

## **Item No. 139, Handled Bowl with Blade “The Chalice of Life and Death”**

### Description:

The main body of the artifact is a bowl, ten (10) centimeters in diameter, comprised of gold approximately five (5) millimeters thick. Two bronze handles are placed on opposite sides, each formed from two curved stems with a thinner straight bar between them. Material sampling suggests this straight bar was once covered by tropical wood native to the island, which formed the actual grip. A small flat disc is formed at the bottom, likely a practical element to allow the bowl to free-stand upright, while material condition suggests it was done during the casting process rather than affixed.

On the inside edge of the bowl, placed in line with the two handles, are a set of nickel blades. These are mounted into small bronze insets, with apparent care made to ensure that the blades did not fall out, nor be exposed enough to hazard fulcrum-point breakage. Each blade (and mount) are surrounded by a narrow reservoir that feeds downward into the body of the bowl, presumably to prevent spillage and/or wastage from the blades' cutting. These blades are also noted for being particularly sharp, suggesting regular maintenance prior to the temple's sealing, while the material composition has prevented corrosion.

The body of the bowl not occupied by the handles is given to several small bas reliefs, formed by stamping the metal outward from the inside of the bowl, seemingly depicting Alla'su. On one side, she is depicted with a cup, drinking its contents, with rudimentary plants growing in her wake as she presumably walks as she drinks. The opposite side is more vague, with Alla'su flanked by a pair of quadrupedal creatures that have no known record in any taxonomic database, nor do they resemble any fauna currently endemic to Selen or Dajorra as a whole. On this relief, she is shown holding a knife in one hand, and cradling a child in the other; the intent behind the imagery is unclear and could point to sacrifice, or the duality of the goddess' nature.

On multiple surfaces of the bowl's interior are reddish brown motes that were discovered to be dried blood. These are especially prevalent in the crevices around the blades, and in the finer details of the reliefs.

### Significance

Initial postulation suggested this might be a sacrificial bowl involving Selenian death rituals in keeping with Alla'su's dichotomous nature (that being goddess of life and death). However, reevaluation of the site, and comparison to known demographics in population, suggests that ancient Selenians took a more pragmatic approach. Rather than fully sacrifice an individual, select individuals were prompted to grab hold of a

single handle and place their arm across the bowl's width, thus placing both blades along the inside of their wrist/forearm. They would then cut themselves and drain sufficient blood so as to partially fill the bowl, but without killing the individual.

*Note: sampling of the blood notes has revealed that both male and female Selenians were subject to this practice, though it is difficult to determine if the ritual direction of the grip/cut varied between sexes.*

The current predominant hypothesis concerning its use was in a semi-annual renewal ceremony. Once the sacrificial blood had reached a certain volume, the officiating priest(ess) would take the chalice and imbibe its contents. Concepts diverge at this juncture:

*- One suggestion is that the blood was not ingested, but rather scattered on local fields and holy sites, either by manual sprinkling, or through spitting. This latter option is considered unlikely, as even modern Selenian culture views spitting, similarly to other cultures, as derogatory. This practice would, in theory, serve to placate the goddess and produce a bountiful harvest.*

*- Another option is that the blood was in fact ingested, and the divergence is more situated on the individual doing the ingesting. Some postulation that, while the priest(ess) may have officiated the ceremony, that the ingestion was done by a third "sacrifice" acting as an avatar of the goddess Alla'su. The fate of this actor in the ceremony is unknown, but the assumed frequency would make killing these avatars prohibitive.*

Other suggestions concerning the practice was that it was more situational, such as in the case of extreme illness, or as a baptismal feature to bring a newborn into Alla'su's good favor. It is alternatively postulated that, upon drinking the contents, the drinker was then physically killed as a sacrifice in triplicate (their blood and that of the two donors), though such an event would have been rare (estimated quinquennial or decennial).

Contemporary significance lies in potential clues toward ancient Selenian worship of Alla'su and the practices thereof, which has been considered a "dead" religion for at least a millennia, likely coinciding with the planet's exposure to extraplanetary life and interstellar travel. Further study is required of other finds of the Alla'su temple, which will hopefully divulge the more specific purpose and usage of the bowl/chalice, which has been dubbed (by grace of its imagery and subject matter" the *Chalice of Life and Death*.