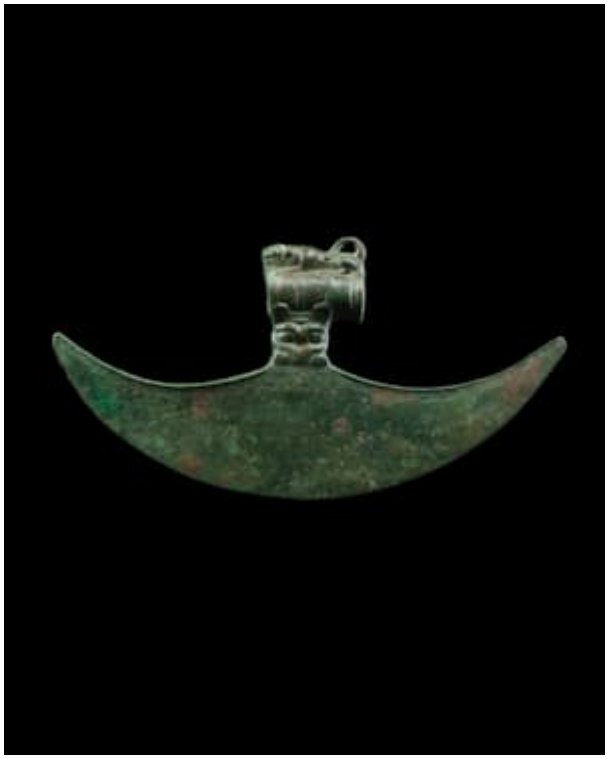

Axe Head

Circa 1200-800 B.C., Central Asia

Bronze

H with stand: 15.88 cm, W: 24.13 cm

A bronze axe head with an ornate cast bronze shaft-hole and crescent-shaped blade. A couchant lioness lies along the length of the shaft-hole, with tail raised in a swooping curve over the back. Small incised dots are used to render the texture of the lioness's fur, and details such as the divides between the toes are also added this way. The rounded hole for the shaft is adorned with raised concentric rings. At the join between the shaft-hole and the blade is the face of an animal, with raised, rounded ears, and large eyes opened wide. A slender snout sits between two raised circles, possibly jowls or paws. The inner edge of the blade itself, framed with a slight raised lip, is incised with bands of zigzags, dots, and overlapping lines in a braid or rope pattern.

Many decorated bronze objects dating from the Iron Age (c. 1300/1250-700/650 B.C.) have been found within the Luristan province of Iran. They are characterised by stylised human and animal forms (both natural and fantastical). The objects include arms and other equipment, jewellery, horse gear, and standards. Spike-butted and crescent-shaped axes are among the most characteristic of Luristan arms. Several examples with Elamite or Assyrian dedicatory inscriptions provide some of the earliest firm dates for these axes, placing their production in the Early Iron Age. Bronze examples with cutting edges, such as this one, are rare after the Iron Age II (1000-586 B.C.). Due to their rarity, it is possible that these axes were used as heirlooms or regalia, rather than as weapons. Sometimes referred to as halberds, an axe of this kind was found during the excavations at Sialk, near Kashan, in the 1930s, securely locating this style to the Luristan region.

Exhibitions

Exhibition of Persian Art, The Iranian Institute, 1940.

Ancient Bronzes; a selection from the Heckett Collection, Heckmeres Highlands, Valencia, Pennsylvania, Carnegie Institute, Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 5 November 1964-10 January 1965, no. 15.

Literature:

Phyllis Ackerman, *Guide to the Exhibition of Persian Art*, exh. cat., The Iranian Institute, New York, 1940, no. U, p. 110.

P. Verdier, *Ancient Bronzes; a selection from the Heckett Collection, Heckmeres Highlands, Valencia, Pennsylvania*, exh. cat., Carnegie Institute, Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1964, no. 15.

Ancient Bronzes from the Estate of Greta S. Heckett; Antiquities from the Estate of Fahim Kouchakji and Other Owners, Sotheby Parke Bernet, New York, 21 May 1977, Lot 215.

Antiquities, Sotheby's, London, 9-10 July 1984, Lot 113, pp. 40-41.