

IMPERIAL GOLD FROM ANCIENT CHINA



ORIENTAL BRONZES LTD.

Christian DEYDIER



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Figure 28  
Illustrated on cover and on pages 69-70  
**SILVER AND PARCEL-GILT IMPERIAL CROWN**  
Liao Dynasty, 10th - 11th century AD  
Height: 16.6 cm.

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**IMPERIAL GOLD FROM ANCIENT CHINA**

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## FOREWORD

Since our exhibition 'Chinese Gold, Silver and Gilt Bronze up to the Tang Dynasty' in London in December 1985, interest in Chinese precious-metal objects has been further stimulated by the publication of important new archaeological finds and the availability of recently excavated pieces for study purposes. Our quest during the past five years to assemble the best surviving examples of Chinese gold and silver has been facilitated by access to these finds and the appearance at auction, prompted by escalating prices, of some outstanding examples from private collections. The transformation in the market has also resulted in the appearance of many spurious objects and others of mediocre quality. All this material has been meticulously examined, analysed and researched by us for our exhibition 'Ancient Chinese Gold' which introduces the most significant and important of our acquisitions, many of which originate from Liaoning Province.

I would like to express my gratitude to Elizabeth Knight and Louisa Ching for the production of this catalogue and Mr. Routhier (Studio Lourmel, Paris) who spent several days photographing each object.

I also wish to thank Simone and Alan Hartman, Robert H. Ellsworth and Anthony Carter for showing me remarkable examples which relate to the subject of the exhibition.

My special thanks to Cynthia Looker and Ming Wilson for their advice concerning the research and the translation of the difficult inscriptions on the Liao items.

Of the many others who have helped me in different ways in preparing the exhibition, I would like particularly to thank the following for their invaluable assistance: Prudence Cuming, Bon and Cy Dale, Anna Plowden and Martin Bale.

Finally, I am most grateful to my assistant Iola Lenzi, for helping me to write, research and organize the exhibition.

Christian DEYDIER

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Studio Lourmel, Paris

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the recent discoveries in China, the few books and articles devoted to ancient Chinese gold and silver have become, for the most part, obsolete. The following is an attempt to summarize the new evidence that has been made available in this specialized field.

In ancient Chinese texts the word *jin*, today translated as gold, was used to mean bronze. What we now call gold, was then called *huangjin*, or yellow bronze.

From the beginning of the history of China, under the Shang, Zhou and Han Dynasties, gold, or *huangjin*, was always an extremely rare material; so rare that the discovery in 95 BC of a gold deposit was recorded in the *Han Shu*, the official History of the Han.

### Shang Discoveries

Under the first three dynasties of the Xia (circa 2100-1600 BC), Shang (circa 1600-1111 BC) and Zhou (circa 1111-221 BC), metallurgy was dominated by the art of bronze. Gold objects were extremely expensive and rarely used for burials. Therefore, few gold or silver items datable from before the Han Dynasty have been found.

The first scientific discoveries of Shang Dynasty gold pieces were made in Anyang between 1928 and 1938. In the royal tombs of Hougang, small sheets of gold, shaped like petals, were found but the purpose of these sheets is still unknown. Shang burial sites at Liujiahe in Pingyu have also yielded gold ornaments.

More recently, in August 1977, the tomb at Liujiahe in the Pingyu district of Beijing yielded four gold objects: a hairpin with a square head measuring 27.7 cm and weighing 108 grammes; a triangular shaped earring, and a pair of bracelets echoing the shape of the earring and with a circumference of 12.5 cm. These objects are all composed of 85% pure gold, and 15% silver and bronze. This find is without doubt the most important to date for Shang gold; such a concentration of gold objects in one tomb had never been found, nor found since, in central China and even in Henan or Anyang, tombs rarely contain gold objects like this. These objects remain in the Beijing Cultural Research Collection.

Nine years later, at Sanxingdui, Guanghan, Sichuan Province, tombs of the Shu Culture disclosed a remarkable quantity of bronze sculptures, chiefly representing small human figures and life-size masks. Amongst the discoveries was a gold staff, life-size, measuring 142 cm, and carved in low relief with faces, birds' heads and fish. It is possible that the staff was of ritual significance and had something to do with King Yufu of Shu.

## Zhou Discoveries

During the Zhou Dynasty, gold and silver were used mostly for inlay, a technique particularly well-developed in the Warring States Period. Much material from this period has been excavated

— The tomb of Marquis Zhao Hou of Cai, excavated in 1955 in Shouxian (Anhui) and datable to 518-491 BC, contained gold sheets representing for example *taotie* masks (cf. fig. no 1 a beaten gold *taotie* mask appliqué from a private collection), mythical animals and a plaque bearing a bird-head on one end and a dragon-head on the other (cf. fig. no 2 a beaten gold bird-dragon appliqué from our exhibition, 'Chinese Gold, Silver and Gilt Bronze up to the Tang Dynasty', London 1985, catalogue no 1).



fig. no 1 — a beaten gold *taotie* mask appliqué from a private collection.



fig. no 2 — a beaten gold bird-dragon appliqué from our exhibition 'Chinese Gold, Silver and Gilt Bronze up to the Tang Dynasty', London 1985, catalogue no 1

— In 1974 in Gucheng (Henan), eighteen pure silver coins weighing a total of 3072.9 grammes were found in a *ding* vessel as well as a jar containing 392 pure gold coins or plaques weighing a total of 8138.3 grammes.

— Tomb no. 1 in Leigudun in Suixian (Hubei), excavated in 1978 and attributed to the Marquis of Zeng, was a repository of gold belt-buckles, gold sheets and five important gold vessels. These included a bowl, a ladle, a cup and lids and were probably drink and food vessels for the deceased.

— In 1982 in Xuji, Jiangsu, thirty-eight gold items were found inside an inlaid bronze vessel bearing a cover cast in pure gold in the form of a tiger and weighing 9 kilogram.

— In Jincun in Luoyang, gold belt-buckles were found in a tomb.

— A considerable number of gold objects in typical northern style and coming from Xiongnu, were excavated in Aluchaideng and Xigoupan in the Zhungor Banner region of Inner Mongolia. The items, comprising gold ornaments for clothing, gold necklaces, gold earrings, round and rectangular plaques, were either

cast, hammered, or worked in repoussé. Many appear with animal motifs: tigers, horses, rams and were frequently inlaid with semi-precious stones, especially turquoise and most were made in China in "barbarian taste" for the vassal princes.

According to archaeological finds dating from the Zhou Dynasty, it seems that many high status individuals were buried with a large number of gold and silver objects. Silver ones were not so precious as gold ones, but all had attained a relatively high level of technological achievement, especially during the Warring States Period. Gold items tended to be worked in sheets and decorated with typical Zhou designs: intertwined dragons, volutes, spirals or "D" and "T" forms. It is supposed that these gold sheets were used to decorate bronze, lacquer, wood or pottery items. Repoussé and stamped-work were favourite techniques of design.

## Han Discoveries

During the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD), the popularity of precious metals increased whereas the use of bronze declined. Personal ornaments such as belt-hooks, clothing accessories, jewellery, and hair ornaments were much in vogue. A new, more refined technical repertory developed in order to meet the demands of the intricate and small-scale objects being produced.

Typical of the decoration of this period is the gold granulated or beaded border: the technique originated in the Mediterranean and Mesopotamian regions and travelled east, coming to China from its western borders. Indeed, the granulated technique has been documented in Mesopotamia and Egypt as far back as the 18th century BC and was also known in Ancient Greece and in Persia in the Achaemenid and Parthian periods.

Other popular techniques of the period included gilding, inlaying and hammering.

Even though the decline in bronze production corresponded with the advent of silver and gold, the prototypes used in the designing of precious metals were those associated with bronze, both in terms of shape and decoration.

Gold objects of this period were very rare and remained so until the Tang Dynasty. The Xiongnu tribe in the north were skilled goldsmiths. A local gold industry was developed in south China in the small state of Chu, being particularly rich in gold. Otherwise, gold was the infrequent object of trade between the Han and more western populations. Eventually gold would become, under the cosmopolitan Tang, and with the opening of the trade routes to China from the West, a commodity bartered quite freely against silk, woods and spices.

During the reign of the usurper Wang Mang (9-23 AD), gold was nationalized and its use and possession was confined to the vassal kings.

## Six Dynasties Discoveries

The Six Dynasties (220-581 AD) period was one of great upheaval and thus only jewellery and personal ornaments survive due to their small size and portability.



These are chiefly worked in sheets often with granular and bead work as with the earlier Han pieces and with the addition of applied semi-precious stones. Popular decorative motifs included dragons with riders, cicadas (cf. no 6 of the present exhibition catalogue) and other stylized animals with large bulging eyes. Gold of this period is very rare.

### Sui Discoveries

Though very brief, the Sui Dynasty (581-617 AD) heralded many important developments in the field of metalwork. At the beginning of seventh century, the Emperor Yangdi instigated diplomatic relations with the Sassanians in order to disrupt the political unity of the tribes of Central Asia and Inner Mongolia as well as to promote commercial ties. As a result, new artistic currents swept through China, considerably enriching the existing artistic repertory. Toward the end of the sixth century, precious metalwork encrusted with semi-precious stones appeared in Chang'an.

The major discovery from this period is the tomb dated 608 AD containing a gold stem-cup and an exceptional necklace composed of gold beads and semi-precious stones. Precious metal of this period is of excellent quality.

### Tang Discoveries

The Tang Dynasty (618-906 AD) heralded a wave of artistic change in China and was to be recognized as a Golden Age of metallurgy. In 642 the Sassanians were defeated by the Arabs, bringing the Sassanian king's son to seek refuge at the Chinese Court in 674. From then forth, and with the reopening of the trade routes across Central Asia, Sassanian culture and artistic heritage permeated Chinese society. Of all the artistic techniques brought directly from Persia, glass-making and metallurgy had the most influence on the Chinese. It has been suggested by some academics that it was particularly Sogdiana's artistic repertoire that provided the source for Tang silver design but these speculations remain unsubstantiated.

The new artistic currents sweeping China from the West coincided with the development of gold mining in China. The regions of Sichuan, Hunan, Jiangxi, Yunnan, Guangdong, Anhui and Shaanxi proved particularly rich in gold. Gold was also imported from beyond China's borders and from the seventh to the eighth century trade caravans brought it from Tibet where it was levied, with silver, as a tribute. Toward the second half of the seventh century, Tibet grew more powerful and thus exported less gold resulting in gold shortages in China. The Emperor decreed that the use of pure gold for food vessels would be prohibited to all those of less than first rank. The use of silver was restricted to those of sixth rank and more and its use by anyone of lesser rank was punishable with death.

The craftsmen who worked with gold and silver were the most skilled in China, and very little of inferior quality was produced as evidenced by the objects of great beauty and technical virtuosity that survive today. As they became increasingly familiar with gold and silver, their artistic repertoire developed. Many metalwork techniques were indigenous to the Chinese and were well-established in Tang workshops. Repoussé in relief was in demand during this period and filigree,

though rarer and more difficult, also appears on some of the finer Tang pieces. In spite of hammering and chasing originating in Persia, these techniques, as well as raising, engraving, turning, cloisonné, filigree, granulation, and inlay, were perfected by the Tang metalworkers. Hammering was particularly popular with the craftsmen and involved beating a circular sheet of gold from its centre into the shape of a bowl or cup which could be ridged or lobed.

The casting of precious metals, very much an indigenous technique, also grew in sophistication, as did the special art, brought east from Persia, of joining various individually cast elements of an object (such as a cup and a foot to create a stem-cup). Engraving too was a technique they learned from the Sassanians and ring-matting or punching also came from the Near East.

With new techniques for working metals, came new shapes, also foreign in origin. Traditionally, whether in China or in Europe, pottery and metal work share common artistic traits. In China, from the Shang to the Han dynasty, bronze vessel shapes influenced pottery shapes whilst from the Sui onward, pottery shapes were copied by the metalworkers. Few vessels of the Tang Dynasty resemble those of earlier periods. The question of the source of Chinese vessel design under the Tang is controversial but it is well recognised that Chinese metalworkers were influenced by silver, glass and pottery shapes coming from Persia, India and sometimes even from Mediterranean regions, including Rome and what remained of Hellenistic civilization. Yet in spite of being borrowed, these shapes were quickly adapted to suit Chinese taste.

Decorative motifs of the period included strictly Chinese volutes and phoenix as well as winged horses, ducks, hunting scenes with non-Chinese huntsmen, and vines in relief, all of foreign inspiration, the latter particularly Roman in flavour. These designs, whether of Chinese or foreign origin, tended to be applied symmetrically including lacquer panels which are particularly rare due to the difficulty of lacquer conservation. Thus, technically and stylistically, the Tang Dynasty, and more specifically the first half of the eighth century heralded a period of great artistic beauty and innovation in the world of metalwork.

The availability of excavated Tang metalwares for study purposes is very recent and nearly all were found on the site of the old Tang capital, Chang'an, dating from the middle of the eighth century. These objects would have been buried in order to conceal them during the An Lushan rebellion of 756.

In 1925 archaeologists discovered fifteen silver pieces in a tomb at Beihuang Shan near Xi'an, one of which was dated 877 and another was inscribed "made on order for the Great Officer (Da Fu) Wang in the forth year of Qian Fu", which corresponds to the year 877. A third vessel, an oblong platter, was inscribed "Wang Congce", probably the same Da Fu as on the other vessel. Along with these three objects, the archaeologists found multi-bulb vases, a gilt oblong platter, a wine jug, two vases, one with a lobed edge, a five-lobed bowl, a four-lobed cup, a circular box and a round box decorated with a repoussé lion and phoenix design. All these pieces were acquired by the British Museum.

Five years later, a second series of tombs was excavated, this time at Balin, Eastern Mongolia. Eleven magnificent silver-gilt bowls were found, eight of which were bought by O. Karlbeck (cf. fig. no 3 a parcel-gilt and silver bowl, from our exhibition 'Chinese Gold, Silver and Gilt Bronze up to the Tang Dynasty', London 1985, catalogue no 36).





fig. no 3 — a parcel-gilt and silver bowl from our exhibition ('Chinese Gold, Silver and Gilt Bronze up to the Tang Dynasty', London 1985, catalogue no 36).

More recently, in 1970, the Treasure of Prince Li Shouli of Bin was unearthed at Hejiacun, in the Xinghua section of Xi'an. This spectacular discovery surpassed previous finds revolutionizing the study of Chinese gold and silver metalwork. More than a thousand objects emerged of which 270 were vases. Amongst quantities of precious stones, foreign coinage (Sassanian, Byzantine, Japanese) and rare minerals, there were lobed lotus-shaped bowls, octagonal and hexagonal cups, pilgrim jars, boxes, dishes and platters, incense burners, miniature stoves, cups, all in either silver, gold, or silver-gilt and all in remarkably good condition. The techniques used to decorate the pieces included granular work, engraving, hammering, repoussé and filigree (the latter inherited from Central Asia).

Historically, the so-called Treasure of Prince Li Shouli of Bin would have been buried when the Emperor and his family were obliged to flee Chang'an during the An Lushan rebellion. Prince Bin was a cousin of the Emperor and being the last of the royal family to flee to Sichuan Province, was entrusted with the burial of the treasure. This has been confirmed by archaeologists who unearthed the treasure at the site purported to be the residence of Prince Li Shouli.

Six years later, in 1976, the Karachin Banners in Liaoning Province yielded six silver dishes, one of which dated 796, and all decorated with animal motifs, including lion, fish and deer.

The most recent discoveries were made in 1982 at Dingmaoqiao in Datu. The tomb there has been dated to 760 by Chinese archaeologists and revealed some 950 precious metal objects. It has been suggested that all the objects unearthed had been produced for a single owner and were buried immediately after their completion.

By their richness and quality, Tang gold and silver wares reveal the extreme opulence and cosmopolitan nature of the Tang court. Tang metalwares would be preserved as stylistic sources by later generations of craftsmen.

### Liao Discoveries

The Liao Dynasty (907-1125) evolved from the Qidan tribe in the far north-east of China. Though a distinct lineage, the Liao juxtaposed Chinese and Qidan culture, inheriting much in the way of artistic conception and technique from the Chinese, particularly from the Tang and strongly influenced by the Song civilization. At the beginning of their reign, the Liao produced a large number of gold and silver wares using Tang and Song metalworking and gilding techniques.

Gold and silver vessels and ornaments played an increasingly important role in Liao burial ritual. Indeed, traditional Chinese burial custom, which involved entombing quantities of artifacts with the dead, had found great favour with Liao high officials and members of the Qidan imperial court. By the middle of the eleventh century, an imperial regulation had been enacted restricting the use of gold wares to burials of high officials. Nonetheless, this legislation may not have been enforced very stringently as several late Liao tombs have yielded precious metal objects.

Liao metalware discoveries of importance are as recent as the early 1970's. In 1972 an imperial crown, similar to no. 28 of the present exhibition, was excavated from a Qidan tomb in the village of Qianchuanghu, and in 1977 another with a dragon motif was found in a tomb in Hebei Province.

Two years later, an extremely rare silver and silver-gilt flask displaying a central deer motif was excavated at Chifeng, Liaoning Province.

The most spectacular discovery thus far however was unearthed in Inner Mongolia in 1985. The tomb was that of a Liao princess and her husband from the state of Chen. The princess, who would have been born in the year 1001, is thought to have died at age eighteen. Her tomb contained, amongst other precious items, gold, silver and silver-gilt bowls, plates, teapots and boxes, an open-work crown, human masks, jewellery, and of great rarity, a pair of silver and silver-gilt boots decorated with phoenix.

Through this catalogue and exhibition we hope to provide a glimpse of the sophistication and beauty of Chinese metalcraft and the remarkable skills of the craftsmen.

Christian DEYDIER



## CHRONOLOGY OF CHINESE DYNASTIES AND PERIODS

(according to Professor Dong Zuobin and based on the oracle bone inscriptions of the Shang Dynasty).

	BC	AD
Neolithic	circa 7000 - 1600	
Xia Dynasty	circa 2100 - 1600	
Shang Dynasty	circa 1600 - 1111	
Anyang phase	1370 - 1111	
Zhou Dynasty	1111 - 256	
Western Zhou	1111 - 770	
Eastern Zhou	770 - 256	
Spring and Autumn Period	722 - 481	
Warring States Period	453 - 221	
Qin Dynasty	221 - 206	
Han Dynasty	206 -	220
Western Han	206 -	6
Xin Dynasty (Wang Mang)		9 - 22
Eastern Han		25 - 220
Six Dynasties		220 - 581
Three Kingdoms		220 - 280
Western Jin		265 - 316
Southern Dynasties		
Eastern Jin		317 - 420
Liu Song		420 - 479
Southern Qi		479 - 502
Liang		502 - 557
Chen		557 - 589
Northern Dynasties		
Sixteen Kingdoms		304 - 439
Northern Wei		386 - 535
Eastern Wei		534 - 550
Western Wei		535 - 557
Northern Qi		550 - 577
Northern Zhou		557 - 581
Sui Dynasty		581 - 617
Tang Dynasty		618 - 906
Five Dynasties		907 - 960
Liao Dynasty		916 - 1125
Song Dynasty		960 - 1279
Northern Song		960 - 1127
Southern Song		1127 - 1279

Catalogue

IMPERIAL GOLD FORM ANCIENT CHINA



1

**GOLD PARROT HEAD WITH TURQUOISE** 金鸚鵡頭鑲飾綠松石

Eastern Zhou Dynasty, 770-256 BC

Height: 2.4 cm.

Gold parrot head holding a turquoise bead in its beak. The head is finely worked in repoussé relief, with symmetrical stylized feather designs on each side.

**Similar example:**

— the only other parrot recorded is cast in gold with a turquoise head: it was excavated in a Xiongnu tomb in 1972 at Aluchaideng, Huangjin Banner, Ih Ju Meng, in Inner Mongolia. It represents a hat ornament. Illustrated in *Kaogu* 1980 no 4 plate 10 no 1 and drawing p. 334, no 1, it also figures on the cover of the exhibition catalogue: *Hoppo kiba minzoku bun butten*, Japan 1983-1984.



2

**PAIR OF GOLD PLAQUES 金帶飾一對**

Warring States Period, 5th-4th centuries BC

Height: 4.4 cm.

Width: 4.2 cm.

Two matching ornamental gold plaques worked in repoussé. Each spade-shaped plaque is decorated in relief with two pendant rams' heads in profile surmounted in the centre by a *taotie* mask. The rams' horns and the *taotie*'s eyebrows are further decorated with finely engraved linear incisions. The sides of each plaque are perforated with a pair of small holes.

The artistic source of these plaques appears to derive from the nomadic tribes stationed in the north of China. Though plaques of this type were manufactured in China, they were most probably designed for foreigners or in "foreign taste".





3

**TWO GOLD BELT BUCKLES 金帶扣子兩個**

Western Han Dynasty, 206 BC-6 AD

Height: 3.3 cm. and 3 cm.

A square-edged and a round-edged buckle. Both buckles are hammered gold with a repoussé symmetrical stylized foliate design.

**Similar examples:**

— the same type of decoration appears on a belt buckle and on an ornament in the shape of a kneeling ram, both illustrated in *Jinguo chutu wenwu zhenpinxuan (A Selection of the Treasure of Archaeological Finds of the People's Republic of China)*, 1976-1984, Wenwu Press, Beijing 1987, no 306 and 307.



4

**GOLD AND TURQUOISE BELL 金鐘鑲飾綠松石**

Northern Dynasties, 4th-6th century AD

Diameter: 4 cm.

Height including drops: 5.5 cm.

Hammered spherical bell inset with turquoise and hung with seven miniature turquoise-set bells. The bell is constructed in two halves, the upper part of the globe applied with tear-shaped turquoise insets and granular scrolls within wire borders. The lower part of the bell is plain with a central slit. The bell is decorated around its middle with nine evenly spaced loops, seven of which are hung with miniature bells of a design similar to that of the larger bell.



5

**GOLD AND TURQUOISE PENDANT 金垂飾鑲綠松石**

Northern Dynasties, 4th-6th century AD

Width: 9.7 cm.

Depth: 4.5 cm.

Crescent-shaped pendant formed of two lobed halves. Each half is decorated with granular borders highlighting lozenge and tear-drop shaped turquoise appliques. The frontal aspect of the pendant bears six protruding cut-off cone finials, four at the centre, one on each side, two with turquoise insets.

**Similar examples:**

No other items of this shape have been recorded; nonetheless, both the pendant and the bell (no. 4 of this exhibition) display fine granular beaded borders enclosing turquoise insets remarkably similar on a technical level to those on objects unearthed at Da Ma Qui, Ulongab Meny in 1981 and since dated Northern Dynasties (420-589). It is agreed that the latter pieces, similar in style to our bell and pendant, are non-Chinese or "barbarian" in origin, emanating from the tribes stationed in northern China.





6

**GOLD FILIGREE HAT ORNAMENT 金帽飾鑲有金絲**

Six Dynasties, 4th-5th century AD

Height: 5.6 cm.

Width: 5.6 cm.

Sheet of beaten gold, in open-work, finely decorated with a granular filigree outline depicting a winged cicada. The insect is arranged symmetrically and displays two large bulbous eyes. The border is decorated with a flower and leaf pattern. The detail of the design is accentuated by minute granular globes of gold worked in relief. The gold foil is fixed onto a bronze plaque.

**Similar examples:**

— C. Kempe Collection, illustrated by Gyllensvard B., *Chinese Gold and Silver in the Carl Kempe Collection*, Stockholm 1953, plate no 20 a/b.

— Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, published by Singer P., *Early Chinese Gold and Silver*, China Institute in America, New York 1971, Catalogue no 27.

— The Minneapolis Institute of Art, illustrated by Juliano A.L., *Art of the Six Dynasties*, China Institute in America, New York 1975, Catalogue no 10.

— Yamato Bunkakan, Japan, illustrated in *Mayuyama Seventy Years*, Tokyo 1976, volume II, page 45, plate 77.

— *Rikucho no Bijutsu (Arts of the Six Dynasties)*, Osaka Municipal Museum, 1976, colour plate no 33.

**Similar examples have been scientifically excavated from datable tombs:**

— item no 60M1, found at Dunhuang, in an early Eastern Qin Dynasty grave, dated by an inscription 369 AD, and illustrated in *Kaogu* 1974 no 3 plate VII no 3. Tombs of northern barbarian states.

— another piece was found in Liaoning (southern Manchuria), in an early fifth century grave of the Northern Yen Dynasty, and illustrated in *Wenwu* 1973 no 3 page 25 figures no 2, 3, 6.



7

**SILVER-GILT COMB 鍍金銀梳**

Tang Dynasty, 7th-8th century AD

Height: 8.5 cm.

Length: 10.5 cm.

Beaten silver-gilt comb of inverted D-shape. The handle is decorated in repoussé technique with gilt flying birds amongst gilt flowers, on a ring-punched ground. The outer border, delineated with repoussé granular beading, depicts a scrolling engraved wave at the base and symmetrically interdispersed repoussé lotus leaves on a punched ground around the handle. The numerous pointed teeth, of which some are missing or broken, are divided from the handle by a straight band.

**Similar examples:**

— British Museum, London, drawing illustrated by Gyllensvard B., 'T'ang Gold and Silver', *B.M.F.E.A.*, volume 29, Stockholm 1957, figure 12 e.

— Gyllensvard B., 'A Botanical Excursion in the Kempe Collection', *B.M.F.E.A.*, volume 37, Stockholm 1965, plate 1a.

— *Wenwu* 1986 no 5 plate IV no 5.





8

**SILVER AND GILT BRONZE CENSER (XUNLU) 銀及鑲金銅薰爐**

Tang Dynasty, late 7th-8th century AD

Diameter: 4.8 cm.

Silver and gilt bronze censer, known as *xunlu*, hanging from a short chain.

The silver censer, cast in open-work, is constructed in two hemispheres joined by a hinge and bolt. Inside, the gilt bronze bowl, used for holding the incense, is freely suspended with two silver concentric rings, each able to turn on its own axis, constantly maintaining the bowl in the horizontal position. The silver sphere is decorated in open-work with a pattern of stylized petals.

**Similar examples:**

— C. Kempe Collection, illustrated by Gyllensvard B., *Chinese Gold and Silver in the Carl Kempe Collection*, Stockholm 1953, plates no 96 and 97; also published by Gyllensvard B., 'T'ang Gold and Silver', *B.M.F.E.A.*, volume 29, Stockholm 1957, plate 5d; and by Gyllensvard B., *Chinese Gold, Silver and Porcelain: The Kempe Collection*, The Asia Society, New York 1971, no 44.

— The William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Atkins Museum, Kansas City, illustrated by Fontein J. and Tung Wu, *Unearthing China's Past*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston 1973, no 91.

— Hakutsuru Museum, Kobe; illustrated by Nagao Ko, *Hakutsuru Cho*, volume 1, Kyoto 1931, plate 49.

— *Wenwu* 1964, no 6 page 30-32.

— *Wenwu* 1972, no 1 page 32-42.

— *Tangdai Jinyin qi*, Wenwu Press, Beijing 1985, no 122.

These censers were used for both religious and secular purposes: they burned incense, aromatic herbs and perfume, scenting the air of tents, beds, or an altar; they were also used to repel insects, or to perfume clothes.





9

**SILVER AND PARCEL-GILT LOBED BOX** 鑲金銀五稜邊盒

Tang Dynasty, late 7th-early 8th century AD

Height: 10.7 cm.

Diameter: 18.5 cm.

Exceptionally large box of hammered silver with five lobes and symmetrically shaped bottom and cover. The top of the cover is decorated in relief with a pair of repoussé birds with long tails and in flight surrounded by repoussé scrolling floral meander. The peonies, birds, and others blossoms are highlighted in gilt. The foliate and bird design is enclosed in a penta-lobed panel on a ring-punched ground within alternating straight and beaded gilt repoussé borders. The cover's sides are further decorated in the centre of each lobe with a gilt flying mandarin duck, all five with finely incised outspread wings. The five divisions between the cover's lobes are decorated with engraved and gilt pendant swags. Finally, the rim of both box cover and bottom are similarly decorated on each lobe with incised and gilt stylized floral swags within narrow gilt borders.

**Similar example:**

— To our knowledge, no other box of this shape and size has been recorded. This exceptional box is the largest known of its date.





10

**PAIR OF GOLD TWIN HAIRPINS** 雙股金髮簪一對

Song Dynasty, 10th-11th century AD

Length: 10.8 cm.

Gold double-tinned hairpins with their upper part decorated in relief with flowers and leaves. The top of each head ornamented with an oval opened multi-tiered flower, each petal finely veined with linear incisions.

**Similar examples:**

— *Wenwu* 1977 no 7 page 10 photo no. 29. Items excavated from a Southern Song tomb, in the northern suburbs of Fuzhou (Fukien).

— *Wenwu* 1984 no 5 page 83 plate 5.

11

**PAIR OF GOLD TWIN HAIRPINS** 雙股金髮簪一對

Song Dynasty, 10th-11th century AD

Length: 10.8 cm.

Gold double-tinned hairpins with their upper part decorated in relief with flowers and leaves. The top of each head ornamented with an oval opened multi-tiered flower, each petal finely veined with linear incisions.

**Similar examples:**

— *Wenwu* 1977 no 7 page 10 photo no. 29. Items excavated from a Southern Song tomb, in the northern suburbs of Fuzhou (Fujian).

— *Wenwu* 1984 no 5 page 83 plate 5.



10



11



12

**GOLD HAIRPIN 金髮簪**

Song Dynasty, 10th-11th century AD

Length: 14.6 cm.

Gold hairpin with its upper part decorated in low relief with a flying bird surrounded by flowers. The head of the pin, crowning the circular bird motif, is in the form of an open flower, each petal shaped as a smaller flower-head engraved with fine linear incisions.

**Similar examples:**

— *Wenwu* 1984 no 5 page 85 plate 13.

— *Wenwu* 1988 no 4 page 330 plate 1/1.

13

**GOLD HAIRPIN 金髮簪**

Song Dynasty, 10th-11th century AD

Length: 16.6 cm.

Hammered gold hairpin. The elongated head is cast in high relief with a flowering vine design. The flowers, probably camellias and chrysanthemum, and the leaves are finely incised with linear decoration.

**Similar example:**

— *Wenwu* 1984 no 5 plate VI-5.



12



13

14

**GOLD BOWL** 菊花形金飯碗

Song Dynasty, 10th-11th century AD

Diameter: 10 cm.

Height: 5.2 cm.

Hammered gold bowl cut out in the form of an open chrysanthemum. Each of the twelve petal lobes is separated from the next by a finely incised divide. The inside base of the bowl is convex and grained to resemble the chrysanthemum's centre. The shallow, slightly splayed foot is fluted, repeating the petal design above.

**Similar example:**

No other example of this type has been recorded but this shape, displaying five wider petal-lobes instead of twelve appears quite often:

— stem-bowl from the Brundage Collection, illustrated by Singer P., *Early Chinese Gold and Silver*, New York 1971, Catalogue no 82;

— stem-bowls, illustrated in *Tangdai Jinyin qi*, Beijing, Wenwu Press 1985, no 197 and 274, all dated from the late Tang Dynasty.





15

**SET OF THREE GOLD HAIRPINS** 金髮簪三隻

Liao Dynasty, 10th-11th century AD

Lengths between 6.2 and 8 cm.

Gold hairpins with heads cut from sheet-gold in the form of flowers. The two larger blossoms are each surrounded by four symmetrically arranged leaves, stamped with a vein design. The smaller flower-head bears eight moulded similarly stamped leaves. Each flower's pistil is crowned by protruding gold wire stamens.



16

**SET OF SIX GOLD HAIRPINS** 金髮簪六隻

Liao Dynasty, 10th-11th century AD

Lengths around 7.4 and 7.8 cm.

Three of the six hairpins are surmounted by a sheet-gold blossom, the petals of which are traced with finely lined incisions. The surrounding leaves are worked with repoussé vein designs. Two blossoms enclose central gold wire stamens; one flower-head with three gold-wire-spring tendrils each crowned with a gold bud. The remaining three hairpins each bear a beaten gold head finely cut in the shape of interlaced birds and flowers, and strengthened in the centre with a gold wire twisted into a spring.



16



17

**PAIR OF GOLD EARRINGS 金耳環一對**

Liao Dynasty, 10th-11th century AD

Length: 4 cm.

The hammered gold head of each earring is in the form of a double faceted flower worked in repoussé technique. The head of the earring also resembles a stylized insect's head, the flowers as large and bulbous eyes, with a long curled tongue at the base.



17

18

**PAIR OF GOLD EARRINGS 金耳環一對**

Liao Dynasty, 10th-11th century AD

Length: 3.6 cm.

Each earring is cast in two halves in the form of a fish. The fish are decorated with scrolling scales alternately finely engraved or stamped. The head of each fish is surmounted by a spherical finial resembling an open peony.

**Similar examples:**

— *Kaogu* 1960 no 2 plate III no 4: similar gold earring in the form of a fish, found at Xinming, Jianping County, Liaoning, tombs dated from the Liao Dynasty.

— *Kaogu* 1986 no 16 page 924 drawing 5 no 27.



18



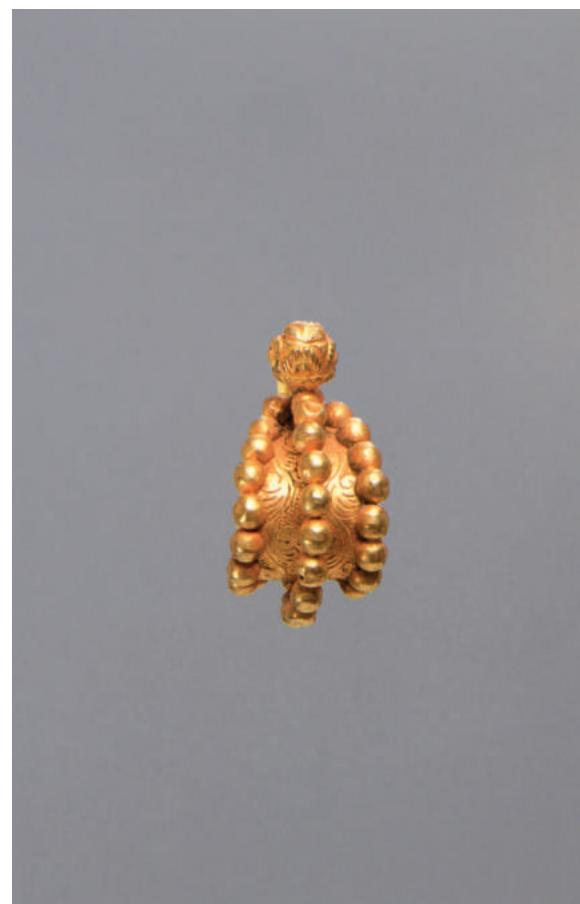
19

**GOLD EARRING 金耳環**

Liao Dynasty, 10th-11th century AD

Length: 5 cm.

The gold hoop of this earring is ridged on four sides and curled under. Each of the ridges is faced with gold beading and three ridges are engraved with a swirling cloud motif. The beaded hoop is surmounted by a sphere chased to resemble a stylized open peony.



20

**GOLD BRACELET 金手鐲**

Liao Dynasty, 10th-11th century AD  
Diameter: 6.4 cm.

Gold bracelet in the shape of a band comprising three rows of convex moulded beads, separated by two finer rows of granular beading. The two extremities of the bracelet curl outward.



21

**GOLD COMB 金梳**

Liao Dynasty, 10th-11th century AD

Length: 7.3 cm

Gold ornamental comb of semi-circular shape. The handle is engraved on both sides with a pair of flying phoenix on a punched-ring ground. The outer side of the handle is bound on the join with a strip of gold hammered to resemble a shoot of bamboo. The numerous pointed teeth are of different length, echoing the curve of the handle.

**Similar example:**

— The Carl Kempe Collection, illustrated by Gyllensvard B., *Chinese Gold and Silver in the Carl Kempe Collection*, Stockholm 1953, no 143.





22

**GOLD PENDANT HEADDRESS 金頭飾**

Liao Dynasty, 10th-11th century AD

Length: 14 cm

Hammered sheet gold crescent-shaped headdress with fifteen gold filigree drops designed to adorn the forehead. The crescent plate is finely worked with repoussé flowers and leaves surrounded on one side by a single, on the other by a double-row granular border. The lower rim of the crescent supports filigree pendant drops, each comprising an open-work stylized flower, a swastika and a graded lobed finial.

**Similar example:**

— a similar example but of later period was excavated in Henan from a tomb dated to the Southern Song Dynasty. The piece is cast using the same technique, decorated with open-work; illustrated in *Kaogu* 1988 no 1 plate 8 no 9.



23

**GOLD SQUARE BOX 金方形盒**

Liao Dynasty, dated 1025 AD

Height: 3.5 cm.

Width: 7.3 cm.

Square box and cover with angled and straight sides. The cover is decorated in repoussé technique with a large coiled dragon in low relief holding a flaming pearl in one of its claws. Each corner is decorated with trefoil cloud scrolls and the straight sides of the box and cover are incised with bands of lozenge motifs. The angled sides of the cover are adorned with a band of incised quatrefoil florettes. A punched-ring background decorates the box overall.

— the interior of the box bears a twenty-three character inscription which can be read:

"Completed by the order of the official (Chen) Zhang Jian, in the fifth year of the Taiping period, and to show obeisance by presenting to the Wenzong Wangfu (to furnish) the altar (dedicated) to the Empress Dowager."

殿前  
文忠王府皇太后  
命工造成又供養  
太平五年臣張儉

**Notes:**

— Zhang Jian (962-1053) is recorded in the *Liao Shi* (Liao History) in the *liechuan* 10, *juan* 80. Zhang was appointed as Commander-in-Chief of the Wuding army. In the 5th year of the Taiping period (1025) he was transferred to Datong, Shanxi province. In the 6th year of the Taiping period, he was promoted to the rank of Left Prime Minister. He was instructed by the ailing Emperor Shengzong (984-1031) to help enthrone the prince, who became Emperor Xingzong in 1032. Zhang held the position of Prime Minister for more than twenty years. He died in the 22nd year of Zhongxi (1053) at the age of 91.

— According to the *Liao Shi*, the name associated with the Wenzong Wangfu was that of Han Derang (941-1011), a Chinese administrator and a military commander under two Liao emperors. His brilliant career, brought him high rank and honourable titles. In 1004 (the 22nd year of Tonghe), he was conferred the Liao clan name Yelu. In 1010 he also received the Qidan name, Longyun. When he died in 1011 at the age of 71, he received the title Wenzong. Wenzong Wangfu was therefore an administration unit, as described in *Liao Shi*: "... following the rules of various palaces Wenzong Wangfu was established, comprising of 5,000 normal households [Qidan], 8,000 transferred households [captured Chinese] and 10,000 cavalymen".





24

**SILVER AND PARCEL-GILT SQUARE BOX 鑲金銀方形盒**

Liao Dynasty, dated 1026 AD

Height: 4.1 cm.

Length: 8.3 cm.

Square box and cover with angled and straight sides. The silver cover is incised with two parcel-gilt dancing ladies holding a flowing ribbon, surrounded by parcel-gilt flowers. The corners each bear a parcel-gilt geometric quatrefoil design. The angled sides of the cover are decorated with incised bands of stylized clouds, the straight sides with a parcel-gilt lozenge design. This design also appears on the straight sides of the bottom of the box. A ring-punched background decorates the box overall.

— the interior of the box bears a twenty-nine character inscription which can be read:

"Completed on the 29th day, 3rd month, 6th year of the Taiping period, to furnish (the altar) of the ceremonial hall (in memory) of the *"Ruide shenlue yingyun qihua chengtian huangtaihou"* (the Virtuous Resourceful Empress Dowager, Heaven-appointed to coincide the rise of the Liao Dynasty and Great Teacher of the people).

廿 又 九 日 造 成	供 養 太 平 六 年 三 月	啟 化 承 天 皇 太 后 殿	睿 德 神 略 應 運
----------------------------	--------------------------------------	--------------------------------------	----------------------------

**Note:**

— *"Ruide shenlue yingyun qihua chengtian huangtaihou"* (the Virtuous Resourceful Empress Dowager, Heaven-appointed to coincide the rise of the Liao Dynasty and Great Teacher of the people), was the daughter of the Prime Minister of the North Chamber Xiao Siwen. When Emperor Jingzong (970-983) ascended the throne, she was chosen as a concubine and conferred the title of queen shortly afterwards. She gave birth to Shengzong (984-1031) who was to become one of the greatest Liao emperors. She was conferred the title of Empress Dowager upon the death of her husband and ruled the country with the assistance of two top officials such as Yuluxiezhen and Han Derang (Wenzong, see items no. 23). In the 1st year of Tonghe (983), Emperor Shengzong gave her the title of *Chengtian huangtaihou* (Heaven-appointed Empress Dowager). In the 24th year (1006) she was conferred the first title above. In the 27th year (1009), she died and received the name *Shengshen xuanxian huanghou* (The Queen that was presented by the Holy God). In the 21st year of Zhongxi (1052) her title was changed to *Ruizhi huanghou* (the Queen of Profound Wisdom).





25

**SILVER AND PARCEL-GILT SQUARE BOX** 鑲金銀方形盒

Liao Dynasty, dated 1026 AD

Height: 4.1 cm.

Length: 8.7 cm.

Square box and cover with angled and straight sides. The cover is decorated in low relief with two repoussé parcel-gilt flying phoenix and each corner with parcel-gilt stylized cloud scrolls. The straight sides of the box and cover are ornamented with an incised band of parcel-gilt lozenge motifs. The angled sides of the cover are incised with a band of parcel-gilt quatrefoil florettes. A ring-punched background decorates the box overall.

— the interior of the box bears a nineteen character inscription which can be read: "Completed by order of the official Zhang Jian, Commander-in-Chief of the Wuding army, in the *bingyin* year, Taiping period, and offered as tribute".

命  
工  
造  
成  
又  
貢

節  
度  
使  
臣  
張  
儉

太  
平  
丙  
寅  
武  
定  
軍

**Note:**

— According to Chen Huan, *Ershi shishuo runmai*, Beijing 1978, p. 124, the Taiping period started in November 1021. That means the 5th year of Taiping period started in November 1025 and ended in November 1026. Since the *bingyin* year started in January 1026, we can therefore deduce that the present box was made between January and November 1026, which was still the 5th year of Taiping period.





26

**GOLD STEM-BOWL 金高足碗**

Liao Dynasty, dated 1027 AD

Height: 5.7 cm.

Diameter: 9.2 cm.

Beaten gold stem-bowl composed of a round deep bowl supported by a tall hollow and flaring foot. The bowl's interior is decorated with two incised flying phoenix shown with long tails and spread wings on a ring-punched background. The exterior of the bowl exhibits a band of stylized clouds. The edge of the mouthrim is set with an elaborate granulated bead border. The foot is decorated with ten incised bands bearing lozenge motifs alternating with ten plain bands enclosing an inscription. The edge of the foot is also beaded.

— the foot bears a thirty-two character inscription which can be read: "Made by a skilled artisan commissioned by the official Xiao Shezhe, in the *dingmao* year, Taiping period, offered together with ambergris as sacrificial utensils (to be placed) on the same table (altar), and presented to the Wenzhong Wangfu to show obeisance".

等	臣	香	祭	大	文	至	太
合	蕭	四	器	殿	忠	匠	平
供	朮	一	龍	供	王	造	丁
進	哲	桌	涎	應	府	奉	卯

**Note:**

— Xiao Shezhe is mentioned in the Liao Shi (Liao History) juan 91. He was the son of the younger brother of the Emperor Muzong (951-969). In the 13th year of Zhongxi (1044), Xiao quelled the Li Yuanhao rebellion and was promoted as one of the Royal Guards in the Hingsheng Palace. Involved in a libel case against a general of higher rank, subsequently Xiao was stripped of his title. In another incident he was jailed, but then released on the request of the Empress Dowager. At the beginning of the Qingning period (1055-1064) Xiao was caught for corruption and again lost his title. But he was soon rehabilitated and was appointed Xuanhuishui in the Northern Chamber. In the 9th year of Qingning period (1063) he was designated a military chief for the north-west regions, with orders to pacify the various barbarian tribes. The following year he received the title of Wang (prince) of Liucheng County. In the 2nd year of Xianyong period (1066), Xiao was promoted to the rank of Prime Minister in the Northern Chamber. He was once again stripped of his title and ordered to lead the Yishun army. The date of his death is not known.





27

**GOLD LOBED BOWL** 金棱邊碗

Liao Dynasty, dated: 1027 AD

Diameter: 9.5 cm.

Height: 2.6 cm.

Beaten gold flower-shaped shallow bowl with lobed hexafoil sides. The well is incised with a large dragon chasing a flaming pearl and surrounded by stylized clouds, all on a punched background. The rim is set with an elaborate beaded border.

The interior of the bowl is inscribed with four characters: "Taiping period, *dingmao* year", corresponding to 1027 AD.

太平丁卯

The underside is carved with a twenty-one characters inscription which can be read: "Sacrificial utensil marked 27 presented by the official Xiao Shezhe to the Wenzong Wangfu (for use) at the altar".

文忠王府太殿祭器  
廿又七字号臣萧术  
哲等供进

**Similar examples:**

- Bluett and Sons Ltd, London, illustrated in *Apollo*, September 1989.
- three other bowls of similar shape, but with different designs (*apsaras*) are actually published: two were exhibited by Bluett and Sons Ltd, in their 'Exhibition of Oriental Art', London 1988, Catalogue no 3 and 4; the third one was sold by Christie's London, in their sale on June 12, 1989, catalogue no 92.





28

**SILVER AND PARCEL-GILT IMPERIAL CROWN 鑲金銀御用皇冠**

Liao Dynasty, 10th-11th century AD

Height: 16.6 cm.

Diameter: 21 cm.

Hammered-silver and parcel-gilt crown probably belonging to a princess or empress. Cut from a silver sheet, and bent, it has at each end a vertical slit for adjustment on the woman's head. The upper part of the crown is crenellated with a peak at the centre and two rounded lobes symmetrically opposed on each side. The crown is decorated in gilt repoussé with two flying phoenix chasing a flaming jewel amongst stylized clouds, all on a background of punched scrolling dot pattern. The pair of phoenix bearing finely engraved feathers, converge with spread wings and floating tail toward a large flaming pearl, also decorated with engraved details and in even higher relief than the birds. This large, central pearl is flanked by a pair of smaller engraved flaming pearls. The central motif phoenix-pearl is bordered above and below with large gilt repoussé scrolling clouds, again decorated with linear and scrolling engraving. A granular border, the dots punched from behind, separates the gilt design from the lower and upper edges of the crown. These edges are perforated top and bottom with evenly spaced pairs of small holes.

**Similar example with phoenix design:**

— a crown decorated with two flying phoenix chasing a flaming pearl, was excavated from a Qidan tomb, in November 1972, in the village of Qianchuanghu, Liaoyang County, Liaoning Province, and illustrated in *Wenwu* 1980 no 12, plate III no 1 and drawing p. 21 no 15.

**Similar examples with dragons:**

— Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, illustrated by Fontein J. and Tung Wu, *Unearthing China's Past*, Boston 1973, p. 187 no 97.

— a crown was excavated in 1956 at Xinming, Jianping County, Liaoning Province, and published Fontein J. and Tung Wu, *Unearthing China's Past*, Boston 1973, p. 186 figure 100; and in *Kaogu* 1960 no 2 plate I no 1-2.

— another one, also with dragons pattern was excavated in 1977 from a Liao tomb, in Hebei Province, and illustrated in *Wenwu* 1982 no 7 p. 51 plate 1.

Items of this type with a phoenix design are extremely rare. Equally true of our piece is this remark made by Fontein J. and Tung Wu, in *Unearthing China's Past*, p. 185 about the Boston piece: "This fine example of the art of the silversmith is unique, not only in this exhibition but probably also in the entire Western world ..".





29

**GOLD PERFUME CONTAINER 金香料容器**

Southern Song Dynasty, 12th century AD

Height: 8.8 cm.

Width: 6.7 cm.

Gold open-work perfume container. The lotus-leaf-shaped container is formed of sheet gold worked in repoussé and decorated with mandarin ducks, kissing amongst blooming peonies and leaves. The flowers and leaves are further decorated with fine linear incisions representing veins whereas the birds are engraved with a fine scallop pattern, depicting feathers. Both sides of the container are symmetrical and surrounded by a chased circular-swirl border. One spade-shaped side of the container is slightly larger than the other at the rim where it curls over the smaller one, thus enclosing the inner cavity for perfume.

**Similar examples:**

Few items of this type, with different motifs (phoenix, flowers, ducks) have been excavated and dated by Chinese archaeologists as Song, Southern Song and Yuan.

— one container, found on the chest of dead woman, in a Northern Song tomb, is illustrated in *Wenwu* 1982 no 3 plate III no 1.

— others containers from Southern Song tombs are published in *Wenwu* 1977 no 7 plate 3 no 4, and in *Kaogu* 1986 no 3 p. 252 fig. 5 no 7-9; and in *Kaogu* 1986 no 10 plate VIII no 7.

— one container with two mandarin ducks, excavated from a tomb dated early Yuan Dynasty, and now in the Nanjing Museum, is illustrated in *Wenwu* 1959 no 11 p. 24 plate 14 no 2; and in *Nanjing bowuguan*, Beijing 1984, Wenwu Press, colour plate no 120.





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**PREVIOUS EXHIBITIONS:**

- \* December 1985 — Chinese Gold, Silver and Gilt Bronze up to the Tang Dynasty.
- \* June 1986 — Ancient Chinese Bronze Vessels, Gilt Bronzes and Early Ceramics.
- \* December 1987 — Opening Exhibition.
- \* June 1989 — Archaic Chinese Bronzes from Shang and Zhou Dynasties.



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