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EWER, BRASS, WITH OPENWORK AND ENGRAVED DECORATION AND INLAID WITH A RED, BLACK, AND BLUE SUBSTANCE

INDIA, LAHORE; 1616

MAXIMUM H: 61; MAXIMUM W: 32 CM

This monumental brass ewer must be one of the largest from the 17th-century Indo-Persian region. It has been suggested that many “Safavid” metal objects were actually made in India as export goods to the Iranian world rather than in Iran itself,¹ a theory that this ewer could support. It has two inscriptions written with Armenian letters against a blue background — the longest in Persian, the shortest in Armenian. The longest is a poem that tells how guests are given something to drink when they make a visit, which could indicate that the ewer was originally made for secular use. The short inscription lists several Armenian names, whose link to the ewer is still not entirely certain. It is clear, however, that it was made in Lahore in 1065 (according to the Armenian calendar), corresponding to 1616 A.D.

In addition to the Armenian calligraphy, the ewer’s decoration largely

consists of split-leaf arabesques, both engraved and openwork, and of stylized cypresses and vases. Engraved on the 12-sided neck are three men, one of them carrying an Indian dagger – a *katar*. Both the spout and the handle take the form of dragons, and the latter ends at the bottom in a sculptural lion's head the sides of whose "body" are engraved with tigers. The lid is crowned with a little bird.

The openwork section under the spout is unusual. This is also true of the rich chromatic effect, with black, red, and blue inlay material that originally provided a strong contrast to the shiny gold color of the brass. The effect can best be traced on the handle, where the old, rather dreary brown patina has worn off. A related coloristic effect can, however, also be found on other Safavid objects, for example candlesticks, and red and black inlay substances can be traced as far back as to around 1200 (see e.g. 11/1982).

¹ *Unpublished lecture by Hamid Atighetchi for the conference "Metals and Metalworking in Islamic Iran," September 3-4, 2004, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.*

Published in:

Mentioned in Mesrop Jacob Seth: *Armenians in India from the earliest times to the present day, etc.* [Revised and enlarged edition of "*History of the Armenians in India.*"], Calcutta 1937, p. 202;

Mentioned in Anne Basil: *Armenian settlements in India: from the earliest times to the present day*, Calcutta [1969], p. 62;

Anne-Marie Kevorkian (ed.): *L'art arménien dans les collections françaises. Paris - octobre-novembre 1986*, Musée arménien de France, Paris 1986, fig. 12;