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# A Golden Bowl from the Caspian Sea Region

Esmail Yaghmaei<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The study tries to discuss a Golden Bowl which is kept at the Mostazafan Foundation's Cultural Institution of Museum. Such bowls and vessels were primarily produced along the southern shores of the Caspian Sea, particularly in the Rudbar region, and later in Azerbaijan. In this article, the author studies this bowl based on iconography and argues that this was related to the first millennium BC.

**Keywords:** Golden Bowl; Caspian Region; Cultural Institution of Museum.

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## Introduction

The bowl is a splendid vessel featuring a central depression, adorned with three consecutive rows of antelope motifs, separated by two bands. Its base is simple, with a solitary twelve-feathered flower positioned at its center.

The weight of this bowl is 118.4 grams with a height of 11.7 cm. The opening has a diameter ranging from 12.8 cm to 7.8 cm, while the bottom measures 6.72 cm in diameter. The edge of the bowl is 0.8 cm thick.

The Bowl exhibits several distinct features, including:

- A plain strip, 2.3 mm wide, encircling the edge.
- A decorative strip in the form of spiral knots (chain weave), flanked by two prominent lines, each with a width of 0.6 mm.
- The first row showcases a sequence of eight mountain goats, all featuring identical patterns and sizes, with a width of 1.82 cm.
- Eight raised parallel lines, enclosed within two decorative bands measuring 2.3 mm in width.
- The middle row also displays eight mountain goats, mirroring the pattern and size of the first row, spanning 1.82 cm in width.
- Eight parallel raised lines, bordered by a decorative strip of spiral knots (chain weave) measuring 2.3 mm in width.
- The bottom row reveals another set of eight mountain goats, characterized by the same pattern and size, spanning a width of 1.9 cm. Beneath it lies a prominent straight line and a strip of spiral knots (chain weave),

akin to the first row, measuring 1.4 mm in width.

- Below the final band of chain knots, there is a slightly uneven hollow line, which represents the point where the bowl's bottom is attached to its edge, extending 6.5 mm from the groove to its base.

The entire external surface of the bowl underwent thorough microscopic examination multiple times, revealing no trace of any lines, seams, or welds. Similarly, as much of the bowl's inner surface as possible was examined with the naked eye, and no indications of seams were observed. Therefore, it can be unequivocally concluded that the bowl was crafted using the lost wax method (Also see Yaghmaei, 2023).

In this technique, the bowl is initially made and coated with natural bitumen or tar, followed by the application of a soft plaster to both its inner and outer surfaces. Time is allowed for the plaster to dry up and solidify. Once the plaster is hardened completely, molten gold is poured onto the two layers of plaster. The molten gold replaces the natural bitumen and fills the entire space within the bowl. In the final stage, the artist breaks the plaster molds, revealing the finished bowl, which is further enhanced through decorative painting.

Each strip on the bowl features eight mountain goats, resulting in a total of 24 engraved goats adorning its surface. Notably, the goats are depicted with their heads facing left. They possess long necks, open eyes, and short tails. As they are portrayed in profile, one cannot see their long crescent horns or ears in each depiction. The goats' extended necks and downward



Fig. 1. A Golden Bowl (Mostazafan Foundation's Cultural Institution of Museum)



Fig. 2. The Bottom of Golden Bowl (Mostazafan Foundation's Cultural Institution of Museum)

gaze suggest that they are engaged in grazing and searching for grass or plants.

While many goat depictions, particularly on pottery, exhibit liveliness, movement, and dynamism, the goats depicted on this bowl form a tranquil row devoid of motion or leaping. Their heads lowered, they appear fatigued and lethargic, prompting us to question the artist's intention behind portraying such calm goats. Given that goats are typically regarded as playful animals; it is intriguing to consider why the artist chose to depict them in this subdued manner.

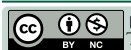
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### Conclusion

The production of such bowls and vessels primarily took place along the southern shores of the Caspian Sea, particularly in the Rudbar region, and later in Azerbaijan. Consequently, we associate this bowl with the findings from Goharderah, specifically the Marlik hills. Based on its characteristics, we propose a chronological placement for this bowl ranging from the first millennium BC to a few centuries thereafter.

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