



Belt plaque, one of a pair

On display

Title/Description: Belt plaque, one of a pair

Born: 0400 c. BC - 0100 c. BC

Measurements: h. 44 x w. 55 x d. 7 mm

Accession Number: 284b

Historic Period: 4th century BC, 1st century BC

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

Square or rectangular plaques framing creatures were especially popular with the nomadic peoples living in the Ordos region and the steppe lands to the north and west of China. They have been excavated in some numbers in China's northern provinces (*Wenwu*, 1980.7:1-10, pl. 1). The two examples shown here are likely to have been used to decorate belts of leather or other perishable materials; each has two loops for attachment on the back, and one has a side loop which was probably part of the mechanism for tying the belt. Each shows what is probably an ox with woolly mane, beard and hindquarters, and the features of the creature - horns, ears, eyes and nostrils - are carefully detailed. This is typical of the animal-style tradition to which these plaques belong (see previous entry). While most plaques were made of bronze, probably by the *cire perdue* process, a

few examples in gold and silver are known; gilded bronze was also commonly used, as here. Since gilding is much more common on belt plaques than it is on harness and cart ornaments such as nos. 133-4. they were probably objects of higher status.

The Chinese in due course adapted and adopted belt decorations from their northern neighbours, making them first, in the early centuries ad, on a much smaller scale. Chinese belt plaques are usually decorated with mythical beasts, such as dragons or *bixie*, in place of the realistic creatures that were typical of the peoples to the north.

These two plaques may be a pair or part of a larger set. Very similar examples have been found in tombs of the Xiongnu near Noin Ula in Mongolia (Rudenko, 1969: figs. 54*7), another was formerly in the collection of O. Karlbeck (Anderson, 1932: 267, pl- xxiv), and two others were in the collection of David Weill (Drouot, 1972: no. 24); see also Sun Ji (1986) and Rawson and Bunker (1990: no. 220).

Entry taken from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection 3 volume catalogue, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997).

Provenance

Acquired by the Sainsbury Family in 1954. Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
