



Ilkhanid Brass Bowl

Fars, Western Iran, Late 13th to early 14th century

Brass

26.5cm diameter, 18cm diameter of aperture, 11.5cm deep

Stock no.: A5833

Of early-Ilkhanate form, with rounded base and convex shoulder rising to a flattened rim, in contrast to bowls of the later period, with straight walls (see, for example, a bowl dated to 1375-1400 in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (accession no. [6-1886](#))).¹ The shoulder is engraved and inlaid with zodiacal cartouches, separated by small roundels with a familiar Z-shaped pattern, described by Melikian Chirvani as 'a six-spoked wheel.'² Underneath this, a band of thin arrowheads are incised. Horizontal slim bands of pattern fill the transition between shoulder and rim: an incised chain pattern, scrolling vine with a trefoil at the centre of the volutes, spiky braid, and interlocking vine. This repertoire is seen on objects from Fars, Western Iran, dating to the late 13th and early 14th centuries: a Fars candlestick, dated 1220-1250, in the Victoria & Albert museum (accession no. [571-1878](#)); a ewer in the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg (no. [VP-1479](#)), dated to the late 13th century; and a bowl of the same early form, dated 1300-1325, in the Louvre, Paris (accession no. [AOR 41/93](#)).

The zodiac is represented as:

Aries (*al-haml*) – a ram walking from left to right.

Taurus (*al-thawr*) – a ram walking from left to right

Gemini (*al-jawzā*) a figure sitting cross-legged with two heads.

Cancer (*al-saratān*) a personified crab over the sea, symbolised by a semicircle

Leo (*al-asad*) is shown as a lion in front of a sun.

Virgo (*al-sunbula*, 'the ear of corn') is a man sitting crossed legged holding ears of corn in his hands.

Libra (*al-mīzān*) is a man sitting cross-legged, holding a beam balancing two baskets. He seems to rub his head in confusion.

Scorpio (*al-'aqrab*) a man sitting cross-legged holding a sword in his left hand and a large scorpion in his right.

Sagittarius (*al-qawṣ*) is symbolised by a man about to release an arrow from. His bow at a dragon.

Capricorn (*al-jadī*) is a goat with large horns.

Aquarius (*sāqī al-mā'*) is a man sitting with one leg over the other, pulling water from a well.

Pisces (*al-samakātāni*) is a cross-legged man holding out a fish in each hand.³

The heads of both man and beast face towards the left. The heads of all the humans are surrounded by haloes, in which traces of silver inlay remain.

On the base is engraved 'M^r M... Gauthier', suggesting a French provenance in the 19th century.

n.b. accession nos are clickable links

¹ Melikian-Chirvani, Assadullah Souren. *Islamic Metalwork from the Iranian World, 8th-18th Centuries*. London: HMSO, 1982. p. 149.

² *Ibid.* p. 176.

³ Carboni, Stefano. *Following the Stars: Images of the Zodiac in Islamic Art*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997. pp. 25-45.