

57103  
circulating copy

MAY 28 1931  
DETROIT

# Bulletin of The Detroit Institute of Arts of the City of Detroit

---

Vol. XII.

MAY, 1931

No. 8

---



BRONZE EWER  
PERSIA, XII CENTURY

## SOME ISLAMIC BRONZES OF THE MIDDLE AGES

Through the acquisition of a small group of bronzes of the Middle Ages, the Near Eastern Department of the Institute comes into the possession of some interesting objects of Islamic-Persian decorative art, a few of which are noteworthy because of their rarity.

The artistic treatment of metal work developed in Persia in the first three centuries of Islam in exclusively Sassanian style forms, in spite of the influences coming in from countries to the east and west. The shapes of vessels, the ornamental decoration, and the technique of the pre-Islamic Sassanian epoch prevailed for a long time and gave to the work its characteristic features. A good example of this early period and especially noteworthy in its Hellenistic-Sassanian elegance is the bronze ewer, 12½ inches high, highly oxidized and somewhat damaged (Fig. 1). The oval shaped body converging into the neck over a bulging ring, rests on a round upward-sloping base. The neck is slightly fluted and the mouth is round and flaring. The handle, affixed to the body with the motive of a deformed animal head, has a bead decoration part way up, and after forming a thumb rest—which is broken, however—spreads into two arms terminating in a griffin's head which grasps the mouth on both sides. In the oblateness of the body as well as in the characteristic form of its vertically fluted neck, it resembles the Sassanian silver and bronze ewers of the period from the fifth to the seventh centuries. This similarity in shape and technique is not casual, but, as has been indicated, is a continuation of old Persian style forms.

In the famous Islamic metal collection of Mr. R. Harari in London there is

a bronze ewer, similar in shape, with a handle identically the same in every detail, which, judging from its decoration and especially from its kufic inscription border, may have originated in the period from the eighth to the ninth centuries,<sup>1</sup> and therefore permits us to place the ewer belonging to the Institute in the same period.

Although the metal work of these centuries was of strictly archaic form and decoration, it became completely Islam-



Fig. 1

<sup>1</sup>Illustrated in *Souvenir of the Exhibition of Persian Art in London*, p. 16; compare also the ewer decorated with seated figures in the Louvre.



Fig. 3

ized in the tenth and following centuries. The technique of relief casting gradually declined and the decoration consisted mainly of engraving. Though in use in the Orient since ancient times, this type of decoration in Islamic art preceded the classic inlay period and determined not only the stylistic character of the metal work, but also of the contemporary, so-called "Guebri" pottery. The second bronze ewer in the group exemplifies this style trend. It is 10 inches in height and has a pear-shaped body and a mouth in the form of an oil lamp (cover). The decoration consists of engraved bands in geometric and arabesque tendril design, cartouches of kufic inscriptions, rosettes and a medallion containing a bird. Under the handle—which is missing—is a winding band terminating at each end in a dragon's head. Up to the present time only a few bronze ewers of this kind have been known in the history of Islamic art, the most important of these being two examples, one decorated with silver and copper inlay<sup>2</sup> in the collection of Mr. Peytel in Paris, the other now in the Louvre. The latter has a very rich silver inlay and according to the inscription

was made in the year 586 A. H. (1190 A. D.) in the northwestern Persian city of Nakhichevan.<sup>3</sup> We are justified, therefore, in placing the origin of this interesting group of bronze ewers, differentiated by their shapes, in the twelfth century. Because of its engraved decoration, however, the specimen belonging to the Institute might have been made, if not in the eleventh century, certainly in the early part of the twelfth century.

Another interesting example of Persian metal work is the lower part of a candlestick (Fig. 3). This is an unusually large piece, 12½ inches high, supported by three strong feet, and, besides the engraved decoration, shows an ornamentation in openwork and relief. The flat rim of the curved base has bird heads protruding at each side of the feet, and on the edge of the rim, midway between the feet, are three-leaved projections engraved with arabesques. The curved plate has a complicated braided pattern with full palmettes in openwork, and above this on the shoulder a kufic inscription frieze in relief (Fig. 4). The ends of the letters in the illegible inscription terminate in angular half palmettes, which is one of the characteristic features of the ornamental inscription of



Fig. 4

<sup>2</sup>Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst, Vol. II, Pl. 157.

<sup>3</sup>G. Migeon, Musée du Louvre, L'Orient musulman, Vol. II, Pl. 23.

the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. A point in defense of this dating is the fact that this piece was excavated in the ruins of the city Rai (Rhages), the Seljuk capital of Persia, where the art of working in metal, in addition to other decorative arts, was highly developed up to the first half of the thirteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

To the same period also belongs the large cylindrical box with cover (Fig. 5). The entire surface is decorated with elongated inscription cartouches and circles filled with intertwined geometric patterns. The inscriptions are partly in kufic and partly in round naskhi on a background of arabesque tendrils. In content these are expressions of blessings and good wishes for the owner, such as were used at the time.



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

Besides these, we have a heavy mortar covered with reddish patina, from the twelfth century. The outside walls of the mortar are octagonal and slightly concave and each side of the octagon is framed by broad undecorated bands and filled with rather deeply wrought arabesque work. In the center of each oblong surface there is a knob; one of these has an animal head with a large ring in its mouth which serves as a handle of the vessel. Several specimens of similar mortars of Persian and Egyptian origin, from the same and following centuries, are preserved and show different kinds of arrangement and decoration of the body.<sup>5</sup>

MEHMET AGA OGLU.

<sup>4</sup>The Institute owns another very beautiful candlestick with an openwork design. See *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts*, Vol. IX, No. 6, March, 1930.

<sup>5</sup>Fr. Sarre, *Erzeugnisse, islamischer Kunst, Metall*, Pl. III.; M. S. Dimand, *A Handbook of Mohammedan Decorative Arts*, Fig. 48.

## EGYPTO-ISLAMIC TEXTILES

Mounds of debris and burial grounds have preserved textile specimens belonging to the Mohammedan middle ages, many of them in places such as Akhmim and Asyut in Upper Egypt which had been centers of weaving during the late Hellenistic and early Christian, Coptic, period. After the conquest of Egypt in 641 A. D. the Arabs employed Coptic craftsmen liberally: architects and masons for the building of mosques and palaces, carvers of bone and wood and weavers for the decoration thereof. Weaving factories sprang up in different places in the Nile delta, the so-called *tiraz*, owned by the state, by the ruling princes or privately, and they worked for centuries not only for home consumption, but carried on a vast export trade all over the Mohammedan world.

The raw materials were largely produced in Egypt, partly imported. Most important was linen, famous for its fine quality from antiquity. The flax was grown in the Fayyum, spun and woven in the factories of Lower Egypt. Very fine cloths, "like the skin around the egg" were soon a staple article for exportation. The high standards were kept up for centuries, but during the Mamluk rule (1252-1517) the quality declined, coarser fabrics, suited to printing and embroidery, were chiefly produced, and in the fifteenth century we hear that the Egyptian ladies preferred the linen of Rheims which was imported from France and traded in the bazaar at Cairo.

Silk was used at first only for the tapestry woven borders, but with the rising standards of luxury soon entire garments were produced. Italy imported in the middle ages satins (*zeituni*) from Alexandria, but we do not know whether the silk was imported from China or grown locally. Syria grew silk from the fifth century onward.

Cotton, today most important for Egypt, was hardly used for decorative weaving in the middle ages and was imported from Syria up to the eighteenth century. Wool, chief medium for tapestry weaving in Coptic times, is almost entirely replaced by silk during the great period of Islamic weaving in Egypt.

The chief dyes were indigo, grown in the oases of Upper Egypt; kermes, imported from Crete and the Peloponnesos; saffron, from Persia and Asia Minor. Gold, much in use for sumptuous fabrics, was mined in Upper Egypt, but silver was imported from India, across the Erythrean sea.

As yet we lack sufficient data for a history of the organization of the *tiraz* workshops. The most important center of weaving was Tinnis (near Port Said) till its destruction by a Frankish squadron in 1180. In 775 an ornamental tent was woven there for the Kaaba, the center of the sanctuary at Mekka. About 1040 it was visited by Nasiri Khosrau, a Persian traveller who counted 5000 looms and mentions some of the special products of the royal looms which were reserved for the sovereign and Caliph and could not be obtained for money or as a gift. Chief of these was the *badana*, a gold-shot fabric reserved for the personal use of the Caliph, and *qassab*, a very fine, loosely woven linen fabric, used for turbans. The fine glossy linen which was imported from Egypt to Italy and Spain and is mentioned in mediaeval inventories as *boccasino*, was probably a *qassab* weave. *Buqalemun*, a heavier fabric, shot in many colors, was in great demand for covers and saddle cloths and much exported.

The finest, simply white and not ornamented *qassabs* were woven at Damiat (Damiette) and there were many other places of temporary importance. Alexandria and Cairo are mentioned in lit-

erary sources, and a great number of textile fragments have been found in the rubbish heap of Fostat, the early Mohammedan capital of Egypt, founded 641 A. D. by Amr, Abu Bekr's general and first governor of the newly conquered province. The existence of a state manufactory at Fostat is proved by a fabric in the Arab Museum at Cairo which, according to its inscription, was woven during the rule of the Caliph al-Amin (809-813), in the "public manufactory at Misr," the old name for the city. It is, however, only natural that fabrics from other weaving centers should also be found there, since Fostat, even after the foundation of Cairo in 909, retained its importance for centuries.

The decoration of the Egypto-Islamic textiles grew out of and continued the ornaments used by the Coptic weaver. The representation of the human form was contrary to ancient, Semitic prejudice, and thus the figures of dancers which we find in steady degeneration on Coptic textiles, disappear completely. Animals, excepting the rabbit, which lent itself beautifully to conventional stylization, are rarely found. The bulk of ornament consists of interlacing and foliation, forerunners of the style known by the term arabesque. In addition to these or independently the Arabic script is used to great advantage, both the stately Kufic in its severe, angular, and luxuriant flowery variety, and the round Naskhi. The inscriptions are mostly taken from the Koran, or consist in repeated invocations of Allah or the temporal powers; fortunately sometimes the name and titles of contemporary rulers are recorded and these textile fragments are of chief importance for the study of the development of style.

The largest number of the specimens in the collection are partly or entirely woven in tapestry technique. Fig. 1 shows a fragment of a wide border, the warp coarse linen, the weft silk. A rondel contains on red ground a falcon

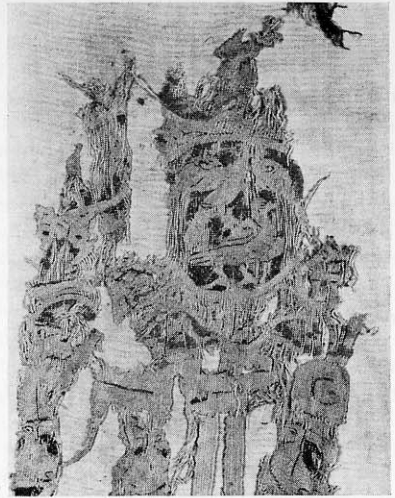


Fig. 1

holding in his fangs a pigeon, a motive often found in Sassanian fabrics. The Arabic conquest of Egypt followed directly on that of the Sassanian empire, the highly developed Sassanian art looms large in the making of Mohammedan art. The excellence of the design and its astonishing realism fully warrants dating this fragment to the latter part of the ninth or the earlier part of the tenth century. Another border shows a similar design of a bird of prey with its victim, in an advanced stage of conventionalization.

A large fragment of a garment (12" by 39") dates possibly to Tulunid time (868-905) (Fig. 2). The fine white linen ground is broken at 3-inch intervals by tapestry bands showing in red octagonal medallions, white ducks turned alternately to right and left. Every second band is accompanied on either side by a Kufic inscription, reading "El Malik" repeated. The style of the calligraphy and the advanced conventionalization of the design, especially of the trefoil pattern in the spandrils, seem to contradict each other and render an exact dating of the piece almost impossible, although the general appearance and color would ad-

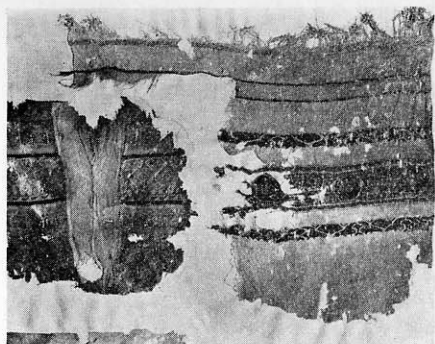


Fig. 5

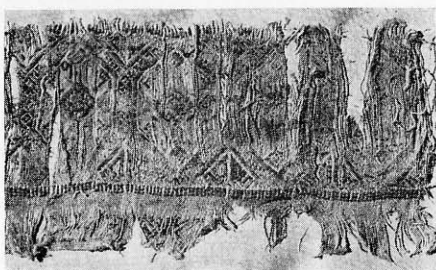


Fig. 8

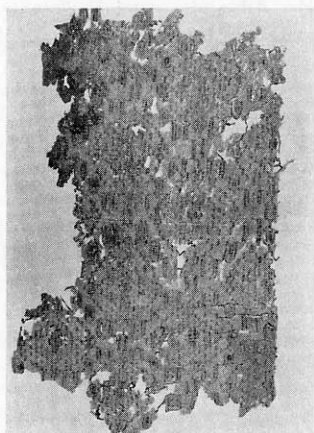


Fig. 6a

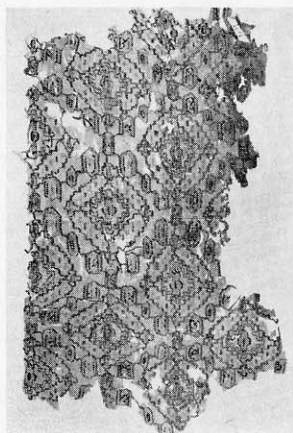


Fig. 6b

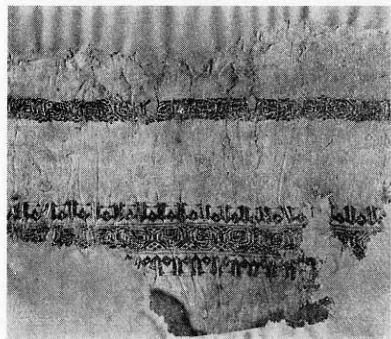


Fig. 2

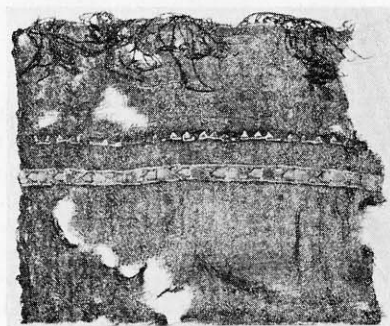


Fig. 4

vocate an early date. A goodly number of smaller fragments makes it possible to study the different types of Kufic and Naskhi writing; most of the inscriptions are tapestry woven, a few are embroidered. One of these, worked in backstitch and overcast stemstitch in green and brownish-red silk on loosely woven linen, gives a congratulation repeated in rectangular fields, only slightly different from a fragment in Berlin (Kühnel, No. 4549, Pl. 25).

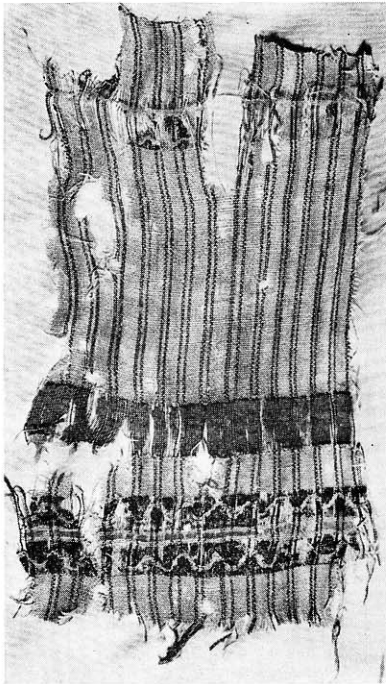


Fig. 3

Several fragments are woven in blue and white stripes or chequers. One fragment is woven elaborately with floating warp and weft to produce a white chequer on blue ground. The others are of plain weave and decorated with brightly colored tapestry borders. Fig. 3 has one border of plain red, outlined with black, a second border shows white wavy lines on black ground on either

side of a red stripe. Another fragment, a small chequer weave, has a yellow border with a beautifully designed yellow duck in a blue rondel.

Fig. 4 shows part of a black woolen veil, the warp threads twisted into a fringe; of the two borders in silk tapestry, the narrower has a debased illegible inscription in white and red on black ground, the wider an ornamental pattern in red, green, yellow and black of distinctly Coptic type. A portion of this veil is in the Arab Museum at Cairo; related fabrics are in Berlin (Kühnel, No. 3150) and Brussels (Errera, No. 421). A far more luxurious type of veils which were probably worn over the dress on special occasions, is represented by two fragments of thinnest celadon green silk. One, the gift of Mrs. T. D. Russell, has a wide border with golden yellow interlaced ribbons, running rabbits and floral motives in red and blue cartouches with, on both sides, red and green Naskhi inscriptions on yellow ground, reading "by order of Allah." The other has a wide selvage of pale gold yellow and two borders of gold metal thread and red, blue and yellow wool. Both fragments belong to the late Fatimid or Ayyubid period, twelfth-thirteenth century.

Interlaced ribbons of golden yellow, often outlined with a red thread, form the decoration of many of the specimens. One fragment has preserved all its pristine beauty and makes us regret the loss of a civilization of such fairytale glamor. Others show, framed in the twisting ribbons, medallions with rabbits or ducks, sometimes floral motives like the fleur de lis. Fig. 5, left side, part of a garment, appears to have been entirely covered with rows of tapestry borders; yellow, green and red are the predominating colors. Fig. 5, right side, the gift of Mrs. T. D. Russell, shows part of a turban cloth, 14½ inches wide, with both selvages and fringe. The pattern of the wide border is unusual, for besides the customary running rab-



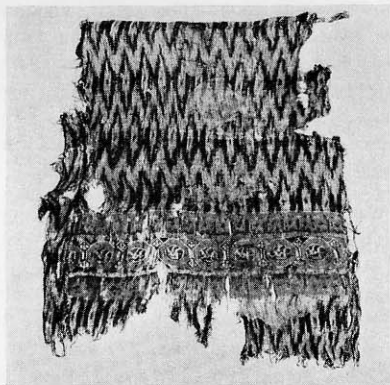


Fig. 7

bits enclosed in medallions, we find larger yellow hares, confronted and beautifully stylized on the red ground between the medallions. The narrow subsidiary borders are filled with confronted ducks, red with green wings and beaks, green with red, blue with yellow and vice versa; polychrome floral motives fill the spandrils.

Fig. 6, a gift of Mrs. T. D. Russell, shows both sides of a fragment of a tunic. The fine, loosely woven linen ground has an all-over pattern of red, blue, green and black heavy silk threads which are inserted with the bobbin to form a stepped diamond pattern. The technique is well known from the peasant weaving of the Eastern Mediterranean area, where it has been preserved until recent times, and it is a pleasurable surprise to find it in such exquisite beauty in a garment of the Fatimid period.

Another gift of Mrs. T. D. Russell is equally rare and curious. Fig. 7 shows a linen fragment with a tapestry border, finely designed and executed, but rather conventional, with interlaced ribbons, rabbits, fleurs de lys and conventional calligraphic inscriptions in yellow, red and a little green. The ground of the fabric is the curious part: flambé blue

and white, we find here a specimen of Ikat technique, warp tied and dyed, a type which we are wont to associate with the native weaving of Sumatra, where this extraordinarily painstaking technique has been preserved till today, and each tribe has developed some highly individual pattern. The Mohammedan Arabs invaded Sumatra some time in the thirteenth century and apparently brought this delightful mode of adorning a simple weave with them.

Among the specimens in the collection which are woven in a technique other than tapestry, we find, in Fig. 8, a fragment of a brocade border, red, brown and golden yellow silk on linen ground. The pattern is purely geometrical, hexagonal cartouches filled with diamonds and angular hooks. It has been suggested that we have here an instance of Hispano-Moresque influence; for lack of comparative material we are obliged to leave this an open question.

A group of printed linen fabrics, all from the rubbish heap of Fostat, includes fragments dating from Fatimid to late Mamluk times. One fragment, Fig. 9, differs emphatically from the rest. Printed in madder red on coarse linen, we see in a hexagonal star-shaped frame the double-headed eagle of the

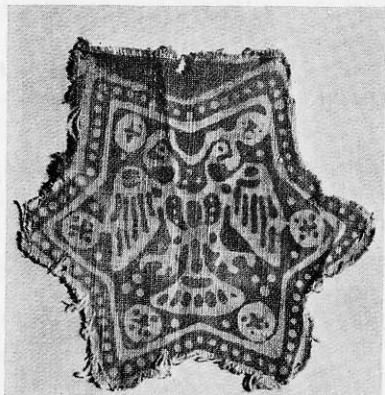


Fig. 9

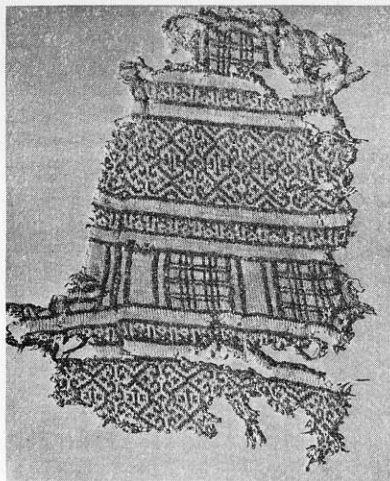


Fig. 10

Ortokids. With its two necks, fan-shaped tail, and exaggeratedly marked leg muscles, it is closely related to the stone relief in the museum at Konia, from a former city gate, built by the Seljuk Sultan Kaikobad I (1219-1237). The horizontally extended fangs with three claws connect it further with an Ortokid

silk fabric in Berlin (Falke, I, p. 105, figs. 158 and 160). The artist who cut the block used for printing our fragment has well observed these characteristics and added to them, to fill the space, six rondels decorated with a simplified rendering of a flower conventionalized to abstraction.

We must at least mention some remnants of the humbler home industries, a group of knitted socks and purses, of unknown provenance. Fig. 10 is finely knitted in blue and white. It is difficult to date such fragments, for while the patterns might possibly refer them to Fatimid times, it is a well-known fact that in home products the same patterns will be copied faithfully from generation to generation.

The collection is exhibited in the textile department. It has already proved to be of inspiration to the designer and of interest to the public in general. It certainly illustrates well the glories of the past and that strange civilization of the Fatimid caliphs, contemporaries of the fine flower of Western chivalry, the Crusaders.

ADELE COULIN WEIBEL.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Otto von Falke: *Kunstgeschichte der Seidenweberei*, Berlin, 1913.
- Ernst Kühnel: *Islamische Stoffe aus ägyptischen Gräbern*, Berlin, 1927.
- A. F. Kendrick: *Catalogue of Muhammedan Textiles of the Mediaeval Period*, London, 1924.
- I. Errera: *Collection d'anciennes étoffes égyptiennes*, Brussels, 1916.
- M. Dimand: "Egypto-Arabic Textiles," *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, Vol. 22, p. 275.

IN MEMORIAM<sup>1</sup>

In the untimely death of Julius H. Haass on April 17, the City of Detroit loses one of its highly respected Arts Commissioners, and the Detroit Institute of Arts one of its substantial friends.

Long before he had any official connection with the museum, Mr. Haass had shown keen interest in the arts, turning to them as a recreation from his strenuous hours in business, and this interest resulted in his becoming a collector of large importance in this locality. As early as 1907 he became a regular contributor to the museum's picture fund and as his interest increased his contributions to the museum became more and more significant. In spite of personal inconvenience, Mr. Haass was always ready and willing to send the precious masterpieces of his private collection to the loan exhibitions at the Art Institute in order that the public might share in their enjoyment.

In later years he gave generously of his time as well as his substance in support of the affairs of the Art Institute. Since 1925 he has served as a trustee of the Detroit Museum of Art Founders Society, and in May, 1930, upon the appointment of the Mayor, he became one of the four Arts Commissioners who manage the affairs of the Detroit Institute of Arts.

RESOLVED, that in the death of Julius H. Haass, the members of the Arts Commission have lost an esteemed friend and associate, and the Detroit Institute of Arts one of its most substantial givers and loyal supporters.

## EXHIBITION OF FRENCH PAINTINGS

Beginning May 22, there will be held at the Institute, for the first time in Detroit, an exhibition of contemporary French paintings, comprising recognized artists who are represented in most of the larger museums of Europe and in many of the well-known private collections in New York and other cities. It will begin with masters like Renoir and Degas, who show the transition from Impressionism to Post-Impressionism, and who have now become classics. Several works will be shown by the master who founded the modern school, Cézanne, and those men of varying tendencies like Henri Rousseau, Odilon Redon, Gauguin, and Van Gogh; but

the majority of the works in the exhibition will consist of paintings by living artists of the school of Paris, like Matisse, Derain, Segonzac, Utrillo, Laurencin, Braque, Vlaminck, and other artists, who, although foreigners, spent most of their lives in Paris: the Italians, Modigliani and Chirico; the Spaniard, Picasso; and the Roumanian-American, Pascin. Among painters of the most modern tendencies will be shown such men as Rouault, Gromaire, Souverbie, Lurçat, Dufy, and others. The exhibition will continue until July 1. It has been made possible through the generosity of Robert H. Tannahill, who is financing the costs of the exhibition.

<sup>1</sup>Resolutions of the Arts Commission at its meeting on April 21.

# CALENDAR OF LECTURES AND EXHIBITIONS

---

## EXHIBITIONS

April 14—May 17. Seventeenth Annual Exhibition of American Art.

May 22—July 1. Contemporary French Art.

April—May. Fifty Cent Exhibit.

## GALLERY TALKS

(Sunday afternoons at three o'clock)

May 3. Ishtar Dragon.

May 10. The Ford Polish Carpet.

May 17. Early American Portraits.

May 24. Two Masterpieces of Chinese Sculpture.

May 31. The Garden Court.

Every Wednesday at two o'clock and Friday evening at eight o'clock, there will be a gallery talk on the special exhibitions.

## CONCERTS

May 5, 8:30 o'clock. "Brahms," by Edward Bredshall.

May 19, 8:30 o'clock. "Debussy and Scriabine," by Frank Bishop, Curator of Music.

---

## THE ARTS COMMISSION

EDSEL B. FORD, *President*

ALBERT KAHN, *Vice-President*

CHARLES T. FISHER

## STAFF

*Art Director*, DR. WILLIAM R. VALENTINER

*Secretary*, CLYDE H. BURROUGHS

*Curator of European Art*, DR. WALTER HEIL

*Curator of Asiatic Art*, BENJAMIN MARCH

*Curator of Near Eastern Art*, DR. MEHMET AGA-UGLU

*Curator of American Art*, CLYDE H. BURROUGHS

*Associate Curator of American Art*, JOSEPHINE WALTHER

*Honorary Associate Curator of American Art*, ROBERT H. TANNAHILL

*Curator of Prints*, ISABEL WEADOCK

*Curator of Textiles*, ADELE C. WEIBEL

*Educational Secretary*, EDGAR P. RICHARDSON

*Museum Instructor*, MARION LELAND

*Curator of Music*, FRANK BISHOP

*Librarian*, AGNES SAVAGE

*Registrar*, ALFRED V. LA POINTE

*Superintendent of Building and Grounds*, OTIS G. BAKER