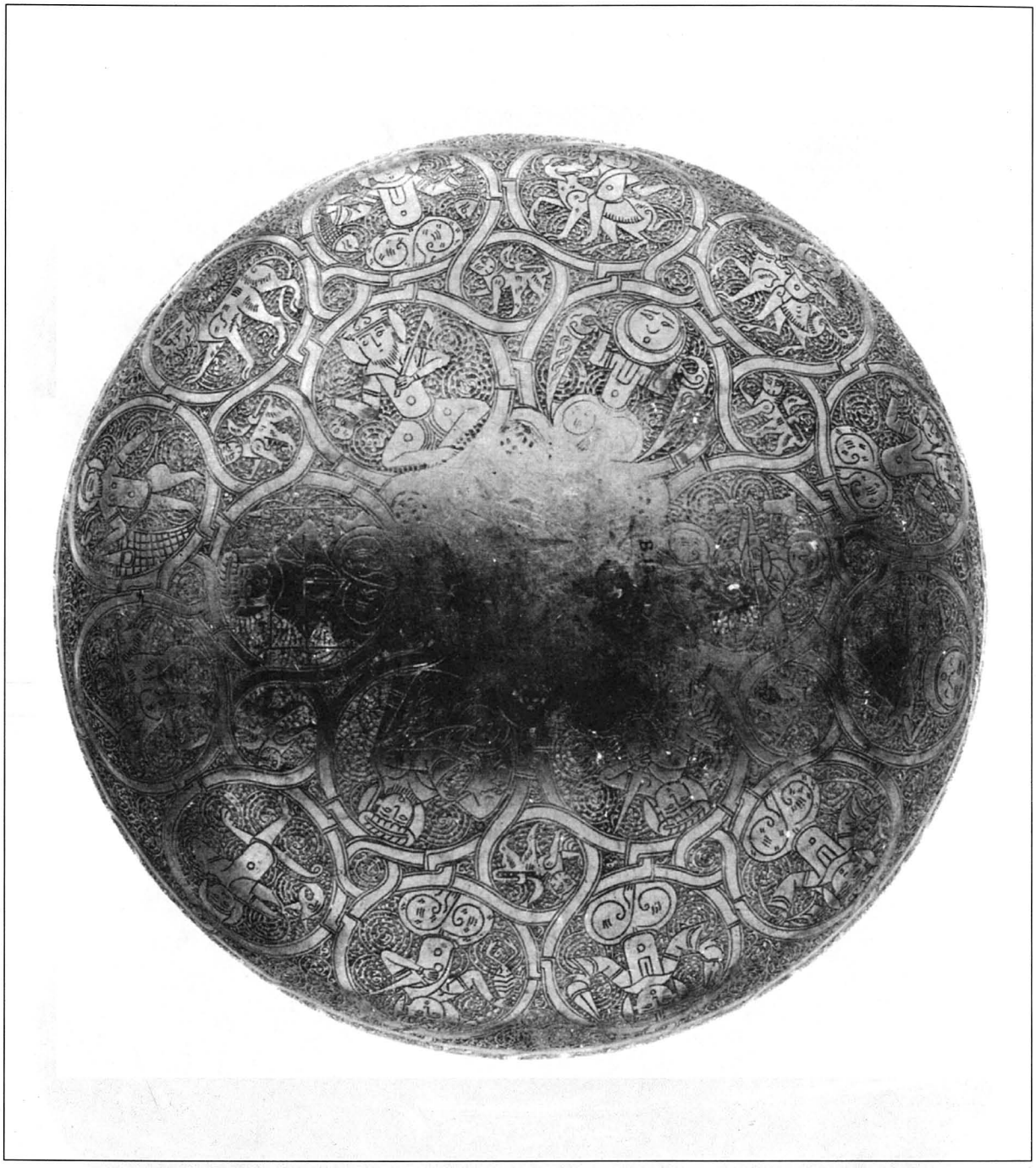


Fig. 3. Mamluk basin in Berlin, Bottom view.

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Fig. 4. Mamluk lamp at the Gayer Anderson Museum in Cairo.

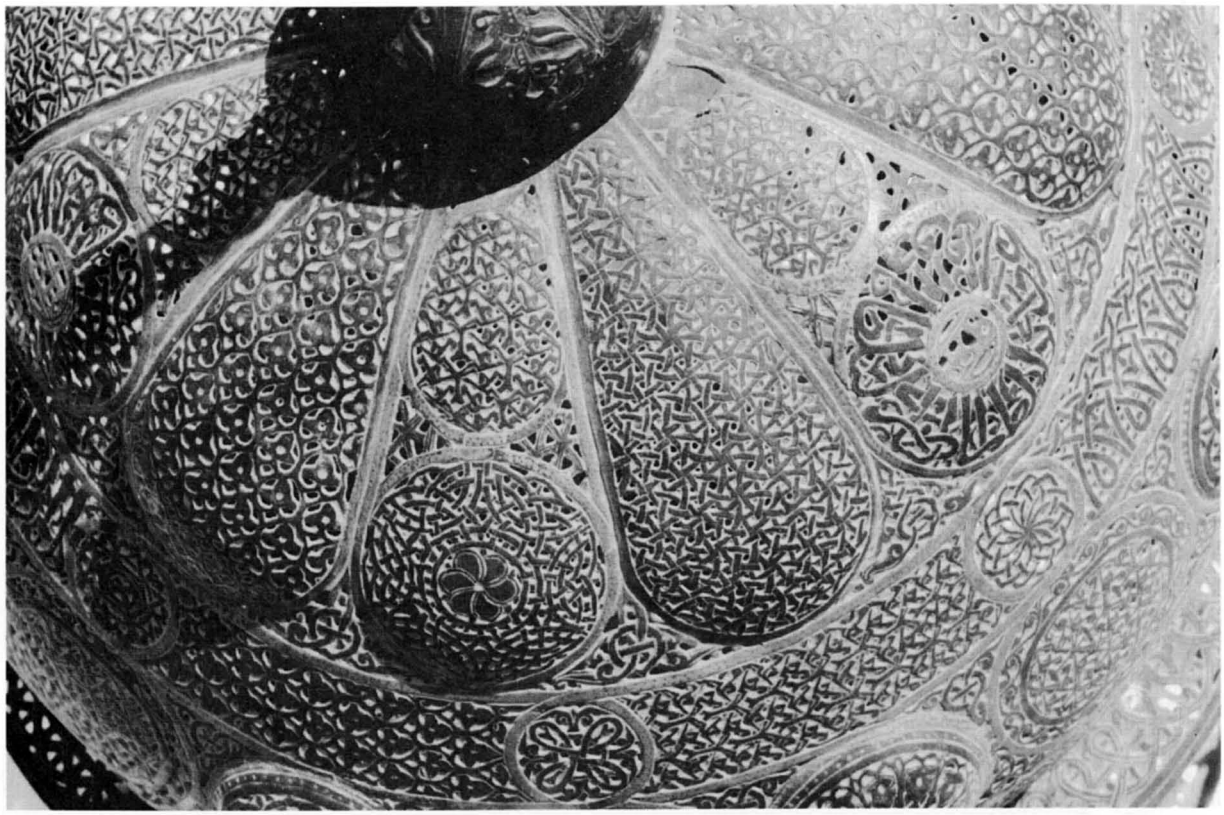
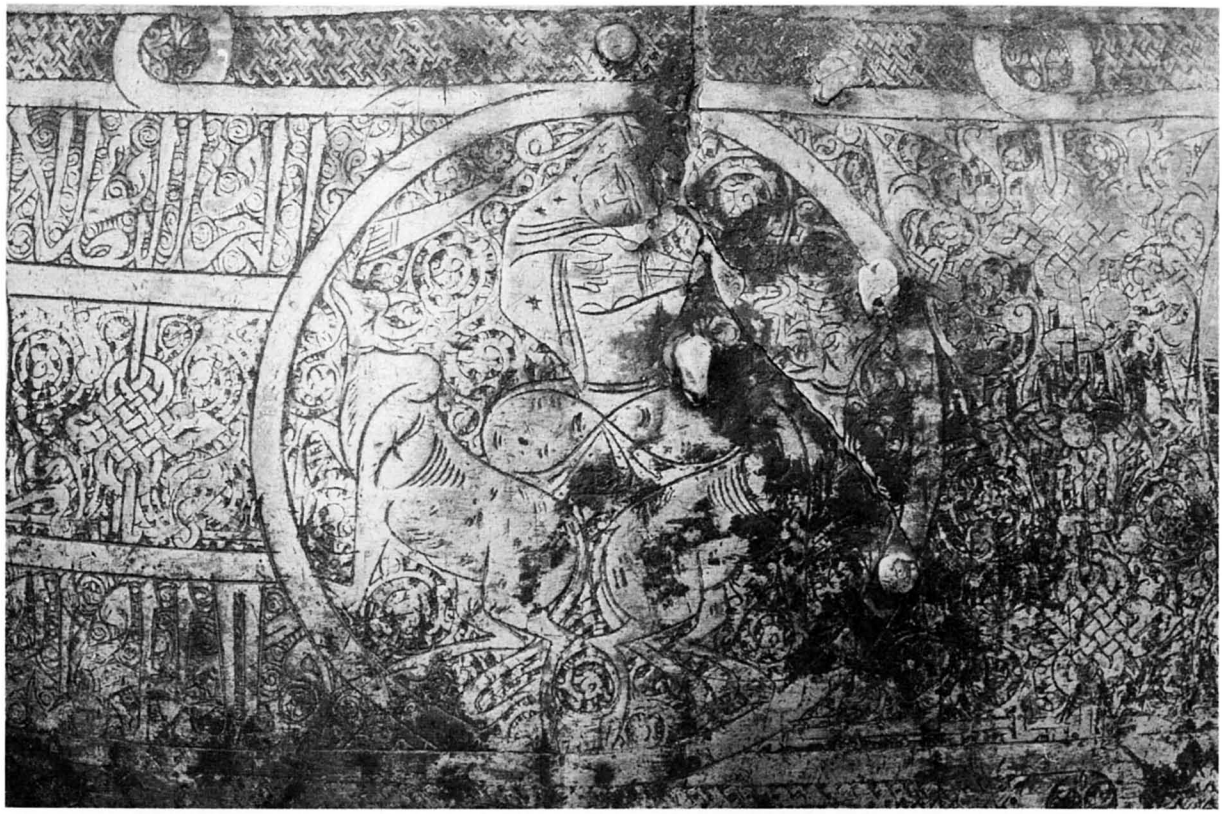




Fig. 5. Aries.

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Fig. 6. Taurus.



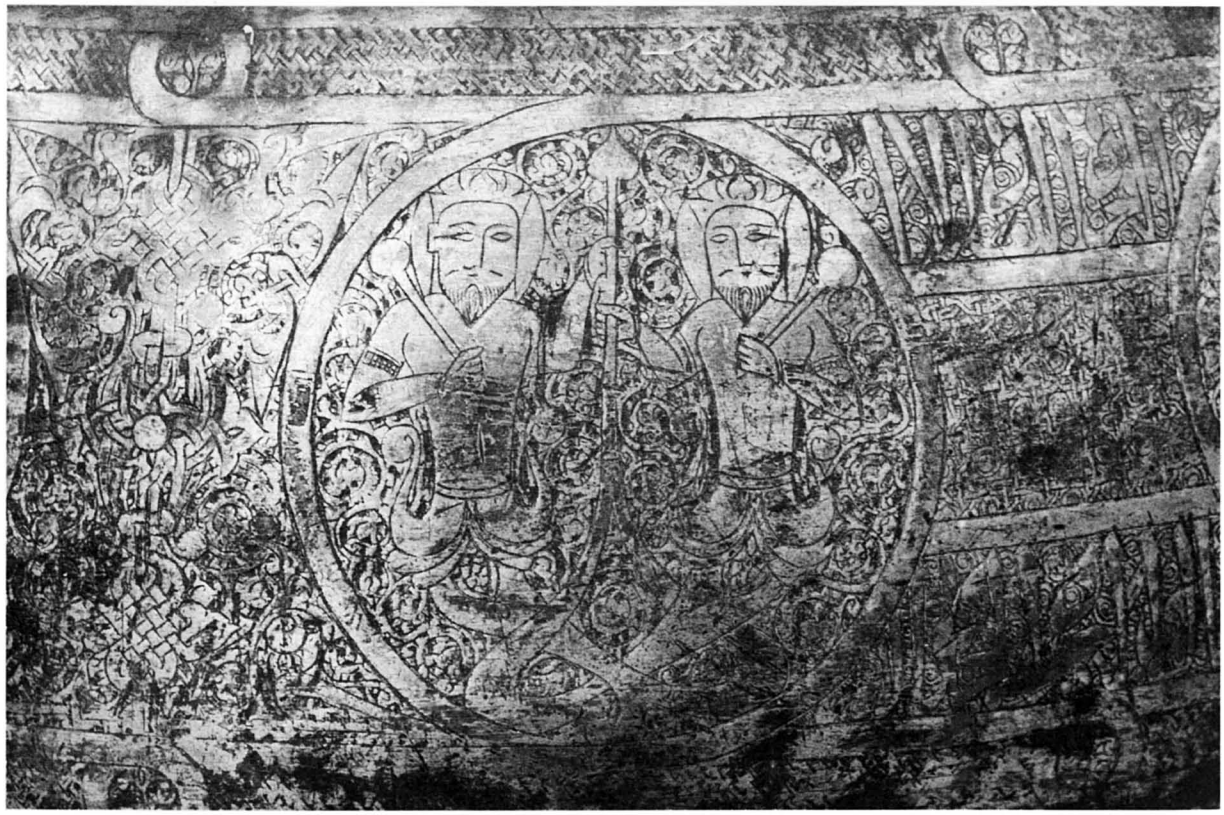


Fig. 7. Gemini.

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Fig. 8. Cancer.

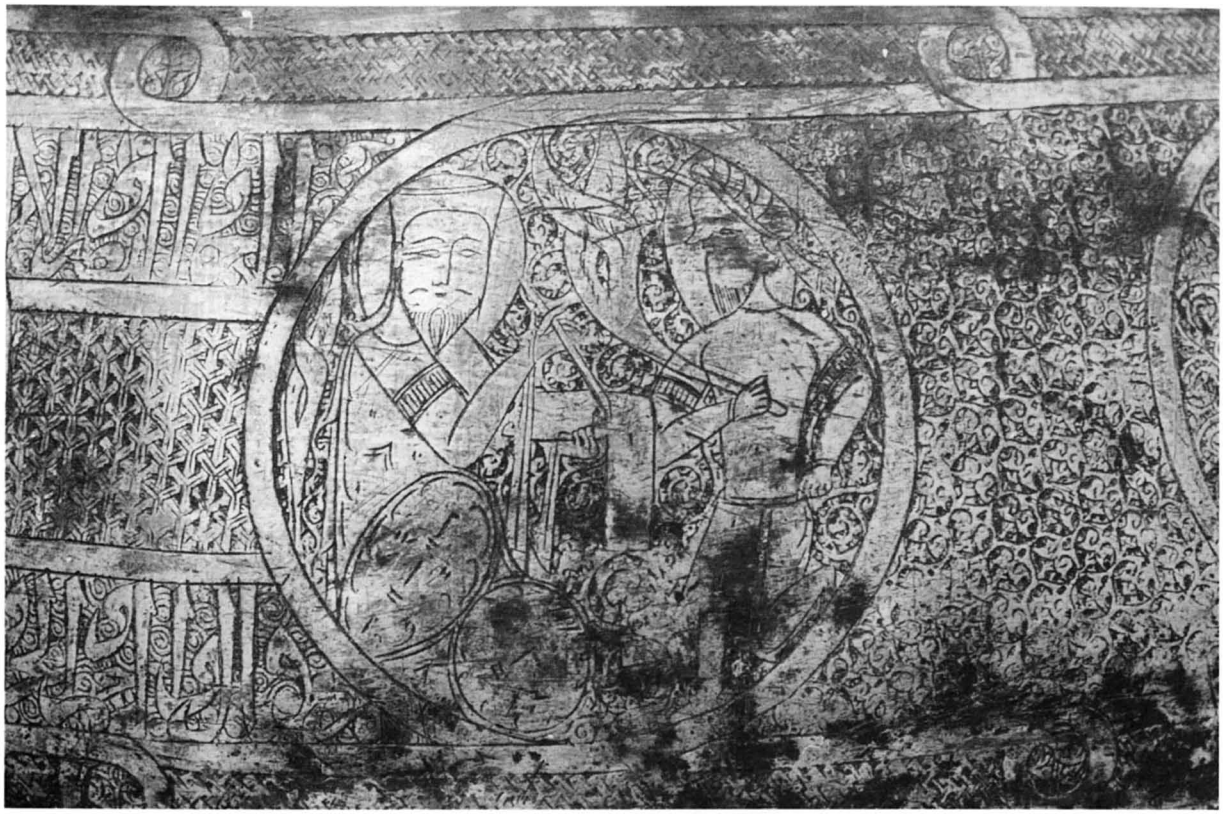




Fig. 9. Leo.

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Fig. 10. Virgo.



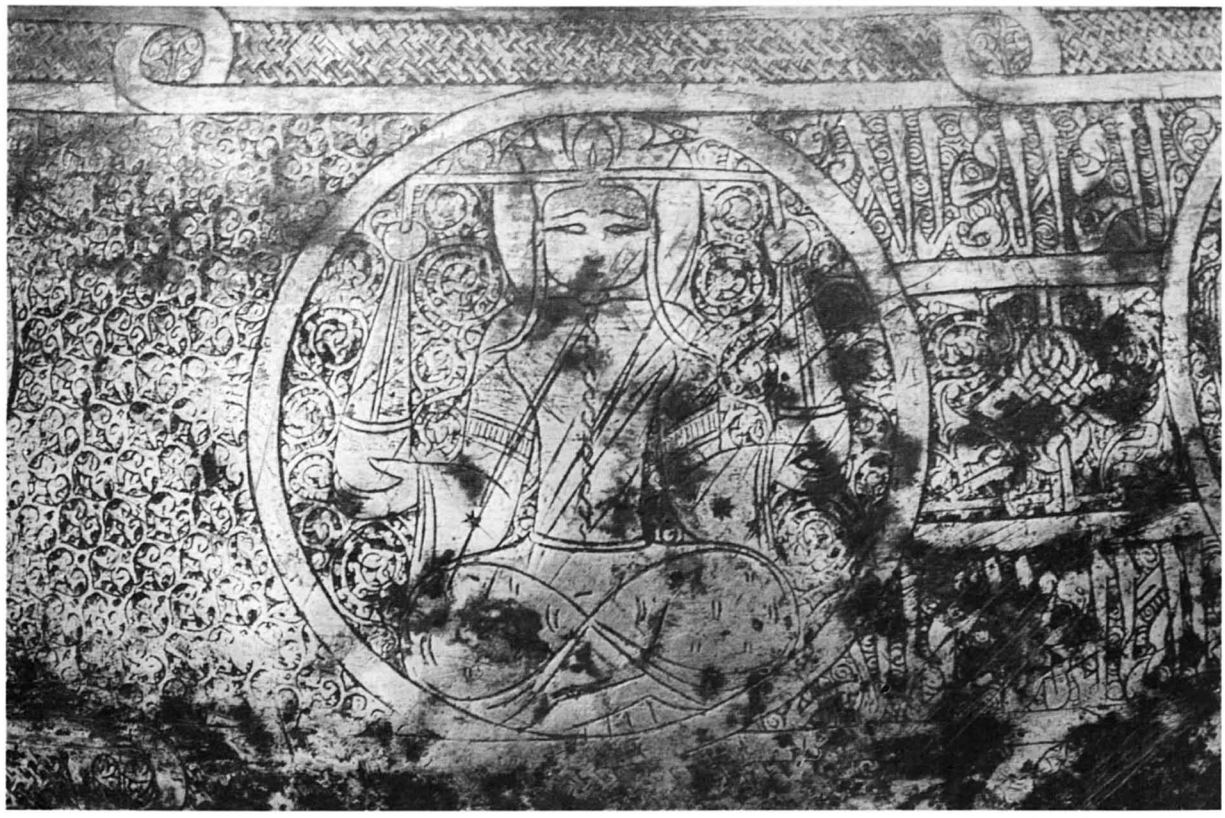


Fig. 11. Libra.

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Fig. 12. Scorpio.



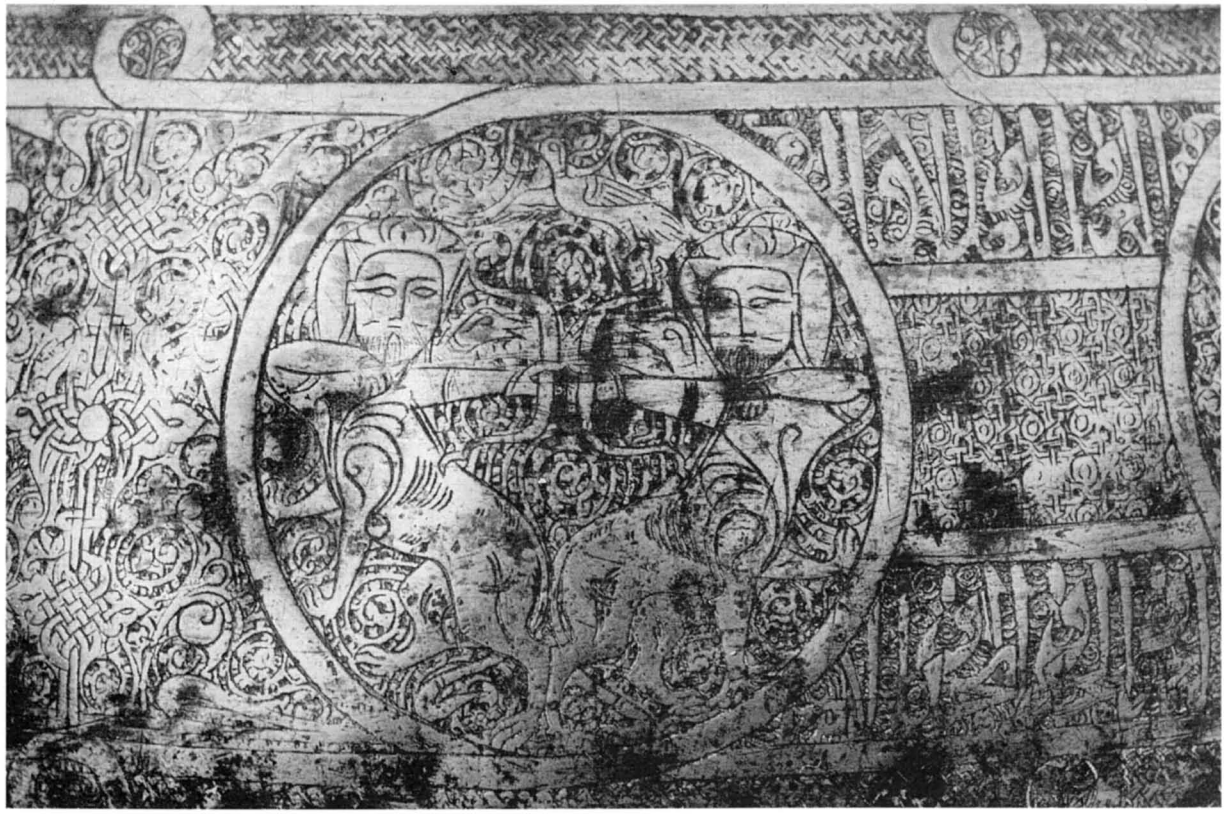


Fig. 13. Sagittarius.

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Fig. 14. Capricorn.



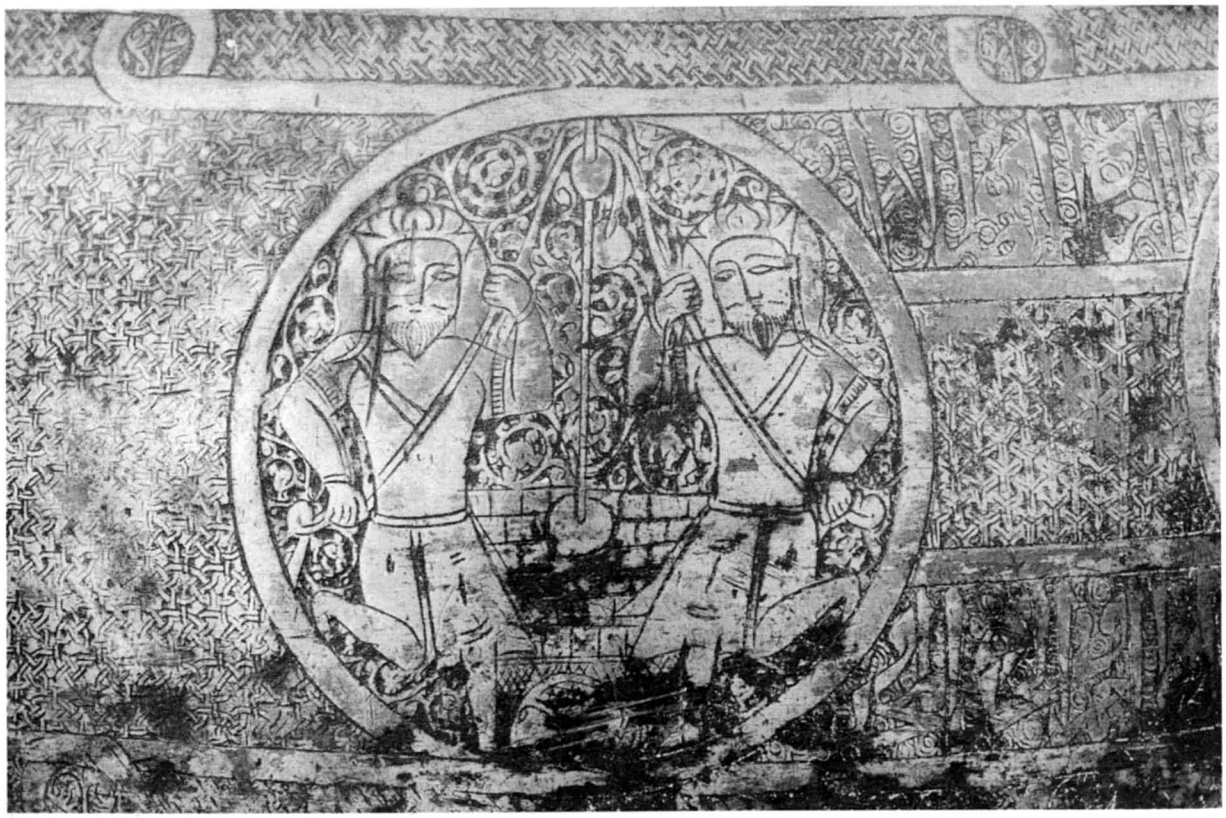


Fig. 15. Aquarius.

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Fig. 16. Pisces.

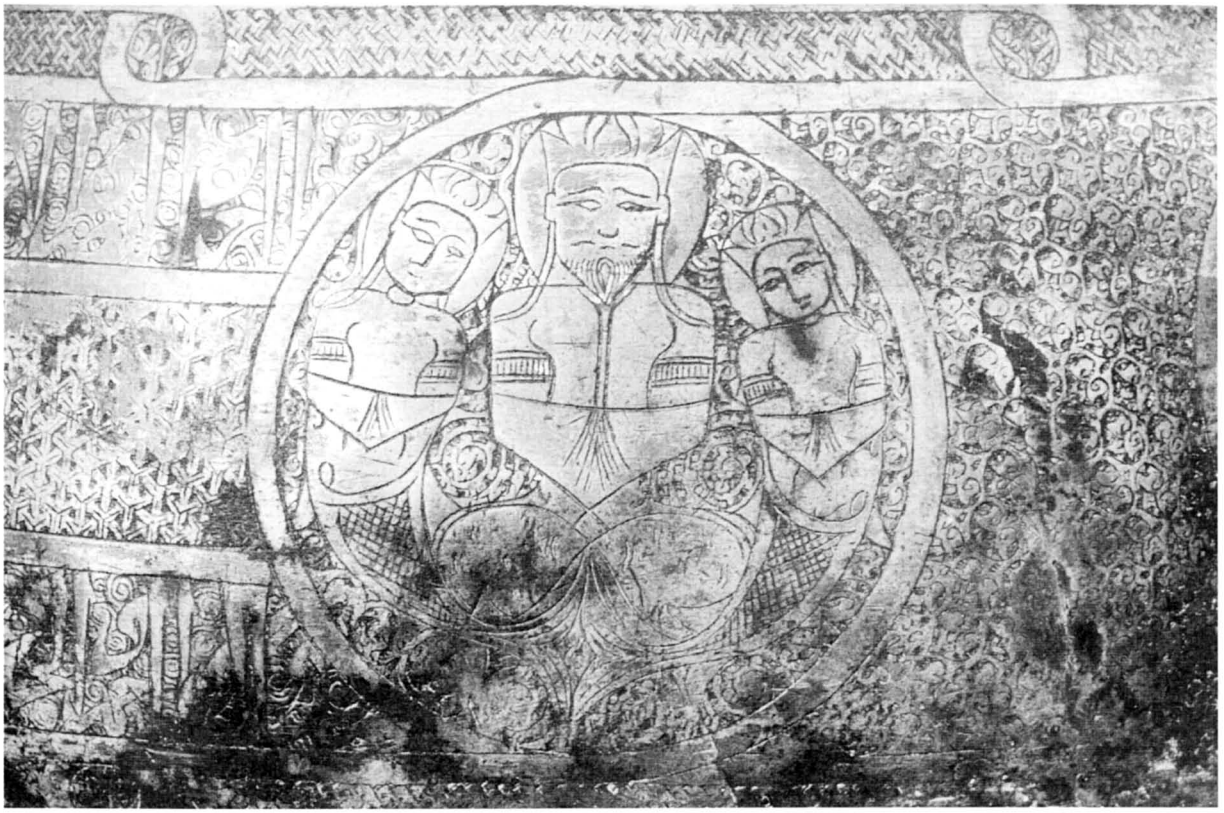




Fig. 17. Carved marble panel at the Islamic Museum in Cairo.

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