

THE CENTRAL ASIATIC JEWELLERY COLLECTION IN THE
MUSEUM OF ORIENTAL ART « GIUSEPPE TUCCI» – THE MUSEUM
OF CIVILIZATIONS (MUCIV)

Paola D'Amore, Rome

The Museum of Civilizations in Rome was founded in 2016 after the reorganization of the museum structures by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage. It includes four National Museums: the Museum of Oriental Art “Giuseppe Tucci”, is one of them. The Museum of Oriental Art, was founded in 1957 with the active support of the outstanding researcher of Tibetan and Nepalese art, Prof. Giuseppe Tucci, with the aim to create an institution in Italy that could deal with the preservation and study of the various arts of the Oriental countries. The Museum was opened to the public in June, 1958.

In 2014 The Museum became the owner of a large collection of ethnic jewellery from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Central Asia, India, Tibet and Nepal, including some items from Uzbekistan. The ornaments were acquired in the markets of Kabul, Mingora, Ghazni, Peshawar and Tehran in the 1950s by Francesca Bonardi, widow of Giuseppe Tucci and gifted to the Museum, after her death in 2014. In 2005 Francesca Bonardi had given to the Museum her collection of pre-Islamic, Islamic and Central Asia items, including gold jewellery dating from the third millennium BCE to the 20th century. The donation and the legacy belong to the Himalayan area with paintings, textiles and sculptures in stone and metal; to the Iranian and Central Asian area with Luristan bronzes, Achaemenid, Parthian and Sasanian metal bowls, Islamic potteries, oil lamps, jugs, trays produced in the Khorasan region, sculptures in stone and many pottery figurine, furniture, textiles, ethnic costumes and a lot of silver jewellery; to the Far Eastern area (China, Japan and Corea) with furniture, textiles, and paintings.

The collection is completed by a rich numismatic set datable to the Parthian, Sassanian and Kushan periods.

The Gold Jewellery Collection covers the geographical area from the Mediterranean Sea to India. The oldest specimens date back to the III and II millennium BCE. There are gold leaf leaves, probably parts of a headdress with comparisons in Mesopotamia (Royal Tombs of Ur) and in northern Iran in the necropolis of Marlik Tepe (Gilan), a gold necklace comparable with the items of Tepe Hissar (north-eastern Iran), an important center for the processing and long-distance trade of semiprecious stones and for the exchange of cultural and technological elements between the West countries and Central Asia and two headbands in gold foil with punched decoration with comparisons in the Sumbar necropolis in Turkmenistan (second half of the II millennium BCE). In this collection there are a lot of ornaments dated from the Iron Period (1st millennium BCE), until to Islamic Period, with pins, pendants, earrings, torques, bracelets mostly produced in Northern Iran, often decorated with semiprecious stones, from Achaemenid, Parthian and Sassanid periods with an incredible stylistic, formal and geographical variety. These jewels reflect in times and ways the relationship between the Greek-Hellenistic, North Caucasian, Syro-Mediterranean and Indian cultural currents.

The class of earrings is very varied in shape and decoration, which often involves the use of semi-precious stones, such as garnet, while pendants, rings, belt elements and horse harnesses well illustrates the court pageantry described by Arab historians.

Lastly, the group of Islamic jewellery is rich and varied for the materials (gold, silver, gilded silver, precious stones, coral pearls, glass pastes), for the technique (beaten foil, granulation, twisted thread, filigree, enamel) and for types (pendants, head and nose ornaments, earrings, collars, belt buckles). A palmette pendant, made with twisted and flat wire with geometric, epigraphic and zoomorphic motifs, can be dated to the end of the 13th and early 14th centuries, produced in Egypt or Syria, while a small pendant in gold and *niello* is older. It is decorated with a Kufic-style epigraphic motif, produced in Iran in the 10th-11th century. Other jewels refer to Mughal and Qajar productions.

Two nose rings can be attributed to Uzbek factory from the mid-20th century. The first presents a lozenge-shaped pendant with a notched profile, decorated with five cabochon stones set, arranged at the four vertices, alternating with gold spheres and a ruby, placed

in the center. The second instead presents a pendant formed by three horizontal threads decorated with pearls, precious stones and granulation spheres. These objects had been bought in Pakistan.

Silver Jewellery Collection

The Francesca Bonardi collection of the silver jewellery (more than 1600 items) includes several specimens from Iran, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India.

The Jewellery of the Central Asia countries is imbued with the aesthetic and symbolical meanings. Some of the typologies are an integral part of the local costumes, expressing the essence of group identity. The ornament indicates the membership of the group, religious faith, position and status within the community. The traditional role of the jewellery persisted up until the early 20th century when the decorative and aesthetic function became more important than the symbolic value.

During the III millennium BCE the ornaments are produced in Central Asia, using materials like stones, bones and shells. In the Bronze Age the new craft of metalworking promotes the creation of new forms: diadems, earrings, torques, bracelets and rings. The frescos and the sculpture dating to Kushan Period (Halchayan, Dalverzin Tepe and Airtam) show the good repertoire of ornaments, like the gold breastplate from Dalverzin Tepe, (1st century), with a rectangular medallion with a cornelian, engraved with an image of Hercules, evidence of the links with Mediterranean World. Under the Sassanid, Byzantine and Turkish influence, massive gold and silver jewels are produced, enriched with engraved gems as emeralds, lapis lazuli, carnelian, turquoise, rock crystal and coral, all stones that bring luck and prosperity and powerful amulets against misfortunes and disgraces. The most popular jewels are those for women, specific for each age, and index of ethnicity. Rich and intricate jewelry emphasized the bride's head and face, while others adorned the neck and chest. These include the bands forehead, formed by metal elements with set stones, among which, coral is always present and with pendants (coins, fish,

crescents, flowers and stars) that fall on the forehead, the traditional wedding crown that frames the upper part of face with two large arches in precious metal with thin gold and pearl pendants. Earrings are always present and the different shapes indicate the regions of production. The *tawiz* are also widespread. They contain invocations or Koranic formulas and they are worn as amulets. The shape is triangular, cylindrical or rectangular, embossed or decorated with filigree and granulation perforations. The shapes and decorative motifs of Central Asian jewellery often have apotropaic value. They are geometric (triangles, lozenges, squares, circles), floral (palmettes, pomegranate or raspberry leaves), animal motifs (fishes, snakes, birds), or allegorical (star, crescent, coins, keys). Among the propitiatory symbols, some plants, such as pomegranate, had great value, while the barley grain was considered a symbol of fertility, imitated in the grains that decorate the surface of necklaces and armillas.

Among the animals the most used form is the fish, and the bird: the first is an allegory of happiness, while the second is a symbol of good luck in marriage.

The jewels are made of silver, considered a pure and uncontaminated metal, often gilded, but there are also examples in copper or tin, subsequently enriched with gilding.

In the collection the most numerous group is the Afghan-Pakistani jewellery with several examples of armilla of tubular (Sind region) or flat (Swat and Chitral regions) semilunate shape, decorated at the ends by a loop motif that imitates the duck's head. The surface is engraved with geometric motifs often decorated with stones and glass paste or with Ottoman Turkish coins as pendants. There are also blue and red enamelled *multans* and head pendants in silver alloy, gold foil and glass beads. There are bonnet-type head ornaments ornamental head plates, temple pendants, diadems, shoulder ornaments, half-moon earrings, rod rings, square *tawiz*, hair clips. The domed type earrings are instead of Indian influence. A particular group is constituted by the bracelets with zoomorphic termination, in particular feline, of difficult

geographical attribution, widespread through the Euro-Asiatic continent, and probably derived from similar bracelets of the Scythian world.

The group from Turkemistan includes headdresses, head ornaments, earrings, neck and breast jewellery, collar buttons, bracelet and finger rings, back and braid jewellery, amulet cases. They show a unity of style and inspiring motifs, matured in the historical and cultural substratum of the region. Most of the artifacts were intended for brides of the upper classes: the decoration is characterized by a fine design engraved with very stylized motifs and with large carnelian set. The decorative motifs are elaborations of more ancient subjects, such as the tree of life, the pair of birds, which can be guessed from the particular shape of the upper portion of the diadems, the solar disc. Among the objects there is also a large buckle composed of two lozenge elements and a central stud with a dense fringe of chains with bracts, a rigid ceremony bracelet, various head ornaments, decorated with bird heads and human stylized faces, hoop earrings decorated with stylized birds or senmurvs. The Turkmen jewellery is characterised by a high degree of symmetrical design and a harmonious style. The drawings are based on the contrast between gold and silver and they consist of flowers, leaf and tendril ornaments. After 1925 the carnelian was replaced by pieces of glass.

Jewelry making in Uzbekistan dates back 12th – 11th centuries BCE, with bronze bracelets decorated with projections resembling the horns of goats found in a necropolis at the source of the Chirchik River (Tashkent region). One of the most famous finds is a treasure hoard of Dalverzintepa (Kushan period), brought to light in 1972 under the floor of room no. 13 in the House of a Rich Citizen. The treasure included necklaces, torques, bracelets, earrings, and gold ingots, some of them engraved with their weights in Kharoṣṭhī script.

The production of jewelry especially increased in the 19th century when precious stones and metals were considered not only attributes indicating the status of the owner but also objects of magic protecting, symbols of good luck and happiness.

Jewelers worked mainly with silver, and the manufacture of gold items, apparently, was limited to the Bukhara region with gold mines. The jewelry collection from Uzbekistan presents two *tillyakosh* tiaras made of gilded silver, pearls, glass paste and mother-of-pearl, silver and gilded pendants, some tribal rings, as well as two gold ornaments for the nose.

The Iranian Plateau is present with armlets, pendants and rings. The armlets consists of three parts connected by a cord and are worn on the upper arm. Often they have engraved inscriptions and images. The rigid bracelets or leech type embossed, engraved, punched, sometimes with vegetable decoration, can be attributed to factories in eastern Iran (Kerman and Sistan regions).

In the Bonardi collection many specimens belong to Indian production (19th and 20th century) or imitations of them. There are bracelets, woman's anklets, earrings, woman's ear ornaments, *tawiz*, amulets and moulds for jewellery decorations.