

## 54. Incense burner stand with caracals

Khurasan, eastern Iran, twelfth century

Cast high leaded brass, openwork and chased decoration

L. max. 176 cm; H. max. 22.5 cm; Thickness min. (wall) 1–2.5 mm;  
Thickness (heads) 3 mm; Thickness max. (snout) 9 mm;  
Weight 1.120 kg

Chasing with irregular tracing (U-shaped, flat and V-shaped)  
W. 0.5–1.6 mm

The surface is brown in colour, with areas of green corrosion.  
The figures are incomplete: one has a broken ear; three other  
ears are also broken and have been filed down. A transversal slit  
is visible on the head of the caracal retaining both ears. There are  
small gaps around the central opening.

Purchase, Jacques Acheroff, Paris, 1958; inv. no. MAO 357



The forequarters of three caracals, their legs forming a tripod, surround the circular base. Fairly coarse irregular chasing defines the openings. Palmettes arranged in a geometric network decorate the chests and the necks of the felines, whose features and ears are detailed with incised tracings. The sides of the base have three birds within frames. A very similar object is in the Cincinnati Museum of Art: it is identical in shape, the openings are in the same places and the surface chasing is large and very irregular.<sup>94</sup> However, no openings have been made in the back of the necks and heads of the caracals, all the openings show birds and there is only one palmette on the neck of the felines. With the exception of these two examples, few comparable objects are known and none with a documented provenance. However, a prototype of a feline (H. 6.1 cm), was found at the site of Gurgan, located east of the Caspian Sea and west of Khurasan.<sup>95</sup> The DAI stand was acquired from Jacques Acheroff, an antiquities dealer who is said to have bought it in Egypt as an object from Gurgan.<sup>96</sup> Two very similar stands were exhibited by Oleg Grabar in 1959, one of which is surmounted in the centre by a three-dimensional bird on a large openwork baluster. The consistency of the dimensions of the two parts, as well as the similarity in their openings, suggest that this is a complete object, an incense burner with its original mount.<sup>97</sup>

It seems likely, therefore, that this caracal base once formed part of an incense burner.<sup>98</sup> It was in any case designed to fit a section that was inserted into the central circular-shaped opening and possibly also into the diamond and triangular shapes cut into the backs of the necks and the heads of the caracals. Like all the openwork objects in the collection, the caracal stand was entirely made in wax and then cast (fig. 12). A core pin remains in the body of one of the felines and probable remnants of the clay core were found inside their heads. The rectangular openings under each protome may have been designed as passages for the core. Some shrinkage porosities and cavities caused by air bubbles in the casting are visible in the angular areas on the exterior and multiple shrinkage porosities are visible on the interior of the walls. The joints made in the wax model between the legs and the forequarters are visible. The openwork was cold worked after shaping in order to perfect it in areas where metal had infiltrated during the casting. The rather coarse and imprecise chasing was also cold worked (fig. 22a) and some reworking is visible. The eyes of the felines do not show any traces of ceramic inlay, but it is highly possible that the eye sockets were intended for this purpose, like those of the caracal and the falcon incense burners (cat. nos. 52, 53).



## 55. Fountain spout and tap

Khurasan, eastern Iran, twelfth century

Cast high leaded copper, chased decoration

Spout: L. 44.5 cm; H. max. 10.5 cm; D. max. 8.1–8.3 cm; D. min. 4.6–5 cm;  
Thickness (edge) 6–9.8 mm; Weight 5.337 kg

Tap: L. max. 9.9 cm; H. max. 23.6 cm; D. (upper) 6.4 cm, (lower) 2.8 cm;  
Weight 2.658 kg

The pipe is brownish in appearance and the spout has a lighter yellow colour; both show significant signs of wear and areas of stable green corrosion. The head of the feline in particular is worn at the front and its features are almost erased; the ears show traces of recent file marks. The bird tap is incomplete: its broken tail and crest have been filed off; wear on the back and where it has been handled are evidence of repeated use. Traces of shocks and bumps are visible on both parts.

Purchase 1973, former collection Jacques Acheroff; inv. no. MAO 486

This fountain spout with a feline head and a bird-shaped tap resembles one published object and another rare example that appeared in a public auction.<sup>99</sup> The bird tap published by Grabar in 1959 is in better condition and a peacock can be identified. As none of these objects have an archaeological provenance, their architectural context is unknown; nor can it be determined whether they distributed water in domestic or public structures. Judging from the less damaged appearance of the pipe, this was inserted into the masonry with only the zoomorphic elements protruding from the structure, perhaps up to the moulded ring behind the tap. The conical tip of the tap had two openings: the larger of these allowed water to flow when it was aligned with the fountain duct, while the second smaller one, located on the lower part of the cone, served to block the valve and the water supply. The tap was attached to a vertical structure, the water probably spilling into a basin. The system of water conduits feeding into basins is attested

by rare finds in the pre-Mongol Iranian world, as at Lashkar-i Bazar in Afghanistan.<sup>100</sup>

The spout and the tap are of consistent dimensions and therefore seem to have been part of the original object. Their alloys, although of the same family, have different compositions: the spout contains more lead (18%) than the tap (7%). Each part was cast in one piece, probably by sand casting as suggested by the two longitudinal seams on the pipe. Multiple casting defects are clearly visible on all the surfaces, in particular large cavities caused by air bubbles. The objects were only partially machined, and the tap is irregularly polished. Some areas remain very grainy, especially between the bird and the conical end. The features of the feline and its fur were chased, probably directly on the model and perhaps partially cold worked.