

DAVID AARON



Plate with Lion Motif

4th-5th Century, Sasanian, Iran

Silver-Plated Bronze

Diam.: 18 cm

A plate of silver gilt bronze, incised with a large image of a roaring lion. The lion is depicted mid-stride, with its foreleg raised in front of it. The lion's mouth is opened wide, displaying its long, pointed teeth and protruding tongue. The snarl animates the rest of the facial features too, with thick wrinkles behind the nose and around the widened eyes. The texture of the mane is suggested through rows of parallel lines in waves around the front of the chest, and tighter curls down the back of the neck. The fur is also evoked on the underbelly and hackles. The long slender tail of the lion curves up behind it, and ends with a trefoil palmette. The tripartite paws, with their sharp elongated claws, stand on simple curved lines suggesting a rocky terrain. Waves fill the base of the design, with a small fish in the bottom right.

The Sasanian Dynasty (224-651 A.D.) was the last Iranian Empire before the rise of Islam, and was one of the world's leading powers of this period, alongside the Byzantine Empire. The empire stretched west to the Mediterranean, east to present-day Afghanistan, and north into parts of Uzbekistan. Silver vessels of the Sasanian type have been found across these areas, possibly exported from Persia, but potentially also made there by locals influenced by their Sasanian rulers. In fact, few of the objects known today were found in what is now Iran and Iraq; the majority were found in Perm, west of the Ural Mountains. Plates and bowls make up the majority of Sasanian silver finds, particularly plates with a simple, low ring foot. These largely feature decoration on the inside surface, as in this example.

