



The Horse Aquamanile in the Rijksmuseum: A ‘New’ Andalusian or Fatimid Bronze

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Some small bronze figures hide their exceptional meaning behind a modest and functional appearance. The small horse aquamanile in the Rijksmuseum unquestionably belongs to this type (fig. 1).¹ Although it possesses a stylized form with a small head and compact body, it can easily be recognized as a standing horse. Its function as a vessel for liquids is emphasized by the relatively large spout on its back and the opening in its mouth.

Seen through a more analytical lens, however, the object subverts our assumptions about its simplicity: all more precise questions concerning the art-historical context remain obscure. Traditionally regarded as a thirteenth-century bronze from Lorraine, it differs substantially from the other vessels in the Rijksmuseum’s collection and from the larger corpus of Western European bronzes. The established date and location of manufacture, which cannot be based on knowledge about the responsible patron, founder and artist, need revision. The cultural significance of the artwork – both from a scholarly perspective today and in terms of its use at the time of production – requires particular attention. Why the form of a simply ornamented horse, without a rider or even a saddle, was chosen for this sort of vessel is especially perplexing. The object’s

< Detail of fig. 1

practical function, most probably as a jar for water, as well as the representative or symbolic functions it might have served within court culture, have never been a focus of scholarly consideration – an inattention compounded by the lack of surviving objects that would allow for a comparative analysis. Despite all these difficulties and question marks, the figure is worthy of study: indeed, as will be demonstrated, it is the only horse aquamanile of ‘Islamic’ (Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid or even Andalusian)² origins, and in this sense, it is also most helpful for understanding Western examples.

State of Research: An Object from ‘Thirteenth-Century Lotharingia (?)’

The Rijksmuseum holds an exciting collection of seven medieval figurative vessels produced in brass and bronze.³ In this collection of unusual knights and lions, along with unique female figures – one a centaur with an infant in her hands and the other seated on a throne on a lion’s back – the small horse figure leaves a rather inconspicuous impression. The object is in a good state of preservation: traces of a former attachment imply only a lost cover at the opening of the spout and another on the underside of the stomach.⁴ The latter opening, which was needed for removing the clay core

after casting the object in a single piece, was usually sealed with a plate during the finishing process; in German research, this opening is often described as a *Fenster* (window).⁵ This casting technique allows to create small, light and hollow figures. The material used in this case is a copper alloy most often described by the generic term 'bronze', although the specific copper alloy has not been confirmed by technical analysis and should probably rather be defined as brass.⁶

The form of the object is limited to the main characteristics of a horse. It is distinguished by a small head, a rounded, voluminous neck and a

bulging chest, while the unornamented body, which narrows at the middle, stands on short legs with hooves. The top of each of the forelegs is marked by a torus; at the back the calcaneus defines the angular shape of the horse's hind legs. More detailed elaboration can be detected on the head: at the flattened sides, the eyes, formed by rings, are made more prominent by being embedded within a teardrop-shaped recess. The horse's mandible, mouth, and blaze are also accentuated by relief.

Several features testify to the object's intended use as a vessel for liquids, such as the narrow spout on its back and the small opening at the mouth.

Fig. 1
Horse aquamanile,
al-Andalusian
(Spain) or Fatimid
(Tunis/Egypt)?,
tenth-twelfth centuries.
Copper alloy (bronze
or brass?), h. 12.4 cm.
Amsterdam,
Rijksmuseum,
inv. no. BK-NM-14111.



Because most of the hollow figurative vessels of the Middle Ages with two openings – today described as *aquamanilia*⁷ – served a function in ritual handwashing, it stands to reason that this object did as well. In fact, this classification was first established by the art historian Heinrich Reifferscheid in 1912 and then reinforced by Otto von Falke and Erich Meyer, who included the horse in their fundamental research on aquamanilia compiled in 1935.⁸ In their catalogue of approximately four hundred anthropomorphic and zoomorphic vessels produced in Western workshops between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, the bronze in Amsterdam was presented among other horses. In this juxtaposition, it was already apparent that it differs significantly from the others: its overall stylized form, its window, placed at the underside of the stomach instead of at the chest, its smaller size, the integration of the spout in its back as opposed to an opening on the animal's head, and the absence of the horse's tack.

These notable differences led the authors to add a question mark behind the presumed region and date of the object's production, namely 'Lothringen (?), 13. Jahrh.' (Lotharingia (?), 13th century).⁹ Elisabeth Bos modified the region to 'Meuse area', while Onno ter Kuile supported both hypotheses, also with a question mark.¹⁰ Surprisingly, none of the authors pointed out reasons for this presumed attribution to the region of north-eastern France. Their localization could be explained historiographically: an attribution to Lorrainian workshops in particular signalled an object's high quality. The question marks, however, have not prompted subsequent scholarship to locate the object's region of production or its date more precisely. To address this problem, one must look in a completely new direction.



A New Perspective: Looking at 'Islamic' Bronzes

The aquamanilia corpus assembled by Von Falke and Meyer only provided a first orientation within the various forms of Western European aquamanilia, but this catalogue remains relevant today in the art-historical classification of such objects. Only a few of their considerations require correction or nuancing. These exceptions include an aquamanile in the shape of a duck, found in the province of Buskerud, in Norway, in 1827 and held today in the University Museum of Bergen (fig. 2).¹¹ Like the horse in Amsterdam, this bronze departs from aquamanilia of Western European manufacture in several respects – in the positioning of the window, in the cylindrical spout in its back and in the (now lost) decoration of the surface with fine copper strands. This is a technique that cannot be found in the repertoire of Western examples; there are, however, similarities in 'Islamic' aquamanilia. Indeed, this specific ornamentation appears on several figurative vessels from regions under Muslim rule during the period in question, as it does on comparable figures of ducks, geese and other birds.¹² Likewise, the placement of the window

Fig. 2
Duck aquamanile,
Abbasid (Iran,
ninth-tenth
centuries).
Brass with small
fields for copper
strands, h. 25.3 cm.
University Museum
of Bergen,
inv. no MA 69.

in the stomach can be seen on the eagle and pheasant aquamanilia, both Abbasid objects now in The State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg. The prominent spout – an overt reference to the object's function as a vessel in a way rarely seen in Western European examples – can also be found, for instance, in the tiger aquamanile from Fatimid Egypt, now in Baltimore (fig. 3).¹³ Such comparisons open a new perspective on the horse figure in the Rijksmuseum, pointing towards production in an 'Islamic' workshop.

One must bear in mind that, irrespective of theological discourses, animals were a major theme in 'Islamic' art and notably in metalwork.¹⁴ These vary from fish, to birds, including falcons and parrots, to quadrupeds, like lions, deer and bulls, to hybrid and fantastic beasts. Similarly, their functions range from lamps – as in the case of the Abbasid horse lamp in St Petersburg (fig. 4)¹⁵ – and candle-



Fig. 3
Tiger aquamanile,
Fatimid Egypt,
eleventh-twelfth
centuries.
Bronze, h. 19.4 cm.
Baltimore, The
Walters Art Museum,
inv. no. 54.2434,
Museum purchase,
1958.



Fig. 4
Horse lamp, Abbasid
(Iran, tenth century).
Bronze, h. 36 cm.
St Petersburg, The
State Hermitage
Museum,
inv. no. IR-1984.



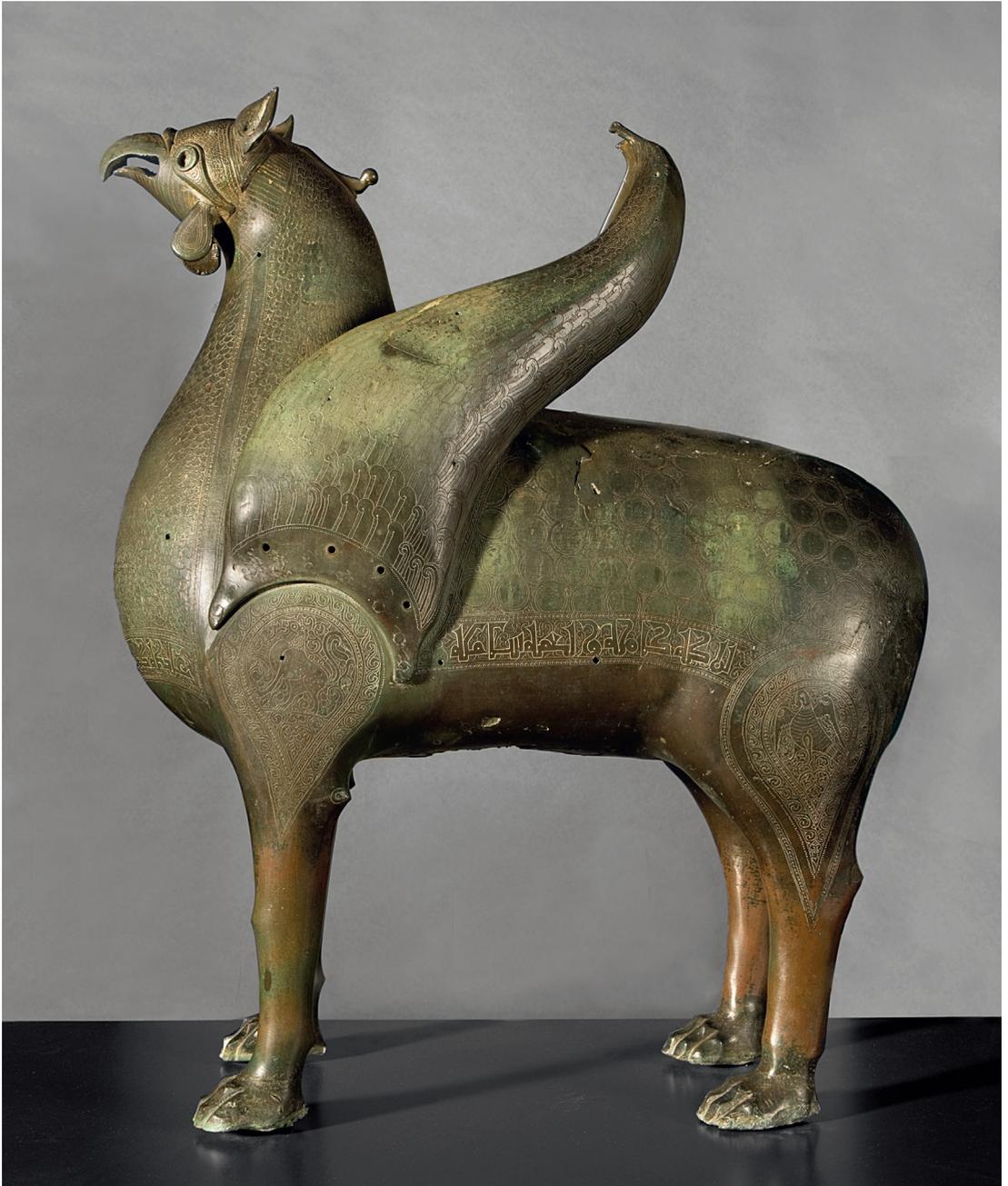
Fig. 5
Deer aquamanile,
Sassanian or Abbasid
(Iran, sixth-seventh
centuries).
Bronze, h. 27 cm.
St Petersburg, The
State Hermitage
Museum,
inv. no. K3-5765.

sticks, to incense burners, perfume flasks, fountain figures, automata and aquamanilia.¹⁶ Among these, the latter have been surprisingly little studied.¹⁷

Today, twenty-one 'Islamic' bronze aquamanilia are known.¹⁸ They were produced between the seventh and the thirteenth centuries in many historical regions – from Greater Khorasan in today's Afghanistan and Iran, to Fatimid Egypt, to al-Andalus in Spain.¹⁹ As well as ducks, geese, pheasants, falcons and tigers, their iconography includes deer and peacocks; unlike most 'Islamic' artworks only a few are inscribed with the identity of the patron and date of production, such as a zebu cow carrying an inscription dating it AH 603 (i.e. 1206). Closer analysis of the preserved artefacts demonstrates that one of the most characteristic traits of medieval 'Islamic' art – namely surfaces fully ornamented with floral and geometric elements, figurative or narrative scenes, as present on the

Bergen duck – is not ubiquitous among these aquamanilia. The early examples, especially the goose and the deer in St Petersburg (fig. 5) and another deer in Naples, have an unornamented body – although in the case of the Naples aquamanile, it is not clear whether it was originally unadorned.²⁰ To be sure, the horse figure is not the only unornamented example.

The stylistic affiliations are harder to detect than the technical and formal analogies. The horse figure in Amsterdam, with its stylized form, provides only a few details useful for a comparison that would help establish the date and locate the region of production. These sparse details can be found on the horse's head. We recall that the eyes take the form of simple rings on either side of the head, each embedded in a teardrop-shaped recess, with its pointed end oriented towards the end of the animal's nose – a very simple solution. One comparison for this can be found in the so-called Pisa Griffin (figs. 6a, b).²¹ The eyes of this monumental bronze likewise take the form of simple rings in low relief on a teardrop-shaped field, in this case pointing backwards. However, their general resemblance could be no more than a first step towards locating and dating the production of the Rijksmuseum horse. Other formal and stylistic analogies in ornamentation can of course be seen across regions, times and genres, a phenomenon often summarized as the 'same basic language', which makes the attribution of artworks difficult or sometimes even impossible.²² Indeed, the Pisa Griffin itself perhaps best illustrates this problem, as the production of this object has been variously dated to the ninth, tenth, eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries in present-day Iran, Iraq, Egypt, North Africa, Southern Italy and Spain. Recently, largely based on technical observations, it has been identified as a twelfth-century object from al-Andalus.²³



Figs. 6a, b
Griffin statue,
al-Andalusian (Spain),
late eleventh-early
twelfth century.
Bronze, h. 107 cm.
Pisa, Opera del
Duomo Museum.



Indeed, especially Córdoba during the Umayyad Caliphate seems to have been a prominent locale for bronze production. A few surviving stylized bronzes in the form of deer also cast in this region can support the thesis of highly developed workshops.²⁴ On the other hand, bronzes like the fountain figure, also in the shape of a deer, in the Bardo National Museum in Tunis (fig. 7), which was found in Cap Bon (Ra's al-tib) in Tunisia and probably cast in Egypt during the Fatimid period, show other possibilities in attribution.²⁵ It also possesses a very stylized form without any ornamentation, comparable to the small horse bronze.

Taking the abovementioned remarks into consideration, and especially the stylized form, a first (new) attribution can be proposed for the horse vessel in Amsterdam, namely as an object cast either in al-Andalus or Tunisia/Egypt between the tenth and twelfth centuries. Given that no other bronze horse aquamanile has yet been found,²⁶ we must consider the figure to be not only the oldest known but in fact the only known 'Islamic' horse aquamanile preserved today.



Fig. 7
Deer-shaped fountain figure, Fatimid Egypt?, tenth-eleventh centuries. Tunis, Bardo National Museum, inv. no. 2817.

Party Animals: The Iconography and Function of Vessels in the Form of Horses

To understand why the motif of a horse was chosen for the design of this small bronze vessel, it is worth considering the iconographic and cultural associations of these animals. Within 'Islamic' (Abbasid, Umayyad or Fatimid) art and culture in general, these quadrupeds seem to have been highly esteemed and were therefore omnipresent. Depicted largely in military and hunting contexts, in images of equestrian sports or in illustrated manuscripts on the subject of training and breeding, they appear as riding animals with bridles and saddles.²⁷ These modes of depiction emphasize the domesticated and subordinated role of horses. This is one reason why the motif of the horse with a rider might have been seen as fitting

for a vessel, thereby accentuating a connotation of service. A ceramic vessel held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and probably produced in today's Iran in the twelfth or thirteenth century (fig. 8), shows, for instance, a horse standing calmly with a rider on its back. Behind the male figure appears a cheetah, an animal used in hunting – a leisure pastime for royalty and elites.

Vessels in the form of horses bearing no signs of domestication can only be observed by going far back in time: for example, again the Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibits a terracotta figure with an ornamented surface, made on Cyprus between the twelfth and eleventh century BCE and ostensibly used as a libation vessel or during other rituals, such as burials or sacrifices (fig. 9). Like other voluminous horse figures, including the

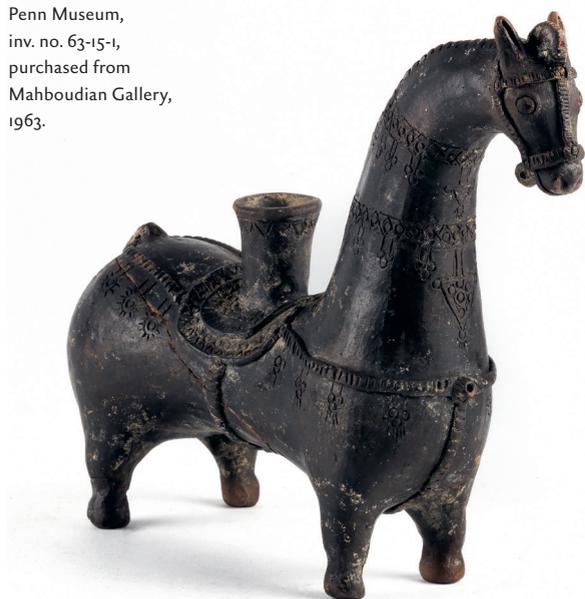


Fig. 8
Rider aquamanile,
Seljuq (Iran, twelfth-
early thirteenth
century).
Glazed stonepaste,
h. 27.6 cm.
New York,
The Metropolitan
Museum of Art,
inv. no. 66.23, Harris
Brisbane Dick Fund,
1966.



Fig. 9
Horse aquamanile,
late Cyriot 1118
(Cyprus, c. 1200-
1050 BCE).
Terracotta,
h. 22.7 cm.
New York,
The Metropolitan
Museum of Art,
inv. no. 74.51.787,
The Chesnola Collec-
tion, purchased by
subscription, 1874-76.

Fig. 10
Horse aquamanile
(described as rhyton),
Amlash (northern
Iran, ninth-eighth
centuries BCE).
Black ceramic, h. 19.3 cm.
Philadelphia,
Penn Museum,
inv. no. 63-15-1,
purchased from
Mahboudian Gallery,
1963.



Iranian example in Philadelphia (fig. 10),²⁸ the one from Cyprus is sometimes described as a rhyton, usually a vessel taking the form of a horn with an animal-shaped protome (forepart) and used primarily for drinking.²⁹ However, upon closer look it becomes apparent that the form of the terracotta from Cyprus – with an emphasized spout and a handle on its back – was designed rather for storing and pouring liquids.³⁰

Despite their primary function as drinking vessels, the rhyta with horse protomes must be mentioned, insofar as they make the association with water very clear. Mostly produced in the Near East, particularly in Persia, and later adapted in Greco-Roman and pre-Islamic traditions, they were made in a variety of materials, such as silver, terracotta or even ivory. Horses are included in the repertoire of the protomes in various forms: sometimes only the head of the animal, with or without the bridle, sometimes incorporating chest and forelegs, and some-



Fig. 11
Horse-shaped rhyton,
Rome (?), first century
BCE–first century AD.
Lead-glazed
terracotta, h. 12 cm.
Baltimore, The
Walters Art Museum,
inv. no. 48.127,
acquired by Henry
Walters, 1914.

times nearly the whole body and a rider.³¹ A Roman terracotta rhyton in the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore represents the forepart of a horse in motion, while the animal's body transforms into a cup with a low-relief design of bunches of grapes, leaves and vines (fig. 11). A similar object appears in the hands of a male figure in the narrative scene depicted on a Hellenistic krater (a bowl for mixing wine and water) in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (figs. 12a, b).

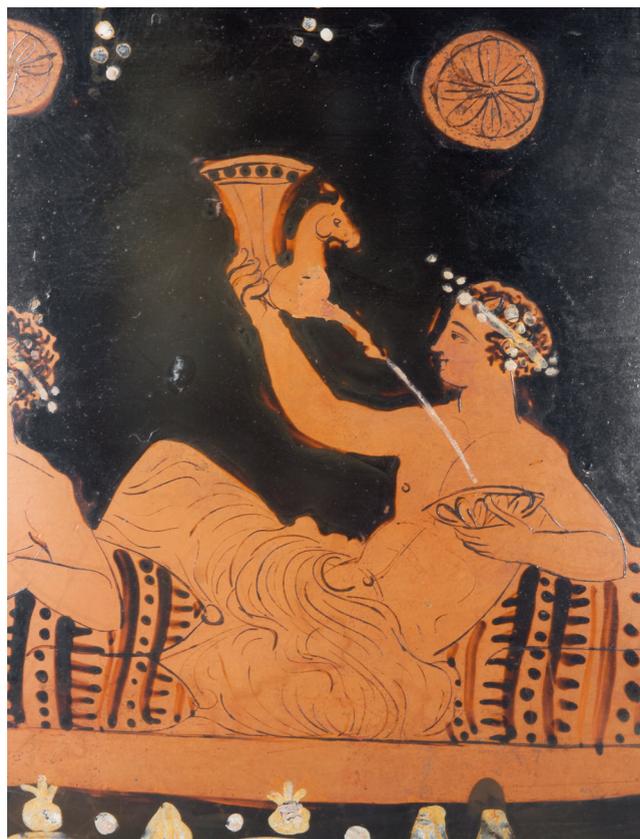
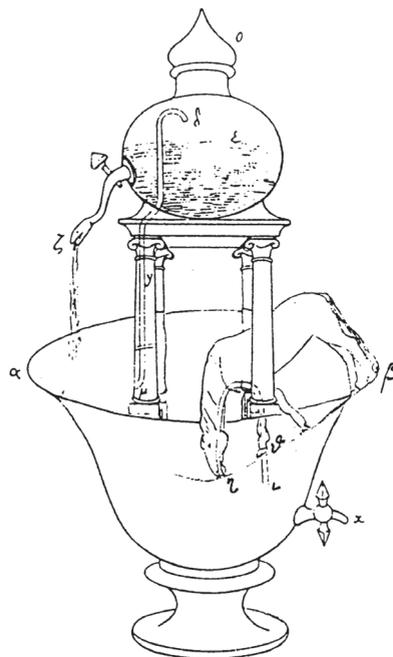
The illustration on the Vienna krater, which dates from the fourth century BCE, moreover demonstrates the use of such a rhyton to transfer wine or water into another cup, through a small opening at the forepart, during the symposium. These Greek gatherings, which were called *comissationes* in Roman times, were private feasts

Figs. 12a, b
Krater, Attic
(Greece, c. 390 BCE).
Terracotta, 34.5 cm.
Vienna,
Kunsthistorisches
Museum,
inv. no. IV 910.
Photo: KHM-
Museumsverband



and parties characterized by drinking and games, music and conversation.³² The events opened with a ritual of handwashing. The engineers Philo of Byzantium (280-220 BCE) and Hero of Alexandria (10-70 CE) described various automata that featured in this opening. The second book of Philo's *Pneumatica*, for instance, describes a washing stand that consists of a vessel on four columns, atop a bronze basin bearing a depiction of a horse with its head bent to the ground (fig. 13).³³ When the first guest opened the valve of the upper vessel, the water burst out on his hands and into the basin below. The hollow horse figure appeared to drink the water from the basin, as it recycled through a hidden tube; the next guest who intended to wash his hands would find the basin empty again.

Fig. 13
Reconstruction
of the washing stand
mentioned in
Philo's *Pneumatica*.
Photo: Astrid
Schürmann,
*Griechische
Mechanik und
antike Gesellschaft*.
*Studien zur
Staatlichen Förderung
einer technischen
Wissenschaft*,
Stuttgart 1991, p. 162.



Automata with handwashing functionality, like those used during symposia, existed in 'Islamic' culture as well. We gain further insight into the construction and use of such objects from the descriptions in the *Book of Mechanical Devices* (*Kitāb al-ḥiyāl*), authored by the three brothers called Banū Mūsā in the ninth century, and the *Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices* (*Kitāb fī ma'rifāt al-ḥiyāl al-handasīya*) of Badi' al-Zaman Abū al-'Izz ibn Ismā'il ibn al-Razāz al-Jazarī, called al-Jazarī (1136-1206).³⁴ The first treatise contains instructions for one hundred automata, including oil lamps and hydraulic devices like fountains or washing stands. In their description of model 6, for example, they note (in Hill's translation): 'We wish to make a figure of a bull [that], when offered a vessel containing water, drinks it and his voice and clamour are heard, so that anyone looking at him thinks that he was thirsty.'³⁵ This recalls the apparatus with the horse described by Philo. Both animals, the bull and the horse, can be associated with bucolic

art, with peaceful grazing or drinking animals.³⁶ An intention to evoke idyllic scenery may explain why the horse in the Rijksmuseum is shown without a bridle or saddle. In the compendium of al-Jazarī, inspired by the Banū Mūsā as well as by treatises from antiquity, we likewise find descriptions of water-raising figures. He also mentions zoomorphic and anthropomorphic vessels used during drinking sessions, as well as seven objects for the hand-washing ritual.³⁷ Such vessels were also used in the Islamic variations of symposia, called *maḡlis aš-šarab* or *maḡlis al-uns*,³⁸ the latter referring to:

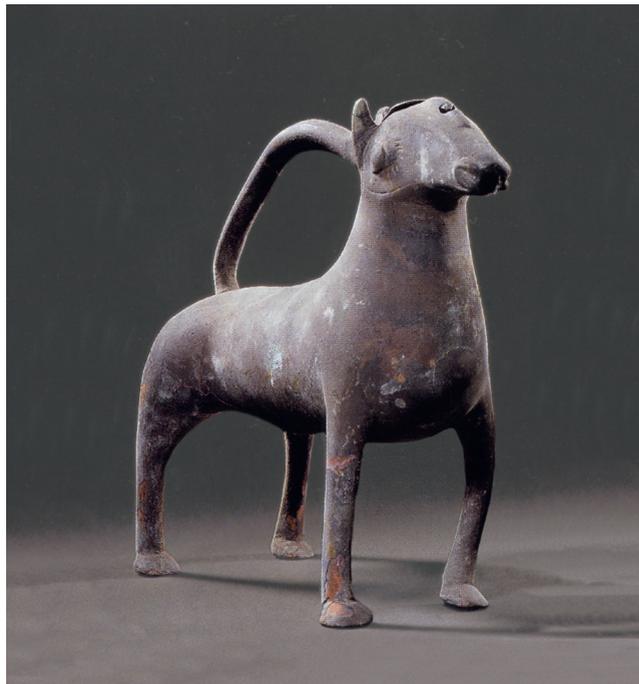
a gathering of a small number of carefully chosen courtiers possessing the physical and intellectual refinements requisite for such an honour in the presence and for the pleasure of the host ... The company devoted itself as one to the deliberately excessive delectation of stimuli to the five physical senses as well as to the intellect and the heart, the combination of which resulted ... in a ritual and communal experience of pleasure.³⁹

Meanwhile, the *maḡlis aš-šarab* is described as a ‘wine and music party’ held after the meal.⁴⁰ In this context, anthropomorphic vessels not only served a functional purpose but also accentuated certain themes through their iconography. Due to the private, intimate character of the feasts, these themes centred less around power and luxury than around pleasure, entertainment and related aspects of an idyllic and idealized court culture. In its form as an undomesticated horse without a bridle, a saddle or a rider, the Amsterdam vessel fits perfectly in this setting. As a consequence, it is more than likely that it was used as an aquamanile for handwashing rituals; only a small amount of water would have sufficed as these rituals were precisely that, more symbolic performance than pragmatic cleansing.⁴¹

Shared Motifs – Different Meanings: Adaptations in the Medieval West

Studies like that by Von Falke and Meyer with their foundational Western European corpus, presented aquamanilia as a largely Western phenomenon.⁴² However, it was already established early on that the idea of casting a zoomorphic bronze vessel for use in the ritual of handwashing was adapted transculturally from regions under ‘Islamic’ rule, and this phenomenon has been studied in connection with the forms of the *senmurv* – hybrid beasts adapted in the Meuse region around 1120 – as well as lions and riders, but never horses alone.⁴³

The horse aquamanile in the Rijksmuseum thus offers new possibilities for concretizing this transcultural entanglement. Bronzes like this one may well have served as a general model for two extant, but much bigger horse aquamanilia made in Western European workshops. The first, the horse figure in Hannover, which was just recently added to the spectrum, is a twelfth-century north German bronze (fig. 14),⁴⁴ as attested by characteristics such as the window at the chest, the opening at the head for pouring the water in and the floral component of the handle behind it. But like the horse in the Rijksmuseum, its appearance is very stylized, with the flattened sides of the head and especially the design of the mouth and blaze in relief. These distinctive features do not seem to have any Western or Central European precedents. The horse aquamanile held in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg (fig. 15) is also comparable.⁴⁵ In view of the typical Western features, including the opening at the head, the form with the sprawling back and the long handle with volutes, it seems to have been produced in thirteenth-century Hungary. But once again it recalls the Rijksmuseum horse in certain details



of the mouth and blaze, as well as in the absence of signs of domestication. Naturally, the 'Islamic' object did not serve as an explicit, direct model for the creation of these horses – and hence they cannot be seen as 'copies' – but it could have played a general role in the adaptation of Islamic elements in the West.

Beyond questions regarding visual parallels among various objects of this type, other methodological approaches are demanded by the easily comprehensible form of the horse as well as by its function as a vessel. The portable horse aquamanile can now be considered part of a 'shared visual culture' of the Middle Ages.⁴⁶ The very old and common idea of using a horse motif within handwashing rituals seems to have been operative in medieval 'Islamic' court culture and, from the twelfth century onwards, was shared

Fig. 14
Horse aquamanile,
northern German part
of Holy Roman Empire,
twelfth century.
Bronze, h. 21.8 cm.
Hannover, Museum
August Kestner,
inv. no. 595.

Fig. 15
Horse aquamanile,
Hungary, late twelfth-
early thirteenth
century.
Copper alloy, h. 20 cm.
Nuremberg,
Germanisches
Nationalmuseum,
inv. no. KG582.



by Western patrons and founders.⁴⁷ It therefore comes as no surprise that the type has until now largely been seen as Western. But what changed in the bronzes' translation into Western culture were the specific meanings attributed to them in light of the decisively ethical and moral connotations of handwashing. In a Christian context, the ritual was needed to purify oneself from internal sins (or vices) before and during the Mass or, in general, before a meal. Already Cyril of Jerusalem (313-386) described this as follows:

But washing of hands is a symbol that ye ought to be pure from all sinful and unlawful deeds; for since the hands are a symbol of action, by them, it is evident, we represent the purity and blamelessness of our conduct.⁴⁸

Other authors from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries like Honorius Augustodunensis (c. 1080-c. 1140), Sicardus of Cremona (1155-1215), and Guillaume Durand (c. 1230-1296) adopted this concept.⁴⁹ The objects used in this act of purification could have strengthened such ethical and moral views, in particular by thematizing virtues and vices.⁵⁰ When representing the former, they could be understood as moral exemplars, while in reference to the latter, they could be seen as cautioning against moral failures. The Western iconography of the horse is remarkable insofar as it could be regarded either *ad bonam partem* or *ad malam partem*, either as a royal insignia or as a representation of the vices of *luxuria* (lust) and *superbia* (pride); the distinctions in meaning depended on context.⁵¹ It is, however, very likely that the former objective of entertainment and pleasure reinforce the positive, virtuous connotations. What is important in both cases is that the form of the horse and its function as a handwashing vessel are connected

through ethical and moral implications. This also explains why an object in the shape of a horse could be used for a handwashing ritual and why new, 'custom' (Western) objects were produced, in lieu of reusing 'Islamic' ones.

Conclusion

Objects like the horse aquamanile in the Rijksmuseum have a difficult standing in art-historical research, especially since they are characterized by a simple and functionally comprehensible form that cannot easily be attributed to a specific date and location of production. When related to few existing comparable objects, it appears that this modest appearance actually conceals an exceptional significance: produced in a region under Islamic rule in the period between the tenth and twelfth centuries, the vessel is one of the rare surviving examples of 'Islamic' aquamanilia. It enlarges the repertoire to twenty-two bronzes now, but it is still the only horse figure to have survived from this context. Like automata, such objects were used in Muslim gatherings and private events, most likely in the handwashing at the outset. The undomesticated appearance – without a bridle, saddle or rider – evokes a bucolic idyll. It differs from Western European aquamanilia in the location of its window on the underside of its stomach, the spout for pouring in water and in its small size. Nevertheless, two horses – one produced in present-day north Germany and the other in Hungary – show important stylistic similarities in details of the head and the blaze. These analogies confirm the trans-cultural entanglement of that moment – in which the meaning of the objects of course changed from one context to the next – and demonstrate, not just generally but in a very concrete way, a 'shared visual culture' of the Middle Ages.

ABSTRACT

One of the very remarkable vessels used for the medieval ritual of handwashing is the horse aquamanile in the Rijksmuseum's collection of European vessels, traditionally regarded as a thirteenth-century bronze from 'Lotharingia'. Because of its small size and unusual stylized form, with the emphasized handle and spout on its back, there is effectively no comparable object in the museum's collection, nor for that matter in the larger corpus of Western European bronzes. More plausible is an entirely new perspective on the aquamanile, namely as an 'Islamic' object cast between the tenth and twelfth centuries in al-Andalus or in a region under Fatimid rule. This article demonstrates the significance of the unique aquamanile in Amsterdam in two key aspects: it can be added to the narrow corpus of twenty-one extant bronze vessels used for the Islamic ritual of lavation yet is the only horse-shaped aquamanile known in that context; as such, it allows the concrete study of the transcultural transmission of ideas and, by way of this mediating function, sheds light on the genesis of horse aquamanilia in Western and Central Europe.

NOTES

- 1 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. BK-NM-14111, purchased in 1926 from the Lambert Collection, Oudenaarde. I would like to thank former Rijksmuseum curator Lucinda Timmermans for discussing the object intensively.
- 2 The term 'Islamic' only describes the production in regions ruled by Muslims or for Muslim patrons. For the historiographically complex concept, see Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, 'The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field', *The Art Bulletin* 85 (2003), no. 1, pp. 152-84 and most recently Claudia Höhl, Felix Prinz and Pavla Ralcheva (eds.), *Islam in Europa, 1000-1250*, exh. cat. Hildesheim (Cathedral Museum) 2022.
- 3 For an overview, see Onno ter Kuile, *Koper en brons*, 's-Gravenhage 1986 (*Catalogi van de verzameling kunstnijverheid van het Rijksmuseum te Amsterdam*, vol. 1).
- 4 There are also small scuffs at the ears and on the underside of the hooves, and small cracks at the opening of the jaws.
- 5 For the casting of small medieval (Western European) hollow figures, mostly aquamanilia, see Pete Dandridge, 'Exquisite Objects, Prodigious Technique: Aquamanilia, Vessels of the Middle Ages', in Peter Barnet and Pete Dandridge (eds.), *Lions, Dragons and Other Beasts: Aquamanilia of the Middle Ages, Vessels for Church and Table*, exh. cat. New York (Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design and Culture) 2006, pp. 34-56.
- 6 Most of the figurative vessels of the Middle Ages are made of brass, especially the Islamic ones, see James Wilson Allan, *Persian Metal Technology: 700-1300 AD*, Oxford 1979; Paul T. Craddock, Duncan Hook and Susan La Niece, 'Brass in the Medieval Islamic World', in Paul T. Craddock (ed.), *2000 Years of Zinc and Brass*, London 1990, pp. 73-101.
- 7 The term 'aquamanile' is a modern (and not a historical) one; therefore, it is used for the Islamic artifacts as well.
- 8 Heinrich Reifferscheid, 'Über figürliche Gießgefäße des Mittelalters', in *Mitteilungen aus dem Germanischen Nationalmuseum Nürnberg* (1912), pp. 3-93; Otto von Falke and Erich Meyer, *Romanische Leuchter und Gefäße, Gießgefäße der Gotik*, Berlin 1935 (*Bronzegeräte des Mittelalters*, vol. 1), pp. 84, 116, no. 540, fig. 499. For more recent studies on aquamanilia, see Joanna Olchawa, *Aquamanilien: Genese, Verbreitung und Bedeutung in islamischen und christlichen Zeremonien*, Regensburg 2019 (*Bronzegeräte des Mittelalters*, vol. 8). The horse vessel is not included here.
- 9 Von Falke and Meyer 1935 (note 8), p. 116. It must be stressed that the authors only assigned the most elaborate aquamanilia to this region.
- 10 Elisabeth Bos, *Vijf Eeuwen Koper en Brons. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam*, Amsterdam 1973 (*Facetten der verzameling*, vol. 13), no. 11; Kuile 1986 (note 3), p. 16. See also a note in *Verlagen der rijksverzamelingen van geschiedenis en kunst* 49 (1926), p. 27 (described as an object from 'Zuid-Nederland', thirteenth century).
- 11 University Museum of Bergen, inv. no. MA 69, formerly described as a bronze from Scandinavia, thirteenth-fourteenth century (Von Falke and Meyer 1935 (note 8), p. 107), and now as an Arabic one from around 1200, see Henrik von Achen, *Vannkanne*

- (*Akvamanile*) fra Hon i Eiker, http://www.historieboka.no/Modules/historiebok_tidsepoke_emne_artikkel.aspx?ObjectType=Article&Article.ID=2396&Category.ID=1392 (consulted 12 June 2019) or even Iran, ninth-tenth century, see Olchawa 2019 (note 8), no. 12. Justin E.A. Kroesen and Stephan Kuhn (eds.), *Die Sammlung mittelalterlicher Kirchenkunst: Universitätsmuseum zu Bergen (Norwegen)*, Regensburg 2022, no. 55.
- 12 See especially the duck aquamanile in a drawing from the seventeen-thirties in St. Petersburg, Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences, inv. no. R. IX, op. 4, D. 176; the goose in St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, inv. no. KZ 5766, Iran, sixth-seventh century, h. 42 cm; and the goose in London, The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, inv. no. MTW 846, Khorasan (present-day Afghanistan and Iran), twelfth century, h. 37 cm. For the phenomenon and earlier examples, see Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, 'The Wine Birds of Iran from Pre-Achaemenid to Islamic Times', *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 9 (1995), pp. 41-97.
- 13 Cf. Priscilla Parsons Soucek and Christine Verzár Bornstein, *Meeting of Two Worlds: The Crusades and the Mediterranean Context*, Ann Arbor 1981, no. 29; for the eagle in St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, inv. no. ИР 1567, Iran/Iraq, dated AH 180 (i.e. 796-97), h. 38 cm and the pheasant, inv. no. ИР-2324, Iran, ninth-tenth century, h. 39 cm, see Larissa Yurjevna Kulakova and Anton D. Pritula (eds.), *Vostok i Zapad, iskusstvo islamskogo mira | East and West: Art of the Islamic World*, exh. cat. Vyborg (Art Museum or Hermitage-Vyborg Center) 2011.
- 14 Although sometimes stated otherwise, the figurative depictions were primarily seen as problematic for religious contexts, see Eva Baer, *Metalwork in Medieval Islamic Art*, Albany 1983, p. 154; Margaret S. Graves, *Arts of Allusion: Object, Ornament, and Architecture in Medieval Islam*, New York 2018.
- 15 Cf. Vladimir Lukonin and Anatoly Ivanov, *Persian Art*, New York 2012, p. 131, no. 69. It shows a stylized horse with a richly decorated surface and a saddle cloth on its back. The restored parts indicate the figure of a rider, now lost.
- 16 Géza Fehérvári (ed.), *Islamic Metalwork of the Eight to the Fifteenth Century in the Keir Collection*, London 1976; Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, *Islamic Metalwork from the Iranian World, 8th-18th Centuries*, London 1982; Baer 1983 (note 14); Rachel Ward, *Islamic Metalwork*, New York 1993; Damiano Anedda, *Bronzo islamici: Sculture zoomorphe medievali nei musei italiani*, Rome 2012.
- 17 Mostly in single studies, recently Elizabeth S. Ettinghausen, 'Analysing a Pictorial Narrative: The Aquamanile in the Hermitage Museum, in St Petersburg', in Annette Hagedorn and Avinoam Shalem (eds.), *Facts and Artefacts: Art in the Islamic World. Festschrift for Jens Kröger on his 65th Birthday*, Leiden 2007, pp. 129-51; Anna Contadini, 'The Lucca Falcon', in Anna Contadini (ed.), *The Pisa Griffin and the Mari-Cha Lion: Metalwork, Art, and Technology in the Medieval Islamicate Mediterranean*, Ospedaletto 2018, pp. 419-48.
- 18 The surviving quantity of ceramic aquamanilia is much larger. However, since they require a different approach due to their distinct context of use, they are excluded from this article.
- 19 These twenty-one aquamanilia are described in Olchawa 2019 (note 8), cat. nos. 1-21; they include six objects collected by Almut von Gladiss, 'Der frühislamische Bronzeguss: Tierbronzen in unterschiedlicher Funktion', in Michael Brandt (ed.), *Bild und Bestie: Hildesheimer Bronzen der Stauferzeit*, exh. cat. Hildesheim (Cathedral Museum) 2008, pp. 29-42, and the falcons in Contadini 2018a (note 17).
- 20 Goose (see note 12); deer (see fig. 5) and Naples, Museo e Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte, inv. no. N. A.M. 138798, Egypt, tenth-eleventh century, h. 38 cm; for the latter see Joanna Olchawa, 'Hirsch-Aquamanile', in Höhl, Prinz and Ralcheva 2022 (note 2), no. 77, pp. 314-17.
- 21 Cf. Anna Contadini, 'The Pisa Griffin and the Mari-Cha Lion: History, Art and Technology', in Contadini 2018a (note 17), pp. 197-256.
- 22 Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art: Revised and Enlarged Edition*, New Haven/London 1987 and Ernst J. Grube, 'Iconography in Islamic Art', in Robert Hillenbrand (ed.), *Image and Meaning in Islamic Art*, London 2005, pp. 13-33.
- 23 Contadini 2018a (note 17), p. 198.
- 24 Anna Contadini, 'Wondrous Animals: Zoomorphic Metal Figures from al-Andalus', in Joanna Olchawa (ed.), *Löwe, Wölfin, Greif: Monumentale Tierbronzen im Mittelalter*, Berlin/Boston 2020, pp. 213-36.

- 25 Slimane-Mostafa Zbiss, 'Les sujets animés dans le décor musulman d'Ifrīqiyah (Tunisie)', in Congrès national des Sociétés savantes (ed.), *Actes du 79e congrès national des Sociétés savantes, Alger 1954*, Paris 1957, pp. 297-325.
- 26 Two much more detailed, post-Sasanian bronze riders on horses appeared on the art market and were sold through Bonhams in 2013 and 2022, <https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/21359/lot/8/> (consulted 12 June 2019). They need further research but do not represent an autonomous horse, therefore they are not included in this article.
- 27 For instance, the illustrated manuscripts of the *Kitab al-furusiyya wa'l-baytara* by Ibn Akhi Hizam (second half of the ninth century), a text on horses and their medical treatment, cf. Beate Siewert-Mayer, 'Riding in the Early "Abbasid Period"', in David Alexander (ed.), *Furusiyya: The Horse in the Art of the Near East*, Riyadh 1996, vol. 1, pp. 110-17. Further publications are Jean-Pierre Digard (ed.), *Cheveaux et cavaliers arabes dans les arts d'Orient et d'Occident*, exh. cat. Paris (l'Institut du Monde Arabe Paris) 2002; Ulf Jäger, *Reiter, Reiterkrieger und Reiternomaden zwischen Rheinland und Korea. Zur spätantiken Reitkultur zwischen Ost und West, 4.-8. Jahrhundert n. Chr. Ein Beitrag zur Synthese von Alter Geschichte und Archäologie*, Langenweissbach 2006; Almut von Gladiss, 'Pferd und Reiter in der islamischen Kultur des Mittelalters', in Alfried Wiczorek and Michael Tellenbach (eds.), *Pferdestärken: Das Pferd bewegt die Menschheit*, exh. cat. Mannheim (Reiss-Engelhorn Museen) 2007, pp. 125-34; Andreas Amendt and Christian Wacker (eds.), *Horse Games – Horse Sports: From Traditional Oriental Games to Modern and Olympic Sports*, Beirut 2012.
- 28 A similar horse figure is in Teheran, Reza Abbasi Museum, inv. no. 928, Iron Age, northern Iran, tenth-seventh centuries BCE, earthenware.
- 29 For instance, Assadullah Sourén Melikian-Chirvani, 'Le Rhyton selon les sources persanes: Essai sur la continuité Culturelle iranienne de l'Antiquité à l'Islam', *Studia Iranica* 11 (1982), pp. 263-92; Susanne Ebbinghaus, *Rhyta with Animal Foreparts in the Achaemenid Empire and Their Reception in the West*, Oxford 1998 (unpublished); Ulf Jäger, 'Rhyta im prä-islamischen Zentralasien (4.-8. Jh. n. Chr.): Form und Verwendung. Einfache Trinkgefäße oder Libationsgefäße in synkretistischen Religionssystemen?', *Iranica Antiqua* 41 (2006), pp. 187-220.
- 30 Susanne Ebbinghaus (ed.), *Animal-Shaped Vessels from the Ancient World: Feasting with Gods, Heroes, and Kings*, exh. cat. Harvard (Harvard Art Museums) 2019.
- 31 Cf. Yerevan, Erubini Historical and Archaeological Museum-Preserve, Armenia, fifth century BCE, silver; Prague, Kinský Palace, inv. no. NM-HMIO 1407, Thrace, fourth century BCE, silver; and New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 47.100.87, Achaemenid, fifth century BCE.
- 32 Kathryn Topper, *The Imagery of the Athenian Symposium*, Cambridge 2012; Fiona Hobden, *The Symposium in Ancient Greek Society and Thought*, Cambridge 2013.
- 33 Described in Philo, *Pneumatica* 2,33 (Bernard Carra de Vaux, *Le livre des appareils pneumatique et machines hydrauliques par Philon de Byzance édité d'après les versions arabes d'Oxford et de Constantinople et traduit en français*, Paris 1902, pp. 163, 167). Astrid Schürmann (see fig. 13) corrected the illustration from Carra de Vaux.
- 34 Donald R. Hill (ed.), *The Book of Ingenious Devices (Kitāb al-Hiyāl) by the Banū (sons of) Mūsā bin Shākir*, Dordrecht/Boston/London 1979; Donald R. Hill (ed.), *The Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices (kitāb fi ma 'rifat al-hiyāl al-handasiyya) by Ibn al-Razzāz al-Jazarī*, Boston/Dordrecht 1974.
- 35 Hill 1979 (note 34), p. 52.
- 36 Martina Müller-Wiener, 'Vom irdischen Paradies zum höfischen Theater: Islamische Automaten und mechanische Konstruktion des 9. bis 13. Jahrhunderts', *Eothen: Gesellschaft der Freunde islamischer Kunst und Kultur* 4 (2007), pp. 198-217, esp. p. 204.
- 37 Chapters II and III. See Hill 1974 (note 34), pp. 95 ff.; 127 ff.
- 38 Müller-Wiener 2007 (note 36), esp. p. 200, and, in general, Cynthia Robinson, *In Praise of Song: The Making of Court Culture in al-Andalus and Provence, 1005-1134 A.D.*, Leiden/Boston/Cologne 2002 (*The Medieval and Early Modern Iberian World*, vol. 15), pp. 48 ff.
- 39 Robinson 2002 (note 38), p. 50.
- 40 Paulina Lewicka, *Food and Foodways of Medieval Cairenes: Aspects of Life in an Islamic Metropolis of the Eastern Mediterranean*, Leiden/Boston 2011 (*Islamic History and Civilization*, vol. 88), p. 499.

- 41 The notion it could have functioned as a perfume flask is dismissed here, as it would have had only one opening instead of two and would not have been made of bronze.
- 42 More recently, the objects from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries have attracted particular attention, driven in part by the growing interest in object studies and questions of materiality and evidenced in two focused exhibitions – in New York in 2006 (Barnet and Dandridge (note 5)) and Hildesheim in 2008 (Brandt (note 19)). See also Claudia Höhl, Gerhard Lutz and Joanna Olchawa (eds.), *Drachenlandung: Ein Hildesheimer Drachen-Aquamanile des 12. Jahrhunderts*, Regensburg 2017; Gerhard Jaritz, *My Favourite Things: Object Preferences in Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture*, Berlin 2019.
- 43 Erich Meyer, 'Romanische Bronzen und ihre islamischen Vorbilder', in Richard Ettinghausen (ed.), *Aus der Welt der islamischen Kunst: Festschrift für Ernst Kühnel zum 75. Geburtstag am 26.10.1957*, Berlin 1959, pp. 317-22; Erica Cruikshank Dodd, 'On the Origins of Medieval Dinanderie: The Equestrian Statue of Islam', *The Art Bulletin* 51 (1969), pp. 220-32.
- 44 Olchawa 2019 (note 8), no. 104. See also the recent finding close to Großdemsin (Saxony-Anhalt) in Germany and today in the Landesmuseum für Vorgeschichte in Halle (Saale): https://archlsa.de/fileadmin/landesmuseum/alle/pdf/pdf_presseinformationen/2021/2021_10_21_aquamanile_pressemitteilung.pdf (consulted 6 September 2023).
- 45 Ursula Mende, *Die mittelalterlichen Bronzen im Germanischen Nationalmuseum, Bestandskatalog*, Nürnberg 2013, pp. 173-75, 444, no. 53.
- 46 For this approach, see Eva R. Hoffman, 'Pathways of Portability: Islamic and Christian Interchange from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century', *Art History* 24 (2001), pp. 17-50. See also Clifford Geertz, 'Art as a Cultural System', *MLN Comparative Literature Issue* 91 (1976), pp. 1473-99.
- 47 Cruikshank Dodd 1969 (note 43).
- 48 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical lectures* 23, see Barnet and Dandridge 2006 (note 5), pp. 3-4.
- 49 Olchawa 2019 (note 8), pp. 179-92.
- 50 Cf. Joanna Olchawa, 'Aquamanilien und ihr Gebrauch in islamischen, christlichen und jüdischen Handwaschungsriten', in Robert Jütte and Romedio Schmitz-Esser (eds.), *Handgebrauch: Geschichten von der Hand aus dem Mittelalter und der Frühen Neuzeit*, Paderborn 2019, pp. 39-58.
- 51 Jörg Traeger, 'Pferd', in Engelbert Kirschbaum (ed.), *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1971, vol. 3, pp. 411-15; for moral connotations of the horse, see Jürg Gassmann, 'Morality Tales and Misadventure: Horses in Medieval Ecclesiastical Writings', in Miriam A. Bibby (ed.), *Saints and Sinners on Horseback*, vol. 1, Budapest 2023, pp. 27-58; Tönno Jonuks and Tuuli Kurisoo, 'Between the Beasts: On the Meaning and Function of Small Quadruped Figurines from Estonia', in Leszek Gardela and Kamil Kajkowski (eds.), *Animals and Animated Objects in the Early Middle Ages*, Turnhout 2023, pp. 193-204; and for a later period, see Peter Edwards, Karl A.E. Enekel and Elspeth Graham (eds.), *The Horse as Cultural Icon: The Real and the Symbolic Horse in the Early Modern World*, Leiden/Boston 2012.

