

NEAR-EASTERN INCENSE-BURNERS AND PYRAEUMS (I MILLENNIUM B.C. – I MILLENNIUM A.D.)

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A tribute of incense to Hideo Fujii

The evidence concerning the use of aromatic substances in various fields of public and private life in antiquity is substantial, though the distribution over time and space of the various relevant types of artifact is not uniform. The representations of fumigation or burning practices in which aromas may possibly have been used are numerous and sometimes explicit. In some cases, such as that of the ointments, balsams, spices, scents and perfumes to be poured or spread on the body or on objects, no special classes of artifacts seem to have been developed according to their mode of use. These essences are normally preserved in a container which is suitable both for conservation and for employment, and this container was less suited to appearing in iconography. Among the classes of objects possibly related to aromas, however, one in particular demands attention because of the evidence of its employment in the diffusion of the perfume of incense or other aromatic substances.

1. Assyrian and Achaemenid incense-burners

In Assyrian art, these objects appear at the court and in the temple, being used in representational and sacrificial contexts. Typical examples are the two incense-burners placed on the ground on each side of the bed on which Ashurbanipal reclines as he banquets in the garden (Fig. 1)¹⁾. They are of unpretentious size, but their structure is conceived in a characteristic way: a flaring stand (conical in one, trumpet shaped in the other; with vertical fluting), a joint at the top (a double floral tuft with pendent leaves of the type common in furniture²⁾), a receptacle (a shallow bowl) and a lid (a smooth dome, more conical in one case, more rounded in the other). A variant of larger size is represented in a libation performed by Ashurbanipal after the lion-hunt (Fig. 2)³⁾. The trunk is smooth, slender and widens considerably in a trumpet shape; it has a torus moulding in place of the floral tuft; the bowl is similar to the former one; the lid, also smooth, is conical. This finial proves beyond any doubt the function of the object: it was intended to collect the fragrant smoke before dispersion.

The use of this type of incense-burner was not limited to the Assyrian court. A smaller version of it is represented by a limestone original object of the 6th century B.C. from the sanctuary of Baal Hamman at Meniko, Cyprus, only 8.5 cm high (Fig. 3)⁴⁾. The bowl has straight sides and a hemispherical lid, and is supported by a flaring stand decorated by two large rounded joints instead of a floral tuft. Other censers of the same provenance and date, of terracotta (Fig. 4)⁵⁾, have a particularly articulated profile: the carinated bowl, which has a conical lid with large ring-grip, stands on three small superimposed dishes or discs; the trumpet stand ends in a hanging tuft below a bossed element or half-opened floral tuft⁶⁾. The detail of the superimposed discs or dishes is found again in the incense-burner depicted

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1) Barnett, Lorenzini 1975: pls.169–170. For the Assyrian censers, cf. Wigand 1912: 18–21, pl.II, nos.41–46.

2) Hrouda 1965: pl.13:3,5,7.

3) Barnett, Lorenzini 1975: pl.125. For censers used in sacrifices by Salmanassar III and Tiglat-Pileser III, see King 1915: pl.i; Barnett, Falkner 1962: 18–19, pl.lx; Hrouda 1965, pl.52:4.

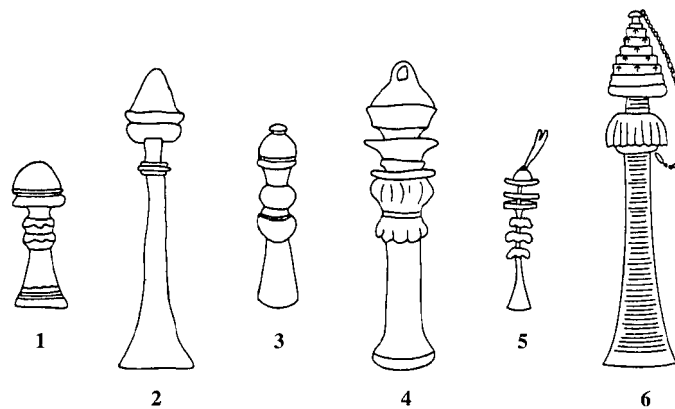
4) *Fenici* 1988: 609, no.153.

5) Karageorghis 1982: 148, fig.113 (h. 38 and 36.6 cm); *Fenici* 1988: 162.

6) Because of the shape of the cylindrical stand and of the short distance of the discs, these can hardly have been used effectively as dishes as they probably were in the Phoenician type with superimposed bowls, *Fenici* 1988: 611, 645, 667, nos.164, 363–364, 494.

between a worshipper and an enthroned god on an intaglio of the 4th century B.C. from Sidon (Fig. 5)⁷⁾, where the tall, slender stem on triangular base is marked by three superimposed pendent tufts and three dishes. The small dome placed on the upper dish may represent the lid, and a wisp of smoke rises from it.

Clear evidence of incense-burners is provided by Achaemenid art, for objects of this kind were required by the rigid court etiquette in ceremonies like those depicted on the two large reliefs from the Treasury at Persepolis: a couple of identical censers (Fig. 6) stand on the ground, close to the throne dais on which the king, accompanied by the crown prince, receives homage⁸⁾. This piece of furniture is worthy of the royal pomp in its size and rich decoration, though its structure is very simple. The treatment of the high trumpet stand with horizontal ribbing, and the ending of the stem in the shape of a pendent, almost capital-like tuft, are typical features. Also typical is the stepped conical lid on the shallow plate with rounded profile: while the lower band of the rim is smooth, there are staggered arrow-slits in the upper bands. A chain is fixed to the high finial and links up at the opposite end with a loop below the capital.



Figs. 1–6 Censers; not to scale.

Two not much smaller censers stand close to the throne with no dais in the reduced version of the same scene carved on the door-jambs of the Hall of the Hundred Columns⁹⁾. Ghirshman's reference to the fire-altars¹⁰⁾ is not relevant either to the subject of the scene or to the shape of the object. Though there is no doubt that this censer was not exclusively employed in the palace¹¹⁾, the context here is clearly the court, and Ghirshman himself describes the scene as an audience. As a fire-altar the censer would scarcely be functional, for the eternal flames would be hampered by the lid¹²⁾. The same incense-

7) Parrot, Chéhab, Moscati 1976: 110, fig.115. The structure of this object recalls the bronze one with two dishes and triangular base from the La Joya necropolis, Gehrig, Niemeyer 1990, 218-219, no.201.

8) Schmidt 1953: pls.119, 121–123; Vanden Berghe 1959: pl.42:d; Ghirshman 1964: 205–206, 349, figs.254–255, 443; Goldman 1991: 179–188, fig.1; Melikian-Chirvani 1994: 111–130, fig.2. Cf. Wigand 1912: 31–32, pl.II, no.58. The two objects are close to each other, but in reality they were symmetrically placed at the sides of the platform, as was already noted by Sarre, Herzfeld 1910: 143. Cf. Goldman 1991: 184.

9) Schmidt 1953: pls.98–99; Vanden Berghe 1959: pl.42:a; Goldman 1991: fig.2.

10) Ghirshman 1964: 205–206.

11) A seal from Ur shows a censer in a religious context, in front of a human-headed winged bull, Stern 1973: 212, fig.354 (altar). The object differs from the Persepolitan one only in the large disc replacing the floral tuft.

12) The fire altar of the Achaemenid graves has stylized flames and no lid. Goldman's terminology (1991: 180), *thymiatherion* and *turibulum*, for the type respectively without and with lid, in an attempt to distinguish the purely religious function of the first from the generic and domestic one of the second, is not a happy choice, for both are cultivated terms and evoke a context far from everyday life.

burner was also produced in a portable format: we see it in the hands of the king's attendants carved on the jambs of the Darius and Xerxes palaces, where it has relatively small dimensions¹³⁾.

Original objects found in the western provinces of the empire are very similar to the Persepolitan ones, even down to the minute details. A silver example from Asia Minor (Fig. 7)¹⁴⁾, only 28.2 cm high, could have stood on the ground or on a table or high base. That from a grave in Ikiztepe in Lydia¹⁵⁾ repeats the same pattern, though without the typical Achaemenid ribbed treatment of the surfaces. Also smooth is the trumpet stand of the bronze specimen, 33.5 cm high, from an Achaemenid grave in Shechem, in Palestine (Fig. 9)¹⁶⁾, fabricated with separate parts fitted together. A large pendent tuft connects the stand and the low ringed cylinder which helps to fix the deep round bowl. The vertical rim of the bowl makes it easier to insert the lid. This was fixed by means of a small bronze chain, but left no trace, so that it has been suggested that it was of wood or some other perishable material.

Thus, this type of incense-burner was well known in different parts of the Achaemenid empire, and most objects of this age, even if they are portrayed schematically or cursorily¹⁷⁾, show the structure of the Persepolitan type. Special variants are also known: a textile from kurgan n.5 at Pazyryk is decorated with a scene at the centre of which, on the ground, a large incense-burner (Fig. 10) stands between two couples of female figures¹⁸⁾. Its structure and all its distinctive features are those of the Persepolitan type: slender conical stand, pendent tuft, plate, lid (oval) and chain. However, the details of the workmanship link it with Ionic specimens, so that, in spite of its provenance from beyond the eastern borders of the empire, the textile has been thought to have been produced by an atelier of a western satrapy¹⁹⁾.

Incense-burners of a different type were also used in the Achaemenid empire. Of the Persepolitan type only the stepped conical lid remains in a bronze censer from Asia Minor of the Menil Collection (Fig. 11)²⁰⁾, which in other respects reflects a western taste. In place of the characteristic trumpet-stand, the brazier dish is supported by a long thin stem on a tripod. The bronze item, of far greater decorative richness, found in the Achaemenian grave of Umm Udheina, near Amman (Fig. 12)²¹⁾, also leaves a wide space to classical influences. The deep bowl is held on the head of a caryatid in Achaemenian dress, rigidly standing on a simple tripod, while the surfaces of the high domed lid are marked by openings of different shapes in superimposed rows.

Of fundamental importance in these incense-burners is the lid, which is essential to their function, though its specific mode of use may have differed between the Assyrians and the Achaemenids. In the first case, it is depicted as smooth; no openings are described, even when the reliefs are minutely carved

13) Schmidt 1953, pls.148B, 150, 183D-184; Goldman 1991: fig.3. Cf. Wigand 1912: 31–32, pl.II, no.59. Melikian-Chirvani's statement that there are no representations of portable censers at Persepolis (1994: 130, note 52) must be corrected.

14) Melikian-Chirvani 1994: figs.1, 18; cf. the colour reproductions in *Archeo*, 120(1995), 86–87, where a provenance from Ikiztepe is supposed. Melikian-Chirvani thinks it to be an import from Iran because of the corrugated treatment of the surfaces. In Lydia, the name 'Artymas', would have been scratched on the base and the statuette of the cock added as a finial. However, this corrugated treatment, though certainly a most characteristic feature of Achaemenian toreutics, does not necessarily imply a specifically Iranian production. In the 6th century B.C., this same treatment is attested very far away, in a Punic milieu, at Lebrija (Sevilla), by a couple of golden censers (Fig. 8), *Fenici* 1988: 228, 725, no.831. A very small dish is here supported by a slender cylindrical, thickly corrugated stem connected by a sharp disc to the low corrugated trumpet stands. Because of their height (70.5 cm) these artifacts are worthy of the court furnishings. Their manufacture can hardly have been independent from the handicraft of Achaemenid Asia. Whether produced in a Punic context or brought to Spain by Phoenicians, they clearly reflect in any case the Achaemenid imperial taste.

15) Mellink 1967: 172, pl.59, figs.20–21; Melikian-Chirvani 1994: 123.

16) Stern 1980: 90–111, fig.6:1, pl.xiv:a.

17) Goldman 1991: 184–185, pl.xviii.

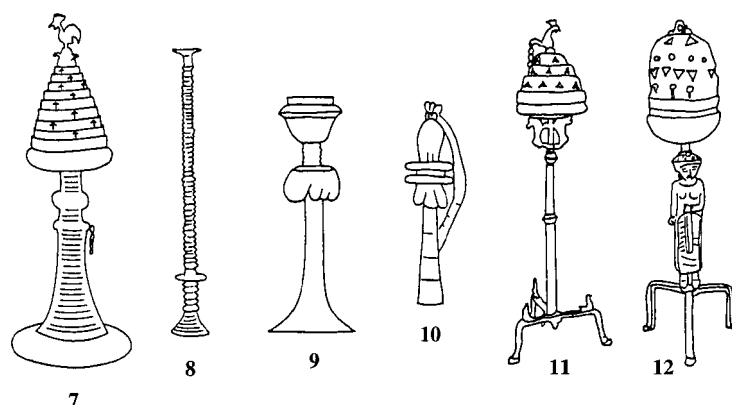
18) Rudenko 1970: 296, fig.139. Goldman 1991: 179 rightly does not agree with Culican's 1975: 111–112, interpretation as an ampulla on a stand.

19) Zick-Nissen 1966: 569–8; Goldman 1991: 179, 185.

20) Melikian-Chirvani 1994: 123–125, figs.16–17.

21) Khalil 1986: 103–110; *Voie royale* 1986–1987: 144–145, no.187; Goldman 1991: 184, pl.xviii:B. Cf. Moorey 1973.

in full detail. We must therefore suppose that it did not fit on to the bowl very tightly, or that narrow slits opened at the base or the top, of a shape and in places that were difficult to depict in the reliefs. Openings not only served to free the fragrant smoke, but also to oxygenate the combustion. By contrast, the large number and the overall distribution of the slits for a continuous dispersion of the fragrance are among the most typical features of the Achaemenid types.



Figs. 7–12 Censers; not to scale.

2. Multifunctional models

The pattern showing a receptacle on a high flaring stand has deep roots in the culture of the ancient Orient, where it can be found in different regions and periods. Since the shape and stability of the stand are functional features, it is not surprising that this pattern was accepted by the Achaemenids. The primary intermediary function, according to Goldman²², must be attributed to the Assyrians, and this hypothesis is very likely in view of the importance of Assyrian culture in the creation of Achaemenid court art. However, as for so many other patterns, in this case too a new original version has been achieved, with the unmistakable ribbed treatment of the stand. The term ‘Persepolitan’ for this version of the incense-burner created many centuries earlier is therefore justified by the representations, which agree in showing that it expressly deserved the court of the Great King. It was probably among the court products that, within the imperial *koiné*, provincial ateliers like those of Asia Minor searched for inspiration.

The Ashurbanipal examples might lead us to think that the pattern on high stand was a characteristic Assyrian creation. And obviously it is, for it appears to have been of general use at the Assyrian court. However, two objects of large size, part of the Lachish booty represented in room xxxvi of the SW palace in Nineveh (Fig. 14)²³, prove that this type must be understood within a wider context, not only from the geographical point of view, but also from the functional one. The two Lachish objects, which differ only in minor structural, more or less rich details, are wholly correspondent to that of Ashurbanipal’s libation, but with a single significant difference, that they have no lid.

The absence of this strictly functional feature may call into question the interpretation of the Lachish objects as incense-burners. On the formal level, they also show notable similarities to other objects of various use portrayed in the Assyrian reliefs. Sennacherib’s Babylonian booty, for example, includes a large basin on a flaring stand (Fig. 16) and a second very similar but smaller one (Fig. 15), placed on a table near a hemispherical cauldron²⁴. These vessels have in common with our incense-burners the

22) Goldman 1991: 186–188, pl.xix. Ghirshman 1976: 126–127 already connected the origins of the *pyraeum* with flaring stand with Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian prototypes.

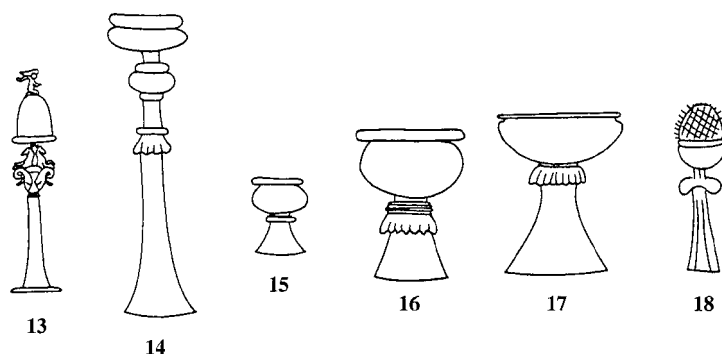
23) Barnett, Lorenzini 1975: pl.82.

24) Barnett, Lorenzini 1975: pl.68.

fundamental features of their structure, the trumpet stand and floral tuft joint, but have wide, stumpy proportions and a very capacious receptacle. From the context of the representation, that of spoils, we cannot derive any direct information as to the function of these objects, which are represented out of service. However, the use of a similar object in a court scene of the time of Sargon is absolutely clear, and it is not that of burning aromas. Here, an attendant draws with a rhyton from a large cauldron on a high stand placed on the floor (Fig. 17)²⁵, which is very similar in its shape and proportions to those discussed, differing only in its larger size.

The slender proportions and the limited capacity of the bowl, therefore, suggest that the objects of the Lachish booty are incense-burners without lids, or pyraeums, as the variants without lid will be called here, whereas the stumpy, capacious variants are likely to be basins for liquids. A number of seals on the other side illustrate the function of pyraeums in religious contexts of objects of similar structure: stand, joint, bowl. They are of large size and stand on the floor; in the bowl burns a flame which, where the workmanship is clear and reasonably detailed, is conventionally rendered as a round hatched dome with a radiating crown of little strokes (Fig. 18)²⁶. The evidence of the glyptics, where pyraeums appear in devotional scenes, is reinforced by the relief: in the White Obelisk, the king sacrifices with a bowl in his hands in front of an offering table, a large cauldron on a low stand and a high pyraeum of our type with a flaming bowl²⁷.

Thus, it is clear that three basic variants of the same model were in production in Assyrian handicrafts, with the aim of obtaining through the necessary modifications, incense-burners - with the addition of a lid -, pyraeums - without a lid -, and containers for liquids or other substances - with different proportions of the bowl -; all these variants were probably made of metal, either in one piece or in separate parts (especially the stand and bowl). This illustrates the relativity of the relation between function and shape in the productive system of the ancient Near East. Objects of similar style but different function may have been devoted to the same employment milieu or to the same sphere of customers, almost as pieces of a single service, especially in the case of metal objects, this material being perfectly suited to the profile of the objects represented.



Figs. 13–18 Censors; not to scale.

3. Ancient Near-eastern pyraeums and offering-stands without lid

The variant without lid, which will be called a pyraeum on the basis of the evidence of the representations, must be distinguished from the incense-burner with lid in its mode of use. This last operates through slow fumigation on burning coals or stones, as in the Pazyryk braziers²⁸, while the pyraeum operates

25) See Flandin's drawing in Albenda 1986: pl.123, where the basin differs from the Babylonian ones only in the small rim.

26) So, for example, in the Neo-Assyrian cylinder from Assur in Berlin, Moortgat 1940: pl.78:655.

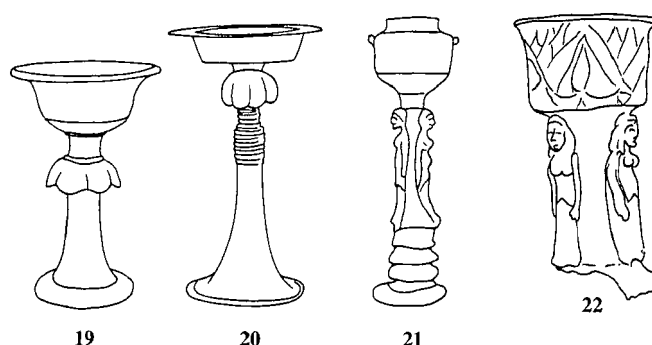
27) Hrouda 1965: 71, pls.10:1, 48:3; Sollberger 1974: pl.xlii: third band.

28) Rudenko 1970: 78–79, 316, fig.28, pls.35, 42B, 62; Invernizzi 1996.

through combustion developing flames. The aims may have been the same, at least in part, for in the pyraeum the aromatic substances may also have burnt slowly on charcoals and in the incense-burner a flame may have developed. However, the employment sphere of the pyraeum was probably wider in the religious field. Artistic representations show various sacrifices where the pyraeum specifically takes the function of an altar, and where the bowl on a high stand is not always a brazier.

A number of bowls on high stands are generically called censers. Before Alexander, artifacts of this shape are rather common: made especially of pottery, they are particularly numerous in Palestine between the end of the 2nd and the middle of the 1st millennium B.C. We may cite, among the most typical examples, a bowl on a high trumpet stand of the end of the 11th century B.C. from Tell eš Šafi (Fig. 19)²⁹, and the cult-stand of the 11th - 10th centuries B.C. from Ashdod with a bowl on a fenestrated stand decorated with hand-modelled figurines of musicians (Fig. 25)³⁰. In the first case, the stand significantly has the same feature, in the shape of a pendent tuft, as that on the Assyrian and Achaemenian incense-burners. Bowl and support may also have been modelled separately³¹, and the same model was produced in metal, as is shown by an example of the 7th century B.C., probably of Palestinian provenance, preserved in Baltimore (Fig. 20)³², in which the high trumpet stand ends in a double ringed band and a pendent tuft, while the wide bowl has a straight profile and a wide rim.

The common interpretation is that these were censers, and they may be more precisely called pyraeums without lids, though the original artifacts very rarely preserve, and the publications very rarely mention, traces of fire which could establish for certain the use as censer, perfume-burner, brazier or pyraeum of an individual bowl on a high stand. The lack of direct proof of such use must also be set against cases similar to the Assyrian ones discussed above testifying to various versions of a pattern, produced to meet different requirements. Two objects of painted ceramic of the 8th-7th centuries B.C. from the royal necropolis of Salamis in Cyprus³³, for example, have both caryatids leaning against a cylindrical stand, which in one case is slender and on a richly moulded base (Fig. 21), while in the other



Figs. 19–22 Censers; not to scale.

29) Katz, Kahane, Broshi 1968: 74, fig. 58 (Tell Zafit); Niemeyer 1970: pl. 23a; Stern 1980, 96, fig. 7:2. See also the Jericho stands Bossert 1951, pl. 1142. The structure is often extremely simple, as in two examples from the Late Bronze age temple of Kamid el-Loz, *Frühe Phöniker im Libanon* 1983: 71, a bowl on a flaring stand, wide or slender; or in the example from Pyre A of the Salamis necropolis (7th-6th centuries B.C.), Karageorghis 1969: pl. 61 (h. 25.5 cm), a bowl on cylindrical stand rather crudely made; or in that from Carthage of the 4th century B.C., only 3.5 cm high, with a flaring stand and wide base, *Fenici* 1988: 645 no. 365.

30) *Treasures of the Holy Land* 1986: 159–161, no. 78.

31) See the high and wide cylindrical fenestrated stand of the 10th-9th centuries B.C. from Tell Amal, Katz, Kahane, Broshi 1968: 74, fig. 58, on to which a bowl has been placed. In this case, however, its three small feet clearly show that this was not the normal position of the bowl, for the small feet were intended to guarantee it a stable base on the ground or a table in its common use. This fenestrated stand can be compared to another hollow, square one, also fenestrated and covered by a complex plastic decoration, *Treasures of the Holy Land* 1986: 161–162, no. 79.

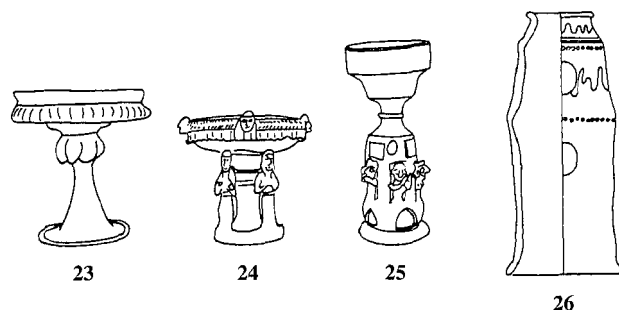
32) Niemeyer 1970: pl. 22; Stern 1980: 98, fig. 7:1.

33) Karageorghis 1969: pls. ix-x, from graves 47 e 23. Their height is 36 and 23 cm.

it is wider (Fig. 22). The receptacle placed on this elaborate support - in one case a wide basin with a narrow mouth, in the other a deep bowl with a straight profile - suggests a function different from that of burning aromas. Burning is certainly more suited to the wide, shallow bowls, which, depending on their proportions and capacity, may have served generically as containers and, when needed, as braziers for aromatic substances.

Stern has defined as Phoenician this stand crowned by a pendent floral tuft, reviving a hypothesis advanced by Albright³⁴⁾. Though its diffusion in the Punic colonies³⁵⁾ connects the samples of the western Mediterranean with a Phoenician origin, the pendent tuft is also part of the common repertoire of Syrian handicraft, as well as Phoenician (especially in ivory furniture). Moreover, the general shape, without the floral tuft, is much older in the Near East, where it is produced in different media, including stone. In the case of exceptional objects, such as a stone bowl of Gudea³⁶⁾, a similar use is suggested. But in the 3rd millennium B.C. the same shape dominates in pottery, with the typical stemmed dishes or fruit stands, the wide bowls or dishes on high flaring stands decorated with applied patterns so common in the Early Dynastic funerary furnishings³⁷⁾. The same shape in pottery is still widespread even later, from Syria to Iran³⁸⁾. However, in these cases, which are more common and of less precious material, no use as censer has been proposed.

Therefore, the fact that this shape is so common and widespread raises the possibility of its relative indefiniteness of function and leads one to wonder if the use of these artifacts as incense-burners may have not been exclusive, since the term is rarely supported by documentary evidence in the form of traces of fire. If the formal designation of bowl on high stand is too generic, the common functional one of incense-burner might also be more cautiously replaced with that of offering-bowl, for the very aroma to be burnt can be included among the offerings, a practice which the classical sources show was very frequent in the Orient, confirming at the same time that it may have required the use of a bowl. On the one hand, Ctesias (I.9.8) mentions two large perfume-bowls of a weight of 300 talents each, on the altar of Zeus Belus in Babylon; on the other, a pyraeum with deep-footed cup very similar to the Asiatic examples burns, in the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean, among the furnishings of scenes in which centaurs and little amorini are active³⁹⁾.



Figs. 23–26 Censors; not to scale.

34) Stern 1980: 96–98; Albright 1942.

35) Blazquez 1975. See for example the wide bronze bossed bowl of the beginning of the 8th century B.C., with flaring stem and pendent tuft from Cerro del Peñón (Malaga), Niemeyer, Schubart 1965; Niemeyer 1970: pl.21; Stern 1980: 98, fig.8; Gehrig, Niemeyer 1990: 214, no.196 (our Fig. 23). It can be compared to the wide ceramic bowl of the 7th century B.C., perhaps from Rhodes, decorated with masks, and with a stand surrounded by four caryatids, Gehrig, Niemeyer 1990: 191, no.148 (our Fig. 24). Apart from the specific decoration, the shape of these bowls finds a close parallel at the geographical and chronological antipodes, in Bronze age Bactria: Sarianidi 1977: fig.70 (metal bowl with straight profile on high cylindrical stem and flaring base).

36) André Salvini 1992.

37) Moon 1988.

38) Thureau-Dangin, Dunand 1936: 100, fig.29, pl.xxiii; Vanden Berghe 1959: pls.11:d (Tepe Hisar), 50 (Tall-i Djari A, Tall-i Bakun culture), 145:e,f (Hasanlu). Cf. the stone footed plates from the Treasury at Persepolis, Schmidt 1957: pls.57-58.

39) Masson, Pugačenkova 1982, 39, fig.7 (Reinach 1909, 73).

The variant of the fenestrated stand attested to by the Ashdod censer quoted above (Fig. 25) is a minor version of the large stands which were placed on the floor to support offerings in the temples. However, even in the case of the tell al-Rimah stands (Fig. 26)⁴⁰⁾, which are particularly significant for the clarity of their finding-context in the cella of the Neo-Assyrian temple, there are no hints as to whether the ritual object they were intended to support was a bowl, a basin or some other item⁴¹⁾. A bowl for burning incense is a reasonable possibility, considering the discoloration by fire in a bowl of the 12th century B.C. from Megiddo, which was fixed to the support with a pin⁴²⁾. However, the fact that the tell al-Rimah stands were found grouped together points once more towards the relative indefiniteness of function of the shape in itself, and in particular towards the possibility that, even in the case of a bowl being supported by each stand, this may have served different functions or actions in each particular case⁴³⁾.

4. Pyraeums and offering-stands of Hellenized Asia

On the basis of the evidence, the censer on high flaring stand, complete with all its distinctive features, and especially that of the lid, does not seem to survive for long after the Achaemenian empire. We find a last adaptation of it in Egypt towards the end of the 4th century B.C., portrayed in the reliefs of the Petosiris grave (Fig. 13)⁴⁴⁾. The slender trumpet-stem has not changed, but the tuft is here replaced by an elaborate capital in the shape of an open lotus-blossom supporting four protomas of horses, while the high round lid on the plate is finished with a finial in the form of a kneeling winged figure. Despite the absence of original documents or representations - these only concern sacred ceremonies -, the possibility remains open that the use of the incense-burner with lid may have continued at court or in private milieus. In any case, the history of the stemmed model by no means ends with the Achaemenids. Quite the contrary, it is especially in Hellenized Asia that it attained great success, though in the variant of the pyraeum without lid.

In fact, items which are not included within the type with flaring stand are not as common⁴⁵⁾; and the representations offer a very ample illustration of the model with flaring stem in different proportions, from variants in which the stand is particularly developed to variants of symmetrical, almost biconical shape. The use context is here limited to the religious milieu, where variants with small bowls or deep cups are especially employed in the ceremonies, whereas the original objects show that variants with wide bowls also keep alive this characteristic multifunctional shape of the ancient Orient.

In this period too, the bowls on high flaring stands are normally called censers or incense-burners, despite the absence of traces of fire. Metal bowls of small size on high foot were found in Greek, Saka and Parthian levels of Taxila-Sirkap (Figs. 27–30). The receptacle has different shapes: cylindrical, hemispherical, or that of a round basin; the stand varies from the cylindrical stem on flat base or foot, to the wide cylinder, to the cone⁴⁶⁾. Although these features are not specifically functional to the use proposed, it is nonetheless legitimate to put forward this possibility, for similar features, individually or

40) Oates 1974: pls.xxviii:1, xix:3 (offering stands). They continue an ancient Mesopotamian tradition of the 2nd and 3rd millennia.

41) Oates 1974: 180 reports that traces indicating the existence of a brazier or altar, though not of the shape in question, were clear on the surface of a brick sunken into the floor of the antecella.

42) Pritchard 1954: 319, fig.583; Oates 1974: 181. For other stands of the 12th–11th centuries B.C., see Pritchard 1954: 319–329, figs. 582, 584–585.

43) At Tarquinia, for example, a holmos is placed on a large perforated pottery stand of the end of the 8th - beginning of the 7th centuries B.C., Gehrig, Niemeyer 1990: 182, no.129.

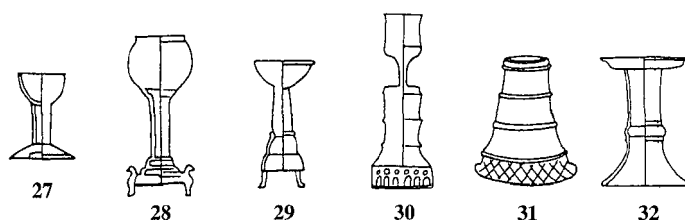
44) Lefebvre 1924: pls.8–9; Goldman 1991: pl.xviii:G. The objects painted in a tomb of the Seleucid period at Marisa have been interpreted as candelabra by Peters and Thiersch 1905, as cressets by Albright 1942, who compares their structure to that of the Phoenician censers. The finial of the richly elaborated stem might perhaps be an incense-bowl with lid.

45) For example, an iron object of the 2nd–3rd centuries A.D. from Garni in Armenia with little conical bowl on simple tripod and high, slender faceted stem is called a candlestick, and its general type is undoubtedly that of the Roman candlesticks. See Arakeljan 1976: 86, pl.cv:2.

46) Marshall 1951, 596, n.324–327, pl.176; Dar 1984, pl.xviii:a.

in association, characterize on the formal level the whole group of incense-burners and pyraeums on high stands.

In this period too, a ceremonial use has been sometimes proposed for similar furnishings, particularly in the Near East. The nature of this use is shown more explicitly by the term 'altar', which designates three bronze examples of the 1st-2nd centuries A.D. from the wādī Ḍura', in South Arabia. They have a wide bowl on a high cylindrical stand with torus moulding, below which the base flares in a trumpet shape (Fig. 32)⁴⁷⁾. The term is certainly appropriate for the censers depicted in religious scenes, such as the pyraeum with wide conical stand, wide squared bowl with a toothed or festooned rim and a little joint of similar shape and decoration, incised between two eagles on a small silver plaque of the middle or the second half of the 3rd century B.C., of Iranian provenance (Fig. 67)⁴⁸⁾. It is also appropriate where there is an influence of architectural forms, as in the stone trumpet stand of Nabataean milieu⁴⁹⁾ without base crowned by a Ionic capital. The finding of the South-Arabian examples in graves, however, should caution us against abusing sacral terms, for these models may certainly have originally served either as small altars, in a sacred as well as in a domestic context, or for secular purposes, the choice ultimately lying with the utilizers.



Figs. 27–32 Censers; not to scale.

The majority of the original artifacts known today are apparently concentrated in the eastern regions of Hellenized Asia, and are made of pottery. At Taxila⁵⁰⁾ they have a high foot or support (Figs. 33–34), and relate to incense more than to other offerings, but the function of censer is acknowledged even in the case of a bowl of Parthian age, which has no stand, though it does have a loop handle connecting rim and base⁵¹⁾. In Central Asia, this model seems to have been particularly popular, from the Parthian period to the Islamic conquest, perhaps because of the predilection that local pottery showed from the Bronze age onwards for the footed bowl or goblet, which sometimes developed in a rather high stand⁵²⁾.

The range of variation of these objects commonly described as censers is considerable. One from Erkurgan, in Sogdiana (3rd-4th centuries A.D.), is richly ornate in the incision and application techniques. It has a very deep bowl and trumpet stand with the characteristic decorated joint and a very protruding disc crowning it in an original way, which evokes the idea of a table (Fig. 35)⁵³⁾. A deep bowl, though smaller, and conical fenestrated stand of old ancient-oriental type is shown by a censer of the 6th century A.D. from Balalyk-tepe in Bactria (Fig. 36)⁵⁴⁾. The height of these objects, which are

47) Breton, Bāfāqīh 1993: nos. 39–41, pls.28:84–85. S.Tassinari, in Breton, Bāfāqīh 1993: 50, compares them to an example from Pompei, though without suggesting a provenance from Campania.

48) Dupont-Sommer 1964: 119–132; Gnoli 1995. From the centre of the bowl a dome with high incisions protrudes: a conventional though realistic representation of the fire, different from the rayed dome of Assyrian tradition.

49) Glueck 1965: 229, pl.191.

50) Marshall 1951: 421, nos.130–132, pl.125.

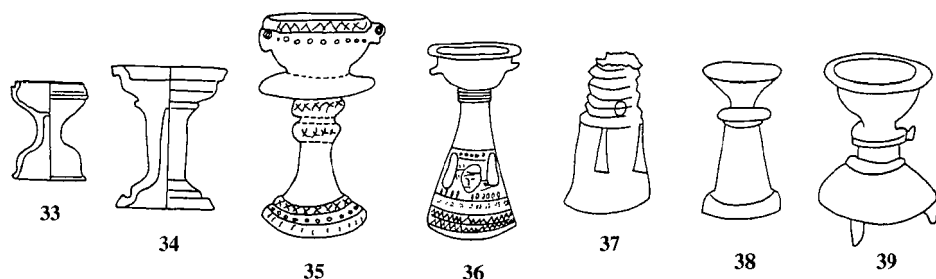
51) The hypothesis that the bowls, 421, nos.133–134, pl.125, were drinking cups is rejected in favour of that of censers.

52) Compare for example the bowls on high flaring stands, Sarianidi 1977: 97–110, fig.25, with the common footed goblets, figs.23–25.

53) *Culture of ancient Uzbekistan* 1991, vol.1: 182, no.287 (h. 30 cm).

54) *Culture of ancient Uzbekistan*, 1991, vol.2: 11, no.361 (h. 33.5 cm). An older fenestrated stand (2nd-3rd centuries A.D.) was found, without the bowl, at Dalverzin-tepe in Bactria: *Antiquities of southern Uzbekistan* 1991: 263, no.58 (present h. 17.5 cm) (our Fig.37).

among the highest in the region, reaches about 30 cm, and marks them out as portable furnishings. Others are even smaller, such as those from the Sogdian necropolis of Orlat (2nd-3rd centuries A.D.) (Fig. 38)⁵⁵, from Kampyr-tepe (1st-2nd centuries A.D.) (Fig. 39)⁵⁶, and from Kul-tepe (2nd-3rd centuries A.D.)⁵⁷. Kampyr-tepe has produced a considerable series of footed bowls of small size, sometimes almost in miniature, interpreted as censers. The bowl is deep, hemispherical or conical; the stand has a more or less elaborate structure and may be reduced to a wide flaring foot or two discs, possibly on small feet (Figs. 40–42)⁵⁸.



Figs. 33–39 Censers; not to scale.

Many Central Asian artifacts are actually fabricated in separate parts which were mounted together before baking, and it is likely that objects made up of separate parts existed in materials other than pottery. The production process in separate parts partly explains the frequency of joints and double discs separated by grooves, with profiles which preserve acute shapes that suggest the influence of metal prototypes. Probably metal pyraeums are also portrayed in Gandhāran art: a low pyraeum with a small bowl on a series of wide discs deeply separated on a square base with small feet burns in a lamentation scene around the coffin of the Buddha⁵⁹.

It must, however, be repeated that, in general, the use of the individual actual objects as pyraeums is rarely proven, and that, on the contrary, even where there are traces of fire this interpretation, which is common today, must be balanced against that preferred at the beginning of the great Soviet archaeological expeditions in Central Asia, when very similar objects, though possibly of less careful workmanship, were defined sometimes as candlesticks, sometimes as censers. A 'candlestick' from Pendjikent⁶⁰ has a cylindrical stand on a hemispherical base and a bowl with a straight profile (Fig. 43); one from Altyn-asar in Chorasmia (Fig. 44)⁶¹ has a high cylindrical stand on a disc-base and a hemispherical bowl decorated by four bosses on its rim. In other cases the cylindrical stand is marked by simple decorations, ribbing or more or less protruding rings⁶², while even conical fenestrated stands are still in production, following very old Oriental models⁶³.

55) *Antiquities of southern Uzbekistan* 1991: 307, no.246 (h. 19 cm), with wide bowl connected to the conical stand by a very projecting disc.

56) *Antiquities of southern Uzbekistan* 1991: 284, no.151 (h.15 cm). The stand with three small feet and the bowl on a foot are balanced in a biconical pattern with a concave joint at the centre. Cf. the fragmentary example of the same site and age, *ibidem*: 288, no.169 (h. 11.6 cm). The biconical proportions are reminiscent of those of the small altar or pyraeum placed on the high stepped altar on which the Cybele priest depicted on the silver plate from Ai Khanum sacrifices, Francfort 1984: pl.xli. A libation of liquid seems by contrast to be performed on the small biconical altar of similar shape of a relief from Bard-e Neshandeh, Ghirshman 1976: 22, fig.11, tav.xiii.

57) *Antiquities of southern Uzbekistan* 1991: 304, no.236 (h. 19.2 cm). The bowl is wide and deep, the conical stand on high smooth ring is opened by wide windows.

58) *Antiquities of southern Uzbekistan* 1991: 286–287, nos.160, 162, 163 (h. 13.8, 7.9 e 8 cm respectively).

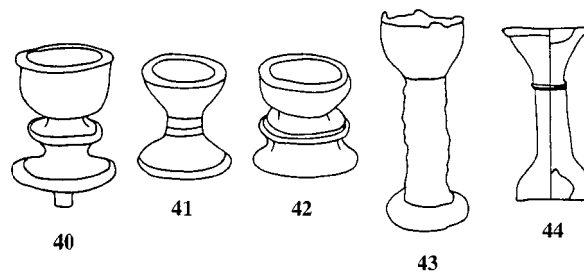
59) Lyons, Ingholt 1957: fig.144.

60) Bentovič 1957: 142, fig.10.

61) Tolstov 1952: 22, fig.11: v. Similar patterns are known in Bronze-age Bactria: Sarianidi 1977: fig.23.

62) Bol'shakov 1964: 105, fig.10; Staviskij 1964: 170, fig.30; Raspopova 1960: 154, fig.5:3, 20.

63) Bentovič 1964:288, fig.28:5–6.



Figs. 40–44 Censors; not to scale.

5. Pyraeums and offering-stands of Hellenized Asia (representations)

While the original artifacts are usually made of pottery, the representations of pyraeums suggest the common use of more valuable materials, such as metal, for the objects usually employed in religious ceremonies. These objects are among the finest handicraft products of Hellenized Asia and in the individual examples variously produce a blend of western and eastern traditions. Among the scenes portrayed in art, the sacrifice performed by Conon painted on the walls of the temple of Bel at Dura Europos in the last quarter of the 2nd century A.D.⁶⁴⁾ is particularly informative. Two priests in simple white tunics accomplish a similar rite: the one on the right holds in his left hand a bowl painted red inside and two knives, and throws a substance that we may imagine to be incense into the flames of a pyraeum with his right hand. The priest on the left holds a small jug in addition to the bowl and knives, while his right hand assumes the same attitude as that of his colleague.

The two pyraeums have the same deep narrow cup, whereas the details of the structure of the high stand differ: in one case this is a high, narrow cylinder on a flaring base, encircled by a number of rings (Fig. 46); in the one on the left (Fig. 45) we again find the typical high conical base of the Achaemenid incense-burner, though this is now fluted vertically instead of horizontally, and flares at the bottom in a smooth band on small feet. A smooth round element between two ribbed ones connects stand and bowl. As in the Achaemenid pyraeum, the principle of the symmetry of the upper and lower parts of the stand is basically respected. Cumont interpreted the painting as representing blue-green glazed pottery pyraeums; indeed, the excavations carried out later at Dura by Yale University brought to light a number of small pyraeums of this material so characteristic of the Parthian age⁶⁵⁾. However, the deeply articulated shapes, the sharp profiles, and the small feet of the left Conon pyraeum are particularly consonant with a metal object⁶⁶⁾, the more so because the models of the pottery pyraeums themselves are sometimes to be sought elsewhere, in toreutics and even in stone sculpture.

The pyraeum drawn on a pottery fragment of the 2nd century A.D. from Assur (Fig. 47)⁶⁷⁾, from which two lines of smoke or flames rise, is also probably intended to be of metal. It has in common with that of Conon the slim feet (only two are represented) supporting the smooth band of the wide base (here with a straight profile), and the conical shape of the stand, crowned by a smooth joint which, together with a low cylinder, supports a small bowl with a wide flaring rim. The horizontal treatment of the surfaces and the simple joint to the bowl of the Assur pyraeum clearly connect it with Achaemenian prototypes. A tall copper flaring stand from Taxila (Fig. 31)⁶⁸⁾ with its surface divided into bands by ribs gives us a clearer idea of the appearance of the Assur censor. However, the memory of the typical

64) Breasted 1924: 80–81, pls.ix, xi; Cumont 1926: 46–48, pls.xxxii, xxxv; Ghirshman 1962: 46, fig.59; Perkins 1973: 36–41, pl.10.

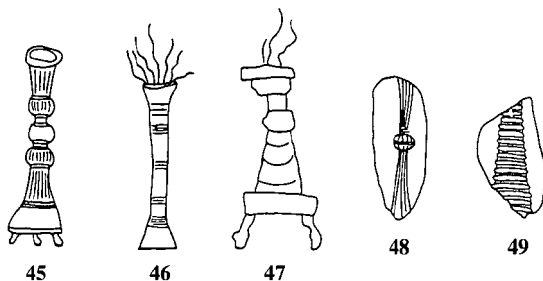
65) Rostovtzeff 1938: 46, pl.viii:1. Cf. Invernizzi forthcoming.

66) Perkins 1973: 40, suggests silver for both pyraeums, which have the same cold bright blue colour connected by Cumont with glaze.

67) Ghirshman 1962: 47, fig. 60.

68) Marshall 1951: 596, no.327a, pl.184. A conical stand of thin bronze sheet decorated by horizontal incisions was found also at Masjidi Sulaiman; its base is closed by a concave applied sheet (Ghirshman 1976: pl.60:GMIS 291). Its small height (9.4 cm) makes it possible that it was simply a small model. In any case its employment possibilities are various.

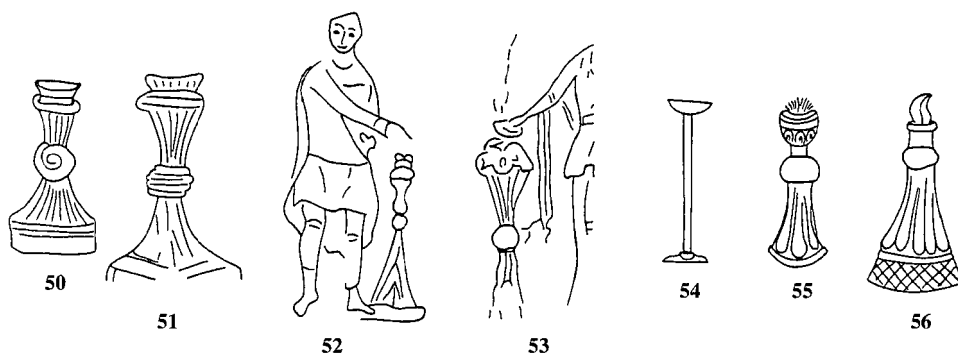
Achaemenian treatment, so different from the vertical modelling popular in Hellenized Asia, is particularly clear in a fragment of mural painting from the naos of the temple of Zeus Theos at Dura, which preserves part of the ribbed flaring stand of a metal pyraeum (Fig. 49)⁶⁹.



Figs. 45–49 Censers; not to scale.

The two articles of the Conon sacrifice, according to the original interpretation, serve different purposes. While the flames of the pyraeum to the right are represented in black, a branch is represented to the left in the copy of the painting, and Cumont thought it to be a reed to be used as a sprinkler for lustrations⁷⁰. This interpretation was abandoned later⁷¹, for the whole Durene painting testifies to both variants of pyraeum being used for the same purpose. The richer version, with a conical stand, is portrayed again in the same temple in the Lysias sacrifice⁷², and, with only one joint instead of three, in the Otes sacrifice (Fig. 50)⁷³ and in that performed by the tribune Terentius (Fig. 51)⁷⁴; the simpler model, with a cylindrical stem, in panel II of the same hall frescoed by Conon⁷⁵. But this same action is very common elsewhere in Durene temples (Figs. 52–53)⁷⁶.

In face of such unanimous evidence, the rite of immersion of a branch in liquid would appear to be completely isolated. Also, the reconstruction of an analogous context for panel II lacks support because



Figs. 50–56 Censers; not to scale.

69) Brown 1939: 208, pl.xxiv:5. The fragment pl.xxiv:4 (our Fig. 48), by contrast, has a slim biconical stem with round joint at the centre.

70) Cumont 1926: 67. Cf. Breasted 1924: 80–81.

71) Perkins 1973: 40.

72) Cumont 1926: 76–84, pls.xliv–xlv; Perkins 1973, 41, pl.11: four officiants on pyraeums on the southern wall of the pronaos.

73) Cumont 1926: 122–134, pls.lv–lvi; Perkins 1973: 46, pl.13.

74) Breasted 1924: 96, pl.xxi; Cumont 1926: 89–101 (gold), pls.l–li; Perkins 1973: 43, pl.12.

75) Cumont 1926: 72–73, pls.xxxi, xli:2, xlii:1; Perkins 1973: pl.10.

76) Perkins 1973, 49, pl.14 (paintings of the naos of the Zeus Theos temple). See also the graffito with a sacrifice to Iarhibol in the Azzanathkona temple, Hopkins 1934b: 152–156, pl.xxxvi:1–3 (our Fig. 52); and the red ink drawing from the Azzanathkona temple showing a Tyche pouring incense (?) from a patera on the flame of a biconical pyraeum, Brown, Rostovtzeff, Welles 1936: 484–485, fig.32 (our Fig. 53). In another graffito a bowl on a very high stem with round base is interpreted as a goblet by Hopkins 1936: 124–125, fig.5 (our Fig. 54). However, its scale in respect to the figure which stands in front of it rather suggests a censer.

of the complete absence of traces of a branch⁷⁷). By contrast, it is significant that the rite is the same in a Roman military ceremony and in a local Semitic cult. The attitude of the hand, which is shown in back view, itself suggests an offering in the fire, and we may suppose that what is represented as a branch in the copy of the painting depicted flames in the original; or that a branch is being thrown into the flames (not represented or not preserved) instead of incense grains or powder. The evidence of the painting, on the other hand, is confirmed by sculpture, where we usually find the flames represented in relief. It is interesting to note here that the pyraeums of the Aphlad (Fig. 55)⁷⁸) and Nemesis (Fig. 56)⁷⁹) reliefs, both with small bowls on flaring supports and round joints, have surfaces carved by vertical grooves opening at the bottom in round petals, a typical mark of a metal furnishing. However, while in the Nemesis pyraeums the flames are realistically modelled in a twisted bundle, that of Aphlad continues the Assyrian representational convention: a dome in relief surrounded by a crown of short strokes incised on the background.

On the deep conical cup of the Terentius and Otes pyraeums, a straight flaring rim is so distinctly represented that, instead of the simple rim of the bowl, it might represent a shallow plate for the fire placed or fixed on the cup ending of the biconical stand. Older originals, such as that from Tell eš Şafi discussed above, lend some support to this hypothesis, which is even more likely for the large pyraeum of one of the reliefs of the Bel temple at Palmyra (Fig. 57)⁸⁰), where an elaborate stand has a conical cup ending, less deep than at Dura, on which a deep bowl with straight and smooth walls is placed.

The Dura documents find excellent and frequent parallels at Palmyra, where the officiants sacrifice in analogous scenes on very similar pyraeums from which plastically represented flames rise (Figs. 58–64). The representational contexts vary: sometimes the sacrificant with his pyraeum is at the centre⁸¹); sometimes the pyraeum alone is represented, in front or between the gods, with no dedicant⁸²); sometimes the sacrificants form a pair⁸³). The braziers are shallow plates⁸⁴) or deep bowls⁸⁵); the joints may be absent⁸⁶) or bear a decoration⁸⁷), take the shape of a disc⁸⁸) or be multiple mouldings⁸⁹); the stands are grooved in the shape of a petal crown, possibly on a small smooth band⁹⁰) or be conical stems⁹¹); to these small feet⁹²) or more or less elaborate square bases on small feet⁹³) can be added. These are all variations on the same metal pyraeum pattern, which is also attested at Hatra, where the sacrifice to the standard on

77) According to Breasted 1924: 90 and Cumont 1926: 73, the branch is simply no longer traceable.

78) Perkins 1973: 77–79, pl.31; Downey 1977: 7–9, no.1; Colledge 1977: pl.33.

79) Perkins 1973: 89–90, pl.36; Downey 1977: 29–31, no.9.

80) Tanabe 1986: pl.45.

81) Sacrifice to the rider gods Abgal and Ashar (154 A.D.), Ghirshman 1962: fig.86; Colledge 1976: pl.43; Tanabe 1986: pl.136 (our Fig. 63).

82) Tanabe 1986: pl.137 (rider god from Khirbet Ramadan; our Fig. 62); Colledge 1976: 45, fig.26 (goddess and rider god from Djub el-Jarrah).

83) Tanabe 1986: pl.53 (relief from the temple of Bel; our Fig. 58).

84) Colledge 1976: pls.39 (relief of the 3rd century from the Palmyrene with Allat and the Sun), 41 (relief of 225 A.D. from Wadi el-Miyah with five gods), 42 (relief with dedication to the god Malka, 263 A.D.), 43, 44 (relief of the guardian spirits of Bet-Phasi'el, 191 d.C.), fig.26; Tanabe 1986: pls.58 (dedication to the god Abgal, 199d.C.; our Fig. 64), 103 (offering to five gods from Qum es-Salabikh, 225 A.D.; our Fig. 59), 116 (relief with dedication to the god Malka, 263 A.D.), 128 (sacrifice to Allat from Khirbet el-Sane; our Fig. 61), 134 (relief with Hercules-Nergal from the Tetracylon surroundings; our Fig. 60), 136 (our Fig. 63), 137 (our Fig. 62).

85) Tanabe 1986, pl.45 (relief of the Bel temple); 107 (sacrifice to five gods from al-Maqate, with very large bowl).

86) Colledge 1976: pls. 39, 42, 43; Tanabe 1986: pls.58 (our Fig. 64), 116, 136 (our Fig. 63).

87) Tanabe 1986: pls.53 (our Fig. 58), 134 (our Fig. 60).

88) Tanabe 1986: pls.107, 128 (our Fig. 61), 137 (our Fig. 62).

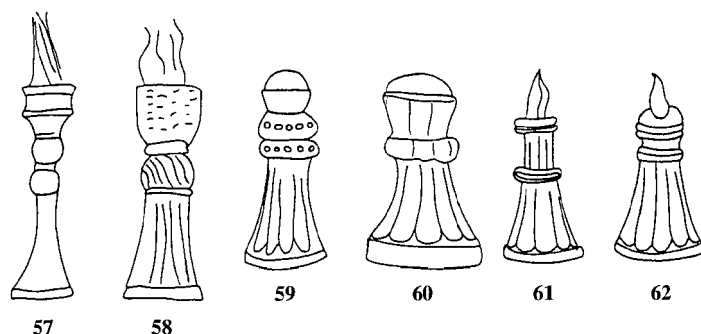
89) Colledge 1976: pls.41, 44, fig.26; Tanabe 1986: pls.45, 53 (our Fig. 58), 103 (our Fig. 59).

90) Colledge 1976: pls.39, 41, 43, fig.26; Tanabe 1986: pls.53 (our Fig. 58), 58 (our Fig. 64), 103 (our Fig. 59), 107 (very wide), 128 (our Fig. 61), 134 (our Fig. 60), 136 (our Fig. 63), 137 (our Fig. 62).

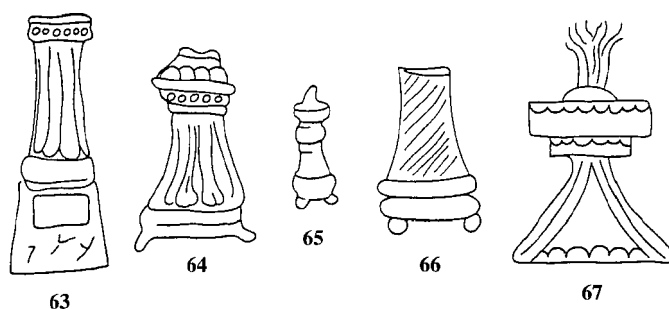
91) Colledge 1976: pl. 42; Tanabe 1986: pl.116.

92) Colledge 1976: fig.26; Tanabe 1986: pl.128 (our Fig. 61).

93) Colledge 1976: pl.43; Tanabe 1986: pls.58 (our Fig. 64), 136 (our Fig. 63).



Figs. 57–62 Censers; not to scale.



Figs. 63–67 Censers; not to scale.

a stele with a frame in the shape of an aedicula⁹⁴) shows a rather squat pyraeum (Fig. 65), and a second fragmentary sculpture⁹⁵) a stand with twisted flutings (Fig. 66).

Apart from the example portrayed on the silver plate discussed above (Fig. 67), Iranian pyraeums can also be placed alongside the Syro-Mesopotamian ones. In Elymais, at Masjid-i Sulaiman⁹⁶), a personage with a horn of plenty stretches out his hand over a stemmed pyraeum built out of a succession of cushion shapes. In a second relief these shapes are placed in more regular symmetry with respect to the centre⁹⁷). The proportions of these pyraeums are rather squat, but their structure can be easily recognized as a variant closer to the type of the Conon sacrifice than to that of the Assur drawing.

Later, in Sasanian Iran, and farther to the east, in the Kushan empire, the frequency of original objects in Central Asia is echoed by the occasional presence on coins of a pyraeum which can be referred to our group. As a rule, the type of the reverse of the Sasanian coins is a fire altar with a column or pillar on a stepped base, supporting a stepped table on which flames burn (Fig. 68). In the late Sasanian coins, however, this pattern is changed into a much more slender biconical construction reminiscent of the metal artifacts of our group, where the two-stepped base and table are connected by domed elements symmetrically opposed to the extremely narrow centre tied by two ribbons (Figs. 69–70)⁹⁸). On the obverse of the Kushan coins, by contrast, the king is usually represented standing in the attitude of performing a sacrifice on an altar of varying shapes. Occasionally, it takes the shape of a biconical

94) Safar, Muhammad Ali Mustafa 1974: 148–149, no.139.

95) Safar, Muhammad Ali Mustafa 1974: 298, no.298.

96) Ghirshman 1976: 124, pl.lxxix:2 and pl.32:35.

97) Ghirshman 1976: pl.lxxix:4 e 33:165. In the text, 126–127, Ghirshman's tendency is to separate this pyraeum from the Syrian ones as a different type.

98) Göbl 1971, tables xi-xiii, from Khosrow I.

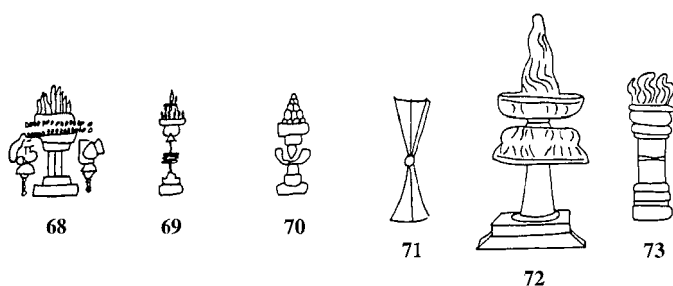
metal pyraeum (Fig. 71)⁹⁹ not very different from the examples we have discussed (cf. Figs. 48, 50–51).

A number of early Sasanian issues are also of particular importance because on the upper table of the altar is placed a brazier with animal legs, while two small offering stands are placed on the ground to both sides of it, immediately below the paw legs¹⁰⁰. These stands have the shape of a bowl on a high stand or foot, covered by a dome which represents the lid or the substance overflowing the bowl. In any case, these bowls are not flaming, and therefore prove that this pattern could be used for containing as well as for burning offerings.

In Gandhāran art, this type of pyraeum is often adapted to the local culture by the addition of significant details. The pyraeum represented in a relief from the sacred area of Butkara¹⁰¹, for example, has a wide shallow bowl from which a high twisted flame rises, and which is supported by a flaring stand on a low, wide stepped base (Fig. 72). However, instead of the small joint in shape of a round joint or torus widespread from the Near East to Central Asia, the stand is crowned just below the brazier by a kind of double umbrella carved with a lotus-flower pattern.

A number of Gandhāran reliefs show at the base of a large image of the Buddha a typical small devotional scene, in which an altar burns between two kneeling worshippers. Sometimes, the structure of this sacred furnishing seems influenced by architectural patterns, as in the case of a relief probably from Jamālgarhī¹⁰², where the stand is a squat column with a double-plinth base and a low capital of the same profile as the bowl, though in reverse (Fig. 73). More often, it is our typical flaring stand, though an architectural influence might be detected here too. Though a classification among the bowls on high flaring stands is also suggested by, among other factors, the wide diffusion of this type throughout Hellenized Asia, a close relation to architectural elements can nevertheless be noted. On the one hand, the structure of the stand can be very similar to that of the columns of the small framing arcades of the reliefs, which are considerably tapered. On the other, the round joints are often replaced by a characteristic large feature of which the profile can be compared to that of a reverse hemispherical bowl or an umbrella. Its function as a high capital is also supported by a similarity with the capitals of these small framing columns¹⁰³.

This typical joint in the form of a reverse bowl or umbrella is found again in the scene at the base of the fasting Siddhārta in the Lahore Museum¹⁰⁴, on a slender flaring stand with ringed shaft (Fig. 74). Here



Figs. 68–73 Censers; not to scale.

99) See the table of altars, Göbl 1984: pl.viii:17.

100) Göbl 1971, tables vi–viii (Shapur II-Yazdegerd I). It must be noted that in the rites of the modern zoroastrianism the fire burns in a deep footed goblet of metal placed on a low stone table: see *Zarathustra* 1993, figs. p.72 (vessel of the perpetual fire), and p.24 (vessel of the fire in the haoma ceremony, this fire being also fed with incense, p.79). This shape is apparently not attested in antiquity as a fire altar but is clearly related to the bowls on flaring stands portrayed on these coins beside the proper altar and particularly widespread in the Iranian Central Asian world. It may be thought that the late Sasanian type of fire altar represents an intermediary step towards the adoption in modern times of the footed goblet as a fire altar.

101) Faccenna 1962, pl.cccx.

102) Rosenfield 1967, pl.92.

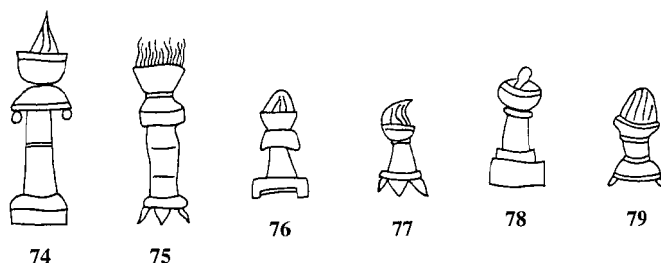
103) Compare, for example, the pyraeum Lyons, Ingholt 1957, fig.153 (our Fig. 76), which Francfort 1984, 83 also considers a pyraeum (of metal) with high flaring stand, with the capitals of the small columns of the relief Lyons, Ingholt, fig.156.

104) Lyons, Ingholt: 1957, fig.52.

however, the flaring round, thick base clearly exclude a connection with architectural mouldings. The pyraeum of a scene of the distribution of relics (Fig. 76)¹⁰⁵ has the same typical joint, while the flaring stand is supported by a square base on small feet. When the bowl is directly supported by the stand, without the interposition of the reverse bowl joint, as in the case of a teaching Buddha¹⁰⁶, it is even more clearly defined as a flaring stand (Fig. 77), while its non-architectural toothed base, suggesting a metal artifact, points to a mixture of different influences.

This same toothed base is encountered again in a small Lahore relief¹⁰⁷, where the pyraeum has the same height as the worshippers standing at its sides (Fig. 75). The toothed pattern is reminiscent of the small feet of the metal pyraeums represented in Dura and Palmyra, as well as of the crenellation of a few small bronze bowls from Dura and Hatra¹⁰⁸. The stand does not flare here but takes the shape of a slender, powerful round pillar and is crowned by a joint which has the same reverse profile as the large deep burning bowl. In the small relief on the base of a Siddhārta in meditation in the Peshawar Museum¹⁰⁹ the pyraeum also has feet, though much smaller ones, as in the metal pyraeums from the western Parthian regions, but the joint on the very short shaft has almost the same reverse profile as the flaming bowl. When the stand has no joint (Fig. 78), as in the case of the flaring stand on the base of a Maitreya in meditation at Lahore¹¹⁰, the similarity with the western Parthian artifacts is even closer.

Especially characteristic is the variant attested by pre-Islamic Sogdian painting. Of a scene in Varakhsha¹¹¹, a figure with rayed head and one of smaller size are preserved, kneeling at each side of a pyraeum which differs from the Durene ones only in the thin square fringed plane interposed between the round joint of the high conical stand and the deep cup from which flames rise (Fig. 80). This fitting might be a service table or a protection against the sparks. The use context shown by mural paintings in Pendjikent confirms that here too, as in the Parthian world, this furnishing is employed in sacred rites. In room 7 of Building III (Fig. 81)¹¹², a figure kneels on the ground at the side of another figure of gigantic dimensions and in front of a pyraeum lacking its upper end, but clearly corresponding to the Varakhsha one even in its fringed table. In a niche of room 24 of Building VII (Fig. 82)¹¹³, the altar held in the hand of a small figure kneeling at the side of a large god in Indian attitude has, by contrast, a



Figs. 74–79 Censers; not to scale.

105) Lyons, Ingholt 1957, fig.153.

106) Lyons, Ingholt 1957, pl.xxi:4. Cf. also Lyons, Ingholt 1957, fig.232 (our Fig. 79), where a very squat cylindrical shaft connects the base with small feet to the wide bowl which has the same reverse profile of the base.

107) Lyons, Ingholt 1957, fig.478.

108) Hopkins 1934a, 49, pl.xxiii:3; Safar, Muhammad Ali Mustafa 1974, 172, n.164; Invernizzi 1996.

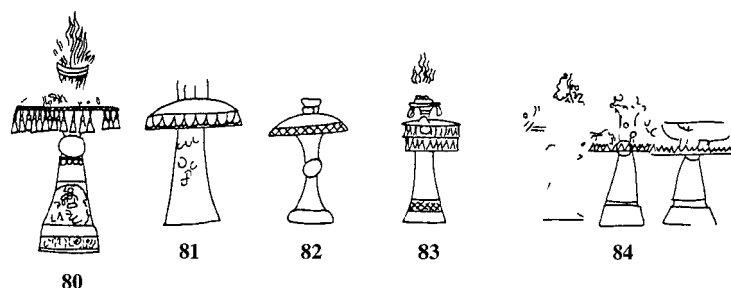
109) Lyons, Ingholt 1957, fig.284.

110) Lyons, Ingholt 1957, fig.261, 302. That this kind of pyraeum is portable is shown by reliefs such as those from Butkara, Faccenna 1962, pls.cliv, clxxi, representing donors carrying a flaming pyraeum in their hands. The object pl.cliv has a moulded base and top, and a plate with a thick bundle of twisted flames, while the hand of the donor conceals completely the shaft of the column or possibly cylindrical stand of the pyraeum.

111) Šiškin, 1963, pl.xiv.

112) *Živopis' Pjandžikenta* 1954: pls.xxvi, xxviii; Belenickij 1973: Fig. p.16 (altar).

113) Belenickij 1973: Fig. p.30.



Figs. 80–84 Censors; not to scale.

convex table.

It seems, moreover, to be particularly significant that in room 10 of Building I (Fig. 83)¹¹⁴ a similar pyraeum is inserted in the festive context of a banquet in which numerous personages take part, squatting on carpets. Apparently, in late-antique Sogdiana - and probably elsewhere - the employment of this furniture was not limited to the temple, but included the palace, and probably in various ways, for the palace is the setting of a last scene painted in room 6 of Building III (Fig. 84)¹¹⁵, where three high conical stands with horizontal toothed tables are represented with different upper endings. It is likely that not all of these objects are pyraeums, and this is certain in the case of the better preserved one, which supports not a brazier but a large basin. The possibility of a different function of specimens suitably adapted from formally similar models, as has already been noted in the handicraft of the ancient Near East, can thus be extended to pre-Islamic Central Asia¹¹⁶.

In conclusion, the pyraeums or offering bowls on high flaring stands which are often called thymiateria according to the Greek style, are widespread all over Hellenized Asia. We may even speak of a *koiné* for them, since, beyond the specific regional traits, they apparently have a similar structure and use everywhere, and are often portrayed also functioning as altars. They seem to be produced by preference in light materials, such as metal or pottery, so that they can be easily transported, being mostly of small dimensions. From this point of view they are closely related to other furnishings with the same purpose, which are more definitely portable and show a wider range of formal variations¹¹⁷. In their use, they are also close to a different class of objects of parallelepiped, pillar or column shape, normally called altars even when flames connote them as pyraeums. These last objects actually find exclusive employment as altars, and in this function they are portrayed in the same contexts as the pyraeums on a high stand. Because of the absence of the lid both are clearly distinct in their use from the incense-burners, which may not be very different, however, in other formal aspects.

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114) *Živopis' Pjandžikenta* 1954: pl.vii.

115) Belenickij 1973: Fig. p.15.

116) Similar evidence is possibly provided also by Palmyra. In an archaic relief, Colledge 1976: 40, fig.20, the offering is performed on a deep bowl on trumpet stand with a large round rochetto, but no flames. However, in this case one may wonder whether at the early time of this carving the conventional rendering of the fire was already in common use in Palmyrene iconography.

117) Invernizzi 1996 and forthcoming.

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