

THE ART OF THE WARRING STATES
AND HAN PERIODS



ORIENTAL BRONZES LTD.

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FOREWORD

Since our opening in December 1985, we have strived to present annual exhibitions featuring the best and most interesting examples of the art of ancient China.

This year we have the opportunity, with our participation in the Grosvenor House Antiques Fair, to organize not one, but two exhibitions. The first in our gallery at 96 Mount Street, the second at Grosvenor House, each respectively dedicated to a specific theme:

- The Art of the Warring States and Han Periods
- Imperial Gold from Ancient China, part II

I would like to express my gratitude to Elizabeth Knight and Louisa Ching for the production of this catalogue and Prudence Cuming and her team in London who spent several days photographing each object.

I also wish to thank Robert H. Ellsworth and Anthony Carter for showing me remarkable examples related to the subjects of both exhibitions.

Of the many others who have helped me in different ways in preparing these exhibitions, I would particularly like to thank Anna Plowden, Martin Bale and Doctor Sarah Allan for their invaluable assistance.

Finally, I am most grateful to my assistants Iola Lenzi and Ming Wilson, for their invaluable collaboration.

Christian DEYDIER

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INTRODUCTION

Ancient China under the Warring States, Qin and Han Dynasties witnessed a period of great artistic change and innovation. The objects featured in this catalogue represent the artistic developments associated with this culturally important period and have been chosen because they are of the highest quality and rarity in mediums such as gold, bronze, inlaid bronze, gilt bronze, lacquer and earthenware. Unfortunately, we were unable to assemble jades or stone and wood sculpture of matching quality and thus have not included examples from these fields. Nonetheless, works of outstanding quality and rarity in this latter category were recently presented by our French colleague Jacques Barrère at his exhibitions of June-July 1990 and March 1991. He was able to assemble Han Dynasty wooden horses, an exceptional unicorn, now in the Musée Guimet, and a superb ox drawn cart (cf. fig. 1).



fig no. 1 —Wooden cart with two birds and drawn by an ox
Eastern Han Dynasty
Length: 68 cm.

(Courtesy of Jacques Barrère)

From an historical point of view, the Warring States Period was one of upheaval. Punctuated by numerous wars, it was a time when many small states sought increased power and acquired it at the same rate the reigning Eastern Zhou Dynasty lost it. This warmongering and increased contact with the nomadic tribes of Northern China, favoured a cultural exchange resulting in artistic and technical innovations.

The unification of China by Qin Shihuangdi heralded the Han Dynasty's apotheosis and thus fostered an artistic flowering exemplified by the perfection of inlay and gilding, the refinement of lacquer and the tactile beauty of jade. These social changes, coupled with a progressive spurning of old religious beliefs, provoked however the decline of the art of bronze in the early days of the Spring and Autumn Period. The aristocrats turned their attention to new techniques such as gilding, inlay and lacquer work.

We will now discuss these new techniques.

The origins of inlay in China are surrounded by controversy. Certain specialists maintain that the technique was imported, while others consider it to have originated in China proper. We do not wish to enter the debate, but only to put forth certain observations pertaining to inlay's evolution from earliest Chinese antiquity.

Recent archaeological discoveries have confirmed that turquoise inlay existed as far back as the late Xia Dynasty (17th century BC). In 1981, excavations at Erlitou, Henan Province, brought to light an ornamental bronze plaque inlaid with turquoise. The inlaid decoration depicts a stylized animal's head with protruding eyes, nose, pair of fangs and horns (cf. fig. 2). This may well be one of the first representations of the *taotie* mask. If nothing else, this discovery scientifically proves the existence of inlay in ancient China.



fig no. 2 — Bronze plaque inlaid with turquoise
Henan Province, Xia Dynasty
Height: 14.2 cm.

The following period, the Shang Dynasty is well documented in its final years, known as the Anyang Period, but the early phase of the dynasty, or Erligang Period (16th-14th century BC), is much less well-known. It seems that no inlaid piece of the Erligang phase has yet been excavated, nor has any attribution been made dating such a piece to the primitive Shang. However, this absence of material proof in no way indicates that the technique did not exist and time must eventually fill this gap in our knowledge.

The second half of the Shang Dynasty is well documented particularly due to the finds at Anyang. Turquoise inlaid pieces of this period abound especially arms, namely knives, axes and spear heads. Turquoise inlay, apparently in great demand at this time, borrowed its artistic references from the design repertory used for archaic bronzes: *taotie* masks and dragons. Queen Fuhao's tomb (Anyang, tomb no. 5 excavated in 1976) brought to light bone vessels inlaid with turquoise, proving that the use of turquoise was not restricted to bronze objects. One of the most important finds from this tomb was an elongated ivory cup with a handle, inlaid throughout with turquoise, the handle representing a stylized bird of prey.

Turquoise inlay is also known to have existed on bronze vessels. Indeed, a *fanglei*, reputedly excavated at Anyang in 1934 and now in The History Museum, Beijing, is entirely decorated with turquoise dragons and *taotie* masks. Another technique apparently used by the Shang to decorate archaic bronzes involved lacquer inlay. We discuss this method further on in a section devoted to lacquer.

Little is known at present about inlay under the Western Zhou. It seems that to date no turquoise inlaid items of this period have yet been scientifically excavated. Under the Eastern Zhou, the art of inlay changed and with the introduction of new techniques, turquoise inlay lost its appeal. At the end of the Spring and Autumn Period, increased contact with the nomadic tribes roaming the plains of Central Asia prompted new artistic techniques and designs to penetrate Chinese bronze art. Inlaid copper, depicting freely drawn hunting scenes, was particularly prized. Gold and silver inlay followed copper but it must be noted that these metallic inlays cannot be dated any earlier than the Eastern Zhou Dynasty.

This new inlay technique was greatly admired from the Warring States Period onward when it found favour with the feudal princes, royal heads of small states and wealthy merchants who formed a new class of well-off patrons. Ownership of such ostentatious objects represented status, enabling the owner to symbolically usurp the power of the central government, whose role by then had been greatly reduced.

Vessels, arms, mirrors, table legs, a wide variety of items were richly embellished with either geometric and abstract designs, hunting scenes, and stylized or naturalistic

animals. These were represented with inlays of turquoise, malachite, metals (copper, silver or gold), amalgam, glass, sometimes even lacquer and jade.

The finds from the tombs of the kings of Zhongshan excavated in 1974-78 at Pingshan county (Hebei Province) testify to the brilliance and richness of the art of bronze decoration under the Warring States. The gold and silver inlaid bronze objects excavated from these tombs, though only supports for screens or tables, are designed as complete animals, highly realistic in their representation. Their perfectly formed muscular bodies are boldly depicted, the strength of their movement emphasized by the sinuous curves of the inlay, giving them great liveliness. These bronzes, all roughly 50 centimetres high and 40 centimetres wide, vary in weight from 20 to 27 kg and represent a rhinoceros, a buffalo (cf. fig. 3), two extraordinary winged chimera with dragon heads, and the famous tiger devouring a fawn. The table base is a composition of several animals, including intertwining dragons and phoenix, supported by four crouching deer.



fig no. 3 — Gold and silver inlaid bronze buffalo
Hebei Province, Warring States Period
Height: 50 cm.

The finds indicate that bronze animal representation, coupled with the technical sophistication of silver, gold copper and lacquer inlays, had reached its apogee. Thus, the Warring States heralded a period of great innovation in the realm of the decorative arts. Amongst other decorative techniques, inlay developed into an art of extreme sophistication. A second very important innovation occurred with the emergence of lacquer.

Lacquer is produced from sap extracted from the lacquer tree, or *Rhus Verniciflua*. Initially of a whitish-grey colour, lacquer darkens to a sombre brown when exposed to light and air. The brownish substance used by craftsmen is therefore none other than dehydrated sap which, when purified, contains 80% urushiol, otherwise known as lacquer acid. Nearly unalterable and impossible to wear out, the substance can be used in its pure form or coloured by adding pigments. When combined with cinnabar, lacquer becomes red; with iron sulfate or soot, the final colour is black; yellow is obtained by adding arsenic sulphur, green by mixing indigo and arsenic sulphur, brown by adding iron oxide, and white is obtained with lead (white is unstable and eventually grows darker with age to end up a dark grey colour). The base supporting the lacquer is generally wooden but a variety of other bases are possible: wickerware, papier mache, fabric impregnated with lacquer and applied in layers (this technique is called "dry lacquer"), leather, metal, bronze and even ceramics.

Archaeological finds have prompted the scientific study of the use and development of lacquer in China, where the substance was utilized from the beginning of antiquity. It seems that as far back as Neolithic times, lacquer had a decorative function. In 1978, at Hemudu, Yuyao county in Zhejiang Province, archaeologists found a wooden bowl covered with bright red pigment with the appearance of lacquer. A pottery vessel, covered with a similar substance, was excavated at another Neolithic site.

The Shang Dynasty (16th-11th century BC) provides many clues relating to the use of lacquer. The digs carried out at Xiaotun, Anyang, Henan Province, from 1928 to 1938, uncovered very poorly preserved fragments of red lacquer work. In 1978 however, a site at Tiaxicun, Gaocheng, in Hebei Province, yielded many fragments of lacquered wooden vessels. Mainly remains of *pan* type dishes and *he* type boxes, the fragments, with thin wooden cores display black decoration on a red background, very similar to that found on bronzes. Some fragments are even inlaid with turquoise, a much revered stone under the Shang.

Furthermore, it seems that the Shang used lacquer not only to decorate wooden objects, but also to enhance certain types of bronze ritual vessels. Indeed, incisions decorating these vessels have sometimes been found filled with a paste-like-substance that some specialists have not hesitated to call "lacquer". Indeed, the incisions that appear on the surface of the *li* vase in the Musée Cernuschi (no. MC 8421) are filled with a black paste that highlights the decorative motif.

The use of lacquer objects became more widespread during the following dynastic period, that of the Western Zhou. Most items of this period, now in museums, were excavated in Luoyang before the war and studied by Professor Umehara. Since 1964, a few objects have been unearthed from sites around Luoyang (Henan), and at Liulihe

in Fangshan, County of Beijing. These pieces, of quite advanced technical level, were composed of a thin wooden core covered with red and black lacquer.

Lacquer works of the early Eastern Zhou, and particularly Spring and Autumn Period, have been excavated from several tombs of the State of Guo at Sanmenxia in Shangcunling. Though most of the items were mere fragments, *pan* dishes and *dou* vessels were the most common. Lacquered objects, commonly with wooden cores, were sometimes inlaid with shell disks.

During the Warring States Period, the taste for lacquer achieved new heights. Some experts, such as Vadime Eliseeff, go as far as stating that from this period onward, all dinner plates and dishes belonging to the court and aristocracy were made of lacquer. The attraction for lacquer during this time is confirmed by the finds at Changsha, Luoyang and other sites, where funerary objects such as coffins, items for everyday use such as dishes, bowls and boxes, musical instruments and decorative elements (parts of chariots and boats) were all found.

Recently, many new archaeological discoveries have come to light. We will mention the most important of these:

* 1975-77: discovery of a cemetery in Shuihudi of Yunmeng. A total of 22 tombs excavated yielded 354 lacquered objects with wooden cores. These were black lacquer on the outside, red on the inside, and when decorated, were usually painted with birds, fish, flowers and curled clouds in red or dark brown on a black background.

* 1978: discovery at Leigudun, Suixian (Hubei) of a number of wooden objects, amongst others a variety of musical instruments, food and drink utensils including boxes and ear cups, and most notably, a black and vermilion lacquered coffin sporting yellow lacquer decoration.

It seems that lacquered objects of the Warring States Period follow two different traditions:

* The Northern Tradition:

This embodies items excavated many years ago from tombs in Jincun (Luoyang) and published by Professor Umehara. Few of these remain due to underground conditions unfavourable to the conservation of their fragile wooden core.

* The Southern Tradition:

This relates to local cultures, mainly those of the States of Shu, Ba and Chu, the latter being the most popular. According to discoveries made to this date, many more

lacquer objects have been excavated in the south rather than in the north and more particularly come from the Chu State.

Warring States lacquered objects are of different types and can be classified as follows:

- * utensils for daily use including: winged cups; toilet boxes; wine cups; *pan* vessels; small tables.
- * weapons: bows; arrows; quivers; shields; sword sheaths; armour.
- * grave furnishings: drums; animals (particularly deer); beds; coffins; tomb guardian animals; chariot fittings.
- * musical instruments.

Generally, Warring States lacquer wares have relatively thick wooden cores. This brings about serious conservation problems once the objects have been excavated. Indeed, if the piece is subjected to decreased humidity too rapidly, the layer of lacquer will dry, shrink, come away from the base, and then flake, causing the object to disintegrate. In the second half of the Warring States Period, the wooden core of lacquer objects becomes thinner and progressively, toward the end of the period, the first "dry lacquer" pieces appear. This technique becomes more widespread under the Eastern Han. In some rare cases, the core is bamboo.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that lacquer was also used to enhance ceramic and bronze objects. Indeed, substantial traces of lacquer have been found to exist on the bronze figures that support the bell from the Leigudun Tomb.

Warring States lacquer work usually consists of red, gold, yellow-gold and white motifs painted on a black background. The decorative devices frequently represent dragons, phoenix, clouds, geometric designs taken from those found on bronzes, less often flowers and petals, still more seldom, hunting scenes.

The high standards achieved by the Warring States lacquer craftsmen were attained and surpassed by the Han artists. The costs involved in the production of lacquer were extremely high. According to the *Yantielun*, known as the 'Discourse on Salt and Iron' and written at the beginning of the Han Dynasty, a lacquer cup could cost ten times more than its bronze equivalent as no fewer than 100 workmen could be required for its production. Hence, it is easy to understand why high ranking officials and nobleman took to inscribing their names and titles on their lacquer vessels and also why these objects bore the name of the place of production, along with a long list of names of those specialist craftsmen who had participated in the manufacture of a specific aspect of the piece.

The pre-war finds at Pyongyang in Korea and Noin Ula in Mongolia have been surpassed by recent discoveries at Fenghuangshan in Jiangling and Mawangdui in Hunan.

From 1972 to 1974, three tombs dating to the early Han were excavated at Mawangdui, an eastern suburb of Changsha. Inscriptions in the tombs have enabled archaeologists to identify the tombs:

- * tomb no. 1: containing 180 lacquer objects and belonging to the Marquess of Dai, who died in 168 BC.
- * tomb no. 2: belonging to the Marquis of Dai, first minister to the king of Changsha in 193 BC, he died in 186 BC.
- * tomb no. 3: containing 316 lacquer objects and belonging to the Marquis' youngest son who died in 168 BC.

The funerary furnishings in these tombs included a lacquer coffin, as well as a lacquer dinner service, many pieces of which bear painted inscriptions: "House of the Marquis of Dai". The find comprised a great variety of vessels: toilet boxes, cosmetic boxes (*lian*) with two inner compartments, sometimes containing smaller boxes, ear cups with their storage boxes, *pan* dishes, vases of *hu* and *fanghu* shapes.

The lacquer vessels found at Mawangdui all have thin wooden cores covered with black lacquer on the outside, red on the inside and are decorated with red, gold and silver painting. These finds have been of paramount importance in the study of Han lacquer and have served to confirm knowledge gleaned from earlier discoveries. A brief outline of the development of Han lacquer can be traced as follows:

During the early Western Han, most lacquer objects contained a wooden core; during the mid Western Han, the wooden core is progressively replaced by a fabric core, the wooden core remaining quite common nonetheless.

Han decorative techniques can be classed as follows:

- 1- painting with lacquer, mixed with various pigments, resulted in a shiny and durable embellishment.
- 2- painting with oil, resulted in the paint's steady deterioration over the years.
- 3- incision, pin-prick engraving on the lacquer surface of the object, sometimes filled with gold or silver.
- 4- inlay, motifs cut out from thin sheets of silver or gold and let into the surface of the lacquer object.
- 5- the same technique as above, used in the negative fashion, with areas cut away in the lacquer.
- 6- gilt or silvered bronze mounts, affixed to the rim of lacquer vessels, appeared during the late Warring States and were particularly popular by the mid Western Han. Gilt buttons, inlaid into the handles of cups, were also favoured.

The elaborate and complex designs of the Western Han become much simpler and understated by the Eastern Han. Decorative motifs usually featured at that time include dragons, birds, fish, bears, horses, other animals, scrolling clouds (*juanyun*), floral designs, geometric designs, human figures and a rare hunting scene. These motifs could be represented in either a realistic or stylized fashion.

The lacquer industry and the fashion that supported it started during the Warring States and reached its apogee under the Han. By the mid Eastern Han, the popularity of lacquer wares began to wane. By the late Eastern Han lacquer was in full decline, coinciding with the appearance of a new material, celadon ware, which in turn, grew increasingly popular and gradually replaced lacquer ware.

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CHRONOLOGY

Zhou Dynasty	XI – 256 BC	
Western Zhou Dynasty	XI – 770 BC	
Eastern Zhou Dynasty	770 – 256 BC	
Spring & Autumn Period	722 – 481 BC	
Warring States Period	453 – 221 BC	
Qin Dynasty	221 – 206 BC	
Han Dynasty	206 –	220 AD
Western Han	206 –	6 AD
Xin Dynasty (Wang Mang)		9 – 22 AD
Eastern Han		25 – 220 AD

Catalogue

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GOLD

1

PAIR OF GOLD OVINE ANIMAL MASKS 金牛形飾件一對

Spring and Autumn Period, 722-481 BC

Height: 2.2 cm.

Pair of gold ovine animal masks finely cast with details in relief. Scrolling tusks flank either side of each curled-up muzzle revealing the animal's tongue. The circular protruding eyes have fine granulated bead eyebrows, matching a granulated lozenge at the bridge of the snout. At the crest of the masks, the animal has two stylized three-lobed ears.

Similar example:

— reclining gold rams, with heads similar to these masks, have been excavated in Fengxiang County, Shaanxi Province and illustrated in *Gongyi Meishupian* vol. 10: Jinyin Boli Falangqi, Beijing 1987, pages 2 and 3, plates 4 and 5.



BELT-HOOKS

2

INLAID BRONZE BELT-HOOK 鑲飾銅帶鈎

Warring States Period, 5th-3rd century BC

Length: 7 cm.

Width: 5.8 cm.

Silver and gold inlaid bronze belt-hook cast as a stylized elephant head, the trunk curling up to form the hook with the extremity resembling a snake's head. The stylized elephant's head has large protruding eyes and is symmetrically decorated with inlaid silver and gold volutes and swirls emphasizing the beast's ears and trunk. The underside of the belt-hook bears a large flat button perched at the top of the hook and decorated with inlaid silver swirl motifs.

Provenance:

— Private Collection

Similar examples:

— Lawton Th., *Chinese Art of the Warring States Period, Change and Continuity, 480-222 BC*, Washington DC 1982, page 91.

— Moreau-Gobard J.-C. and Lion-Goldschmidt D., *Chinese Art*, New York 1971, page 113, plate 47.



3

INLAID BRONZE BELT-HOOK 鑲飾銅帶鈎

Warring States Period, 5th-3rd century BC

Length: 9.1 cm.

Width: 2 cm.

Silver and gilt inlaid bronze belt-hook with a serpentine head. Divided along its length into three parallel facets, the hook is decorated with a stylized serpentine dragon running along its length. The dragon is baring his fangs and extends four double clawed paws. His body is decorated with a single row of gilt scales, separated one from the other by silver wire divisions. The sides of the hook are inlaid with an interrupted silver border. The reverse of the hook bears an off-centre flat button with silver scroll inlay.

Provenance:

— Private Collection

Similar example:

— an example illustrating a similar snaking dragon design and using the same technique is published by Rawson J. and Bunker E., *Ancient Chinese and Ordos Bronzes*, Hong Kong 1990, catalogue no. 125.



4

GILT SILVER BELT-HOOK 鑲金銀帶鉤

Warring States Period, 5th-3rd century BC

Length: 8 cm.

Width: 2.7 cm.

Parcel-gilt silver belt-hook in the form of a sculpted stylized animal. The animal's head is gilt, with chased eyes, eyebrows in relief and ears pointing backward. The bill-like smiling snout, continues into the serpentine head of the hook. The animal's body is cast with asymmetric scroll and linear designs and four stylized paws of differing abstract form are visible to the front and rear. A flat spade-shaped parcel-gilt tail finishes the piece.

The underside of the hook bears a central slightly convex gilt button.

Provenance:

— Private Collection.



5

INLAID BRONZE BELT-HOOK 鑲飾銅帶鈎

Warring States Period, 5th-4th century BC

Length: 11.3 cm.

Bronze belt-hook inlaid with gold and turquoises protruding in slight relief. The serpentine head of the hook is decorated with a central turquoise with striated gold bands and three gold circles to either side of the stylized jaw. The convex face of the hook displays symmetrically positioned gold volutes and scrolls surrounding a central row of tear-shaped and spherical turquoises.

The underside of the belt-hook is also decorated with inlaid gold scroll motifs and a slightly off-centre button with a circular hooked scroll design.

Provenance:

— Private Collection.

Similar example:

— a similar belt-hook, without turquoises, is illustrated by Lawton Th., *Chinese Art of the Warring States Period, Change and Continuity, 480-222 BC*, Washington DC 1982, catalogue no. 53.



6

INLAID BRONZE BELT-HOOK 鑲飾銅帶鈎

Warring States Period, 4th-3rd century BC

Length: 25.7 cm.

Width: 4.5 cm.

Bronze belt-hook overlaid on its face with gold foil and cut out to reveal silver wire inlaid into the bronze. The belt-hook is divided along the length of its convex surface into three parallel facets. The convex side of the belt-hook is symmetrically decorated with finely traced volutes and swirls, the overall composition depicting two pairs of stylized intertwined dragons, each pair sharing a serpent head. A serpent-like finial forms the lower end of the belt-hook.

The back of the hook is inlaid with two silver dragon or snake designs flanking either side of the flat circular button, positioned slightly above the middle of the hook. The button is inlaid with a central gold swirl motif, continued with silver finials and surrounded by two fine silver bands.

The sides of the belt-hook are decorated with inlaid silver and gold stylized clouds.

Provenance:

— Private Collection.



7

INLAID BRONZE BELT-HOOK 鑲飾銅帶鈎

Warring States Period, 5th-3rd century BC.

Length: 15.2 cm.

Gold and silver inlaid bronze belt-hook, finely cast in the form of a dragon entwined with a bird. The dragon bites and clutches a long plume while the bird tugs at its feathers.

The bodies are finely detailed with silver and gold hooked scrolls and in silver feathers.

The shaft is decorated with a bird head inlaid in gold and ends in a dragon-head hook.

Provenance:

— Private Collection.

Exhibited:

— Oriental Bronzes Ltd/ Christian Deydier, 'Chinese Gold, Silver and Gilt Bronze up to the Tang Dynasty', London December 1985, Catalogue no 9.

Published:

— Oriental Bronzes Ltd/ Christian Deydier, *Chinese Gold, Silver and Gilt Bronze up to the Tang Dynasty*, London December 1985, page 18-19, no 9.

Similar example:

— H. D'Ardenne de Tizac, *Animals in Chinese Art*, plate XIX.



8

GILT BRONZE BELT-HOOK 鍍金銅帶鉤

Western Han Dynasty, 206 BC-6 AD

Length: 16.5 cm.

Width: 3.7 cm.

Gilt bronze belt-hook cast in openwork to resemble a moving dragon. The animal's head is horned, has a bulging eye and fangs. The elongated body is decorated with stylized scrolling scales and four legs with sharpened claws. The opposite end of the hook curves into a serpentine form. The reverse side of the hook is unadorned and is set with a central flat button.

Provenance:

— Private Collection.

Exhibited:

— Eskenazi Ltd, 'Twenty Five Years', London 1985, catalogue no. 10.

Published:

— Eskenazi Ltd, *Twenty Five Years*, London 1985, catalogue no. 10.

Similar example:

— 'Asiatic Art in Japanese Collections', *Asahi Shimbun*, Tokyo 1969, vol. 6, Decorative Arts number 24.



BELT-HOOKS

9

INLAID BRONZE SWORD (JIAN) 鑲飾銅劍

Warring States Period, 5th-3rd century BC.

Length: 47 cm.

This extremely rare bronze sword has an ovoid hilt with two ring rolls crowned by a concave pommel disk. The underside of the pommel is gilt and decorated with lines.

The guard of winged shape is also gilt.

The tapered two-edged blade with a median ridge on either side, is decorated overall with a geometrical design inlaid in gold and silver. The patterns symmetrically arranged on each side of the gilt median ridge are spirals, scalloped curved spirals in negative, gilt or silvered triangles, and a long silvered broken line.

Provenance:

— Private Collection.

Exhibited:

— Oriental Bronzes Ltd/ Christian Deydier, 'Opening Exhibition', London December 1987, catalogue no 9.

Published:

— Oriental Bronzes Ltd/ Christian Deydier, *Opening Exhibition*, London December 1987, page 30-31, no 9.

Similar example:

— a very similar sword, not yet published, and probably coming from the same tomb, belongs to Mr. R.H. Ellsworth, New York.

Notes:

— This sword can be dated to the late Warring States Period, by its shape, technique of inlay, designs and material.

— According to the classification of the *Kaogonji* - book on Eastern Zhou swords, compiled in the 2nd century BC - this sword was probably owned by a man of the highest rank. This possibility is confirmed by recent excavations. All the important swords scientifically found were owned by kings (Gou Jian, King of Yue; Fu Chai, King of Wu; King He Lu) and princes (Prince Gu Fa; Prince Liu Sheng).



10

INLAID BRONZE CROSSBOW TRIGGER 鑲飾銅弩機

Late Warring States Period, 3rd century BC

Height: 16 cm.

Length: 18 cm.

Bronze crossbow trigger inlaid with gold volutes and scrolls resembling a cloud pattern.

Notes:

— The cloud pattern, one of the most popular decorative motifs during the Han Dynasty, already appears on lacquer during the late Eastern Zhou Dynasty.

— The design on this crossbow trigger is very similar to the one on the lacquer box from the Low-Beer Collection and illustrated: *Archives of Asian Art*, vol. XXI, 1967-1968, page 12 fig. 10 (dated late Eastern Zhou).

— crossbow prints embedded in the ground have been found at the Qin Shihuangdi site and are illustrated in *The Pits of Terra Cotta Warriors and Horses of Qin Shihuang Mausoleum — an excavation of no. 1 pit, 1974-1984*. The Institute of Archaeology, Shaanxi Province, pages 288-292.

— a very similar design appears on the bronze chariot and crossbow illustrated in *Wenwu* 1991 no. 1 p. 7 and p. 12, fig. 5.



11

INLAID BRONZE CHARIOT ORNAMENT 鑲飾銅車管飾

Late Warring States Period or Early Western Han, 3rd-2nd century BC

Length: 34 cm.

Diameter: 4.4 cm.

Silver inlaid bronze chariot ornament in the form of two connecting cylinders. The two tubes fit together thanks to an internal tongue and groove system and the join is covered by undecorated sleeve composed of three planes protruding from the tube.

The two cylinders display identical designs in inlaid silver on a bronze background. They join together so that the design on one prolongs that on the other with one tube a quarter turned in relation to the first.

The design itself is composed of a complex series of spirals, curves and volutes, all of differing sizes. An assemblage of geometric motifs, viewed separately, suggests triangles, stylized birds' heads, or when the tube is reversed, dragon-elephants with curved trunks and stylized cicadas.

Similar examples:

— Rawson J. and Bunker E., *Ancient Chinese and Ordos Bronzes*, Hong Kong 1990, page 185, plate 94.

— similar items have been excavated from the tombs of the Zhongshan princes as discussed by Wu Hung, 'A Sanpan Shan Chariot Ornament: Xiangrui Design in Western Han Art', *Archives of Asian Art*, volume XXXVII, New York 1984, pages 38-59.

Notes:

— several decorated cylinders similar to this one are documented as having been dug up with the remains of chariots but are invariably described merely as "tubes".

— according to Wu Hung, 'A Sanpan Chariot Ornament: Xiangrui Design in Western Han Art', *Archives of Asian Art*, volume XXXVII, New York 1984, pages 38-59, this kind of chariot ornament belonged to a set of chariot fittings and was used to join the handle of the canopy to the carriage.

— the fine quality of the decoration adorning these fittings suggests the high rank of the chariot's owner. This appears to have been confirmed by the discovery of the tombs of the Zhongshan princes or kings.



12

INLAID BRONZE CHARIOT ORNAMENT 鑲飾銅車管飾

Late Warring States Period or Early Western Han, 3rd-2nd century BC

Length: 42.5 cm.

Diameter: 5.5 cm.

Silver inlaid bronze chariot ornament in the form of a long tube divided into four sections by three raised rings. The central raised joint covering the internal tongue and groove attachment is divided into three planes, each decorated with silver inlaid scroll and triangle patterns. The two other rings, in high relief, are inlaid with spirals, plain lines and starlets.

The silver designs on the two parts of the tube are displayed symmetrically on a bronze background. Each part is decorated with a complex series of concentric circles, slender drops, spirals, and volutes of differing sizes. Geometric motifs, viewed separately, suggest triangles, stylized birds' heads, or when the tube is reversed, dragon-elephants with curved trunks and stylized cicadas.

Similar examples:

— a tube similar to one part of our two-part cylinder is in the City Art Museum, Saint Louis and is published: Loehr M., *Ritual Vessels of Bronze Age China*, New York 1968, plate 79, page 173.

— another tube, similar to one of the two parts of our cylinder is in the British Museum and published: Yetts W.P., *The George Eumorfopoulos Collection, Catalogue of the Chinese and Korean Bronzes, Sculpture, Jade, etc.*, volume I, London 1929, A99 and A100.

Similar examples but with different decoration:

— a similar tube but with different decoration and dated to the Han Dynasty, is in the Marquis Hosokawa Collection, Tokyo and is illustrated: *Archives of Asian Art*, volume XXI, New York 1967-1968, figure 14, page 14.

— another, also dated to the Han Dynasty and coming from Lo-Lang in Korea, is in the Geijutsu Daigaku Collection, Tokyo, and illustrated: *Archives of Asian Art*, volume XXI, New York 1967-1968, figure 15, page 14.





LACQUER

13

PAINTED LACQUER TRAY (AN) 彩繪漆案

Warring States Period, 5th-3rd century BC

Length 57 cm.

Width: 34 cm.

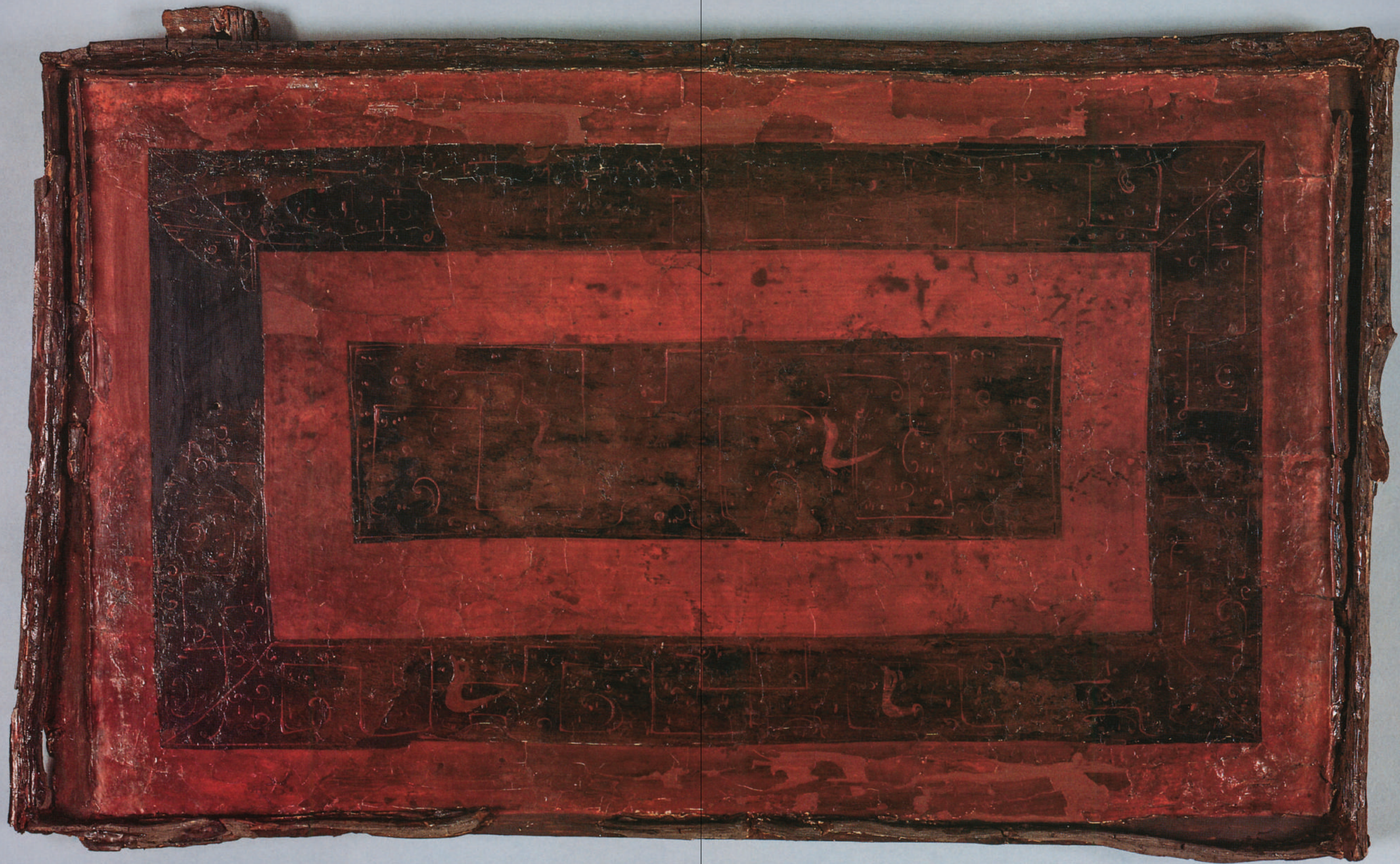
Rectangular nut-brown and red lacquer tray or low table, with a raised moulding around the edge. The face of the tray is decorated with alternating brown and red rectangular lacquer borders. The central brown lacquer rectangle as well as the brown border between the outer and inner red ones, are embellished with red lacquer decorative motifs including stylized birds, clouds, "C" scrolls, dots and dashes.

The underside of the tray-table is plain brown lacquer and strengthened by a pair of parallel stretchers affixed along its width at both extremities. These would have supported the table's short legs, none of which have survived.

Notes:

- this type of tray or low table for individual use was generally transported directly from the kitchen fully laden with plates, cups, ear cups (*bei*), spoons and chopsticks.
- the tray's core is wooden but is further supported by lacquer impregnated fabric beneath the stretchers.





14

LACQUER BOX AND COVER (LIAN) 彩繪漆奩連蓋

Western Han Dynasty, 206 BC- 6 AD

Diameter: 8 cm.

Height: 6 cm.

Round nut-brown lacquer box with a slightly domed cover. The sides of both the box and the cover are painted similarly in red with delicate "C" shaped scrolls within simple line borders at the top and bottom. The cover is decorated with a central inlaid silver quatrefoil within a red linear border and surrounded by scroll shapes and stylized animals. At the cover's edge there is a border of small scrolls within two concentric lines.

Similar example:

— pieces displaying very similar decoration have been excavated in Tianchang County, Anhui Province and are illustrated in *Zhongguo Wenwu Jinghua*, Beijing 1990, no. 96-97.

Note:

— the core of this box is composed of fabric impregnated with lacquer, as opposed to wood and is therefore referred to as "dry lacquer".



15

LACQUER BOX AND COVER (ZHI) 彩繪漆卮連蓋

Western Han Dynasty, 206 BC-6 AD

Diameter: 9.7 cm.

Height: 10.2 cm.

Round blackish-brown lacquer box with a slightly domed cover and plain red lacquer interior. The sides and lid are decorated with extremely fine incisions, sometimes filled in with red lacquer. A central frieze surrounding the box depicts stylized animals in flight amongst feathery clouds. Above and below are incised linear borders, four of which are partially filled with red lacquer. These lines are contained within two lozenge, stripe and dot borders, the dots filled with red lacquer. The cover displays the same incised line and dot design, nearly all filled in with red lacquer and surrounding a central medallion of feathery clouds. At the centre of the cover and on one side of the box, two small gouged areas appear where gilt bronze handles have been ripped away.

Similar example:

— a very similar *zhi* was excavated, with other components from a lacquer set, at tomb no. 1, Mawangdui, in 1972. It is illustrated, along with matching lacquer plates, ear-cup, and cup, displayed on the set's matching lacquer tray, in *Zhongguo Bowuguan Congshu* vol. 2, Hunansheng Bowuguan, Beijing 1983, page 188, plates 114, 116.

This *zhi*, with the same incised and filled decoration, has a gilt bronze ring-pull handle at the centre of the cover and a double ring handle on one side, both handles in the positions where the gouges appear on our vessel.

Note:

— This box is technically referred to as "dry lacquer" because its core, visible thanks to the two gouges, is composed of fabric impregnated with lacquer instead of wood.



16

LACQUER EAR-CUP (BEI) 彩繪漆耳杯

Late Western Han Dynasty, 206 BC-6 AD

Length: 15.8 cm.

Height: 6.6 cm.

Nut-brown and red oval lacquer ear-cup. The brown lacquer exterior of the cup is painted with stylized red lacquer birds, "C" clouds and linear motifs within parallel red lacquer line borders. A frieze of concentric circles within a trellised grid decorates the outer lip and handles of the cup.

The interior of the cup is red lacquer, embellished at the inner lip with a finely painted black and yellow linear border containing sporadic daubs of green above a border of fine yellow hatches separated by green dots.

Similar example:

— an ear cup, dated 8 BC, of identical shape and decoration at the outer lip was excavated at Mozuizi, Gansu Province and illustrated in *Gongyi Meishupian* vol. 8: Qiqi, Beijing 1989, pages 21 and 54, plate 55.

— an ear cup displaying a similar design is illustrated by Umehara S., *Shina Kandai Kinen-mei Shikki zuzetsu*, Kyoto 1943, p. 13 fig. 4, and plates XIII no. 15 and XII no. 12.

Note:

— part of the cup's wooden core was destroyed and has subsequently been replaced and the original lacquer fitted onto the new core.



GILT BRONZE

17

PAIR OF GILT BRONZE BRIDLE ORNAMENTS 鍍金銅馬勒飾

Ordos, Western Inner Mongolia, 3rd century BC

Height: 5.6 cm.

Width: 3.2 cm.

Pair of gilt bronze bridle ornaments cast to resemble rams' heads in the jaws of two crouching wolves. The wolves, depicted in profile, have turned-up snouts, long curved ears and clawed hind paws. The rams' heads are cast in relief with finely detailed snout, eyes and horns. A curved loop protrudes from the rear of the ornaments for attachment.

Provenance:

— Private Collection.

Similar example:

— Rawson J. and Bunker E., *Ancient Chinese and Ordos Bronzes*, Hong Kong 1990, catalogue no. 214.



18

GILT BRONZE ZHI 鎏金銅卮

Late Warring States Period, 3rd-2nd century BC

Height: 10 cm.

Diameter: 11.5 cm.

Gilt bronze *zhi*, the cylindrical cup decorated at the lip and toward the base with two slightly raised bands, both divided into a pair of concave rings. The vessel is supported on three delicate feet, each displaying two vertical lobes and resembling stylized animal hoofs. The circular handle, positioned under the banded decoration at the lip, is prolonged horizontally to incorporate a thumb-rest.

Similar examples:

— a very nice lacquer example is published by Shen Zhiyu, *The Shanghai Museum of Art*, New York 1981, plate 189.

— a gilt and silvered *zhi*, but of later period, (Western Han Dynasty) was exhibited by J.J. Lally, 'Chinese Works of Art', New York, May 27 to June 18, 1988, catalogue no. 35.

Note:

— usually this type of item is made in lacquer with some parts (base, legs, etc...) in inlaid bronze.



19

GILT BRONZE VESSEL (*BIANHU*) WITH COVER 鎏金銅扁壺連蓋

Late Warring States Period, Early Western Han, 3rd-2nd century BC

Height: 10.8 cm.

Small sized gilt bronze *bianhu* with cover. The ovoid body has slightly convex sides. The shoulders and the centre of the cover bear small protruding looped annular supports. The body is decorated overall with very fine incised swirling clouds. The vessel stands on a slightly splayed ring foot.

Similar example:

— a similar piece, but inlaid with gold and silver is illustrated: *Orientations*, September 1986, colour plate, back cover.



20

GILT BRONZE MIRROR 鍍金銅鏡

Han Dynasty, 206 BC-220 AD

Diameter: 10.2 cm.

Gilt bronze mirror of round shape decorated with two concentric ridges heavily cast in relief. Its centre is embellished with a half-spherical pierced bead.

Exhibited:

— Oriental Bronzes Ltd/ Christian Deydier, 'Chinese Gold, Silver and Gilt Bronze up to the Tang Dynasty', London December 1985, page 30, no. 16.



21

GILT BRONZE TAOTIE MASK 鎏金銅饕餮鋪首

Han Dynasty, 206 BC-220 AD

Height: 12.5 cm.

Width: 9 cm.

Gilt bronze *taotie* mask, holding a circular gilt bronze handle in its long snout curved down and back. The mask is decorated in relief with protruding eyes and scrolling swirls to either side. The circular handle, is decorated with two bevels flanking a central raised ridge.



22

GILT BRONZE BEAR 鎏金銅熊

Han Dynasty, 206 BC-220 AD

Height: 6 cm.

Hollow gilt bronze support inlaid with turquoises and cast in the form of a bear. The bear, decorated with fine incisions resembling fur, sits on his haunches, front paws with sharpened claws resting on his knees. His snout is realistically cast and open, revealing rows of pointed teeth.

The bear's back is decorated with engraved wave designs below which his tail is worked in slight relief and incised with fur markings.

Provenance:

— Private Collection.



23-24-25

SET OF THREE GILT BRONZE VESSELS 鍍金銅容器三件

Western Han Dynasty, 206 BC-6 AD

This rare set is composed of three gilt bronze vessels, a *hu*, a *bianhu*, and a tripod *ding*.

The quality of the casting of these vessels, enhanced by an excellent gilding, makes them an extraordinary and very fine example of a much appreciated technique at the beginning of the Western Han Dynasty.



23

GILT BRONZE VESSEL (*DING*) WITH COVER 鎏金銅鼎連蓋

Western Han Dynasty, 206 BC-6 AD

Height: 16 cm.

Width: 21.6 cm.

Gilt bronze tripod vessel of *díng* shape, originally used for cooking. The domed cover is decorated with three annular loop handles surmounted by a small knob. The plain body is ornamented horizontally by a simple narrow band in relief at its middle. Two squared upright loop handles protrude from the shoulders. The vessel is supported on three stylized animal legs.



24

GILT BRONZE VESSEL (HU) 鎏金銅壺

Western Han Dynasty, 206 BC-6 AD

Height: 25.7 cm.

Gilt bronze vessel of *hu* type. The pyriform-shaped body is supported by a ring foot. The averted mouth is ornamented with a flaring band. The central area of the body, delineated by two narrow rings in relief, is divided horizontally into two equal planes by a third ring. The shoulders of the vessel are decorated with two finely cast *taotie* masks in low relief, with loop muzzles used to hold movable rings, now missing.



25

GILT BRONZE VESSEL (BIANHU) 鎏金銅扁壺

Western Han Dynasty, 206 BC-6 AD

Height: 29.8 cm.

Width: 29.8 cm.

Gilt bronze *bianhu*. The body of oval shape has flat sides impressed around the circumference with a wide depressed band. The shoulders are decorated with *taotie* masks in high relief with loop muzzles holding a movable ring. The flared neck terminates with a six-lobed stylized garlic bulb. The body is supported on a flared rectangular foot.



EARTHENWARE

26

EARTHENWARE HEAD OF A HORSE 彩繪陶馬頭

Han Dynasty, 206 BC-220 AD

Height: 17 cm.

Painted earthenware head of a horse. The head is covered with a layer of slip which has been finely modelled to reveal expressive protruding eyes, open muzzle disclosing upper and lower teeth, flaring nostrils and delicately carved jaw muscles. The head is painted red overall with eyes and teeth picked out in white and black and the muzzle and mane in black. The horse's harness and bridle is detailed in grey, black and white.



27

EARTHENWARE INKSTONE TORTOISE 灰陶龜形墨硯

Eastern Han Dynasty, 25-220 AD

Height: 13 cm.

Length: 5 cm.

Grey pottery figure of an inkstone in the shape of a tortoise. The cover is decorated with a pattern of pentagon-shaped forms, and incised with the eight trigram of the *Yijing*. The body of the inktablet, of concave shape and forming a container, represents a tortoise with its four legs and raised head.

Provenance:

— Hans Ostrom Collection.

— Johannes Hellner Collection.

Similar examples:

— The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, The William Hood Dunwoody Fund, published by E. Schloss, *Art of the Han*, China Institute in America, March 14 - May 27, 1979, Catalogue no 52.

— Oriental Bronzes Ltd / Christian Deydier, *Opening Exhibition*, London December 1987, Catalogue no 12.



28

EARTHENWARE WATER POT 綠釉羊形水壺

Eastern Han Dynasty, 25-220 AD

Height: 17 cm.

Length: 22 cm.

Barrel-shaped glazed earthenware water pot in the form of a ram. The cylindrical spout is centred on the animal's back and is decorated at the rim with two parallel grooves. The ram's head has two protruding eyes, a pair of curled horns covering small ears, a smiling slit muzzle and an engraved grid design decorating the central axis of the head, from the forehead to the nostrils. The animal also sports a tail. The glaze is lustrous green with a pearly iridescent finish.



29

EARTHENWARE FISHMONGER 綠釉陶魚販

Eastern Han Dynasty, 25-220 AD

Height: 21.5 cm.

Green-glazed pottery fishmonger kneeling as he prepares a fish on a legged cutting board. His sleeves are rolled up and he wears a double-peaked cap emphasizing very large flapping ears.

Similar examples:

— Musée Cernuschi, Paris.

— Yale University Art Gallery, illustrated by Pirazzoli-t-Serstevens M., *La Chine des Han*, Fribourg 1982, page 178, plate 131.



30

EARTHENWARE BOAT AND CREW 陶舢舨及船員

Eastern Han Dynasty, 25-220 AD

Height: 11.5 cm.

Length: 36 cm.

Earthenware model of a boat (*sampan*) and its three-member crew. The central part of the otherwise open vessel is covered with an arched canopy, engraved in a grid pattern to resemble straw. The sides of the boat are decorated horizontally with double engraved lines. The three figures, all with crudely modelled faces, are standing and have extended arms. There are two holes at the bow of the vessel, probably for the suspension of the anchor.

Similar example:

— a similar vessel, excavated at Shahequ, Guangzhou is published: Akiyama T., Ando K., Matsubara S., Okazaki T., Sekino T., *Arts of China, Neolithic Cultures to the Tang Dynasty, Recent Discoveries*, Tokyo 1968, p. 149, pl. 245.



31

EARTHENWARE FIGURE OF A CANTOR 灰陶男唱俑

Eastern Han Dynasty, 25-220 AD

Sichuan Province

Height: 36 cm.

Grey pottery figure of a seated male figure, his belly with its indented navel protruding from between his knees. The man has his arms to his chest and is clutching a stick in his right fist. His left hand is held against his chest with the thumb and index finger pointing up whereas the other three fingers curl into his open palm. He wears a flat cap and has fine boldly modelled ears, nose and smiling mouth above a square cropped goatee beard. The figure has a hunched back, visible at the rear. Traces of original green pigment appear on the piece.

Similar examples:

— a similar cantor excavated at Chongqing is now in the Chongqing museum and is illustrated in *Zhongguo Diaosushi Tulu*, vol. 1, Shanghai 1983, p. 325.

— a standing cantor with the characteristic large stomach has been excavated at Pi County, Sichuan Province and exhibited in Beijing in 1990 and illustrated in *Zhongguo Wenwu Jinghua*, Beijing 1990, no. 104.



32

EARTHENWARE FIGURE OF A MALE DANCER 灰陶男舞俑

Eastern Han Dynasty, 25-220 AD

Sichuan Province

Height: 57 cm.

Grey pottery figure of a male dancer, with his right arm and leg extended and his left arm on his hip. He wears a long swinging robe which, with ample sleeves and folds, follows the movement of his dance. The dancer's robe has black and red cuffs, collar and sash. His hair is drawn up in an elegant black and red three-lobed coif. The dancer's face has finely modelled features defined in black and red. His sinuous silhouette is as dynamic and elegant from behind as from the front.

Similar example:

— a similar figure was excavated in Mianyang, Sichuan Province and published in *Zhongguo Diaosushi Tulu* Vol. 1, Shanghai 1983, page 330.



BRONZE

33

ARCHAIC BRONZE TIGER 銅老虎

Late Eastern Zhou Dynasty, 770-256 BC

Length: 17 cm.

Archaic bronze foot cast in the shape of a tiger twisting into an “S” shape. His two front paws are level with his ears. His head, perfectly moulded, has two erect ears, protruding eyes, and a curled tongue appearing from his open mouth. The powerful body, with two fore-paws, shoulders and the left back leg cast in high relief, ends with a curled tail. The body, head, legs and tail are decorated with finely engraved fur scrolls and lines.

Provenance:

- Alfred Schoenlicht Collection.
- Frederick Mayer Collection.
- Private Collection.

Exhibited:

- Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1947 and 1948, on loan.
- Art of the Late Eastern Chou, China House, New York 1952, Catalogue no 11.

Published:

- Visser H.F.E., *Asiatic Art in Private Collections of Holland and Belgium*, Amsterdam 1947, plate 68 no 128.

Similar examples:

- The Seattle Art Museum.
- Pillsbury Collection, Minneapolis Museum, illustrated in *Bulletin* vol. XXXVI, 1947, page 113, no 23.
- Grousset R., *L'Evolution des Bronzes Chinois Archaïques*, Musée Cernuschi, Paris 1937, plate XIV, no 42.



34

ARCHAIC BRONZE CANDELABRA 銅燭台

Late Eastern Zhou, Early Western Han, 3rd-2nd century BC

Height: 36 cm.

Length: 36 cm.

Height of the figure: 19.5 cm.

Bronze three-branch candelabra depicting a *xian* or a figure of human appearance holding three sconces.

Cast in solid bronze, the *xian* is represented kneeling, sitting back on his heels. He wears an outfit of feathers including a pair of trousers and a top. His jacket, feathered at the rear, is overlaid with a feather cape which rests on his shoulders, falling away at the back and dividing into two stylized wings. The feather design decorating the *xian*'s outfit is extremely finely executed and cast in slight relief.

The figure's head is adorned with two large laterally placed ears that protrude well above his skull. The *xian*'s face has boldly traced features including a wide moustache. His hair is gathered to the rear in a duck's tail.

In his hands the figure holds a wide round platter upon which is placed a bowl, its rim decorated with four lotus leaves. Three branches extend from the bowl, each decorated at its crest with a stylized dragon. The central branch is vertical whereas the two side branches adopt a serpentine form, extending vertically, curving to the horizontal and then finishing vertically with a dragon. At the helm of each branch, over the dragon, there is a four-petal lotus which supports a shallow drip-pan which would have contained oil.

Similar example:

— a bronze figure smaller than this one, with crude features and without candle-arms, was excavated in Shaanxi Province, near Xian. It is illustrated in *Gongyi Meishupian* vol. 5: Qingtongqi, Beijing 1986, pages 75 and 180, plate 212.

Note:

— the term *xian* 仙 can be translated as "transcendental", the ability to transfer from one state to another. Our figure therefore embodies the concept of a metaphysical transfer of state. His feather and winged attire also suggest a more prosaic and literal interpretation of *xian*, referring to the being that flies from one place to another, earth to heaven in this instance.









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PREVIOUS EXHIBITIONS:

- * December 1985 - Chinese Gold, Silver and Gilt Bronze up to 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
- * June 1990 - Imperial Gold from Ancient China
- * June 1991 - The Art of the Warring States and Han Periods
- * June 1991 - Imperial Gold from Ancient China, part II
The Grosvenor House Antiques Fair

