

14. An Unusual Bronze Mirror with Hinged Leg

Diameter: 14.3 cm. (5 5/8 in.)

Southern Song period

13th century A.D.

The mirror is circular with conjoined cabriole legs forming a base to stabilize the mirror when set at an angle, the mirror angled when the hinged leg of curved tubular form, attached to the back, swings out, the mirror then further balanced on the flattened paw-form foot of the extended leg. A wide raised band circles the perimeter of the back of the mirror framing a four-character inscription in raised ribbon relief reading *zhang ling fu gui*, “excellence, honor, good fortune, wealth.” The mirror is heavily encrusted in bright green patina with a smoother olive-green patina along part of the rim visible on one side. The obverse, or the reflecting side, is characteristically plain beneath substantial accretions of green and brown.



Before the Song dynasty, bronze mirrors were fashioned almost exclusively with pierced knobs located on the reverse of the reflecting sides. This allowed for mounting on a stand or suspension from ribbons or cords so the mirrors could be easily held in the hand. The construction of the present mirror, with its built-in stand and hinged leg, is quite unusual yet it reflects the trend during the post-Tang period for novel methods for handling and supporting mirrors. A mirror with a similar hinged leg was discovered in a 13th-century Southern Song-period tomb in Fujian province, the tomb of Xu Jun (d. A.D. 1272) and two of his wives, supporting the dating of the present mirror (figs. 1-2). Interestingly, another Song-period tomb in Fujian, that of a noblewoman, was equipped with an enormous wardrobe for her use in the afterlife as well as an immense collection of toiletries to insure proper grooming. Included in this assortment was a lacquer stand to support one of the several mirrors found there (fig. 3).

Hinged legs were not the only method for producing a freestanding mirror. Three mirrors illustrated here are cast with bases or feet in the form of cloud-like scroll segments (figs. 4-6). Mirrors were also cast with suspension devices other than the traditional pierced knob centrally located on the reverse of the reflecting side, such as the bell-shaped mirror here with a large loose ring for suspension (figs. 7). And finally mirrors with long handles were produced, expanding the range of this important accouterment in design and utility (fig. 8).

The antiquarian interests prevalent among Song-period scholars, including such a luminary as the Northern Song monarch Huizong himself, is embodied in the inventive shapes of mirrors created at this time. The mirror illustrated above (see fig. 1) was fashioned in imitation of an ancient bronze-age tripod vessel. Bronze bells from this revered past inspired not only the shape of mirrors at this time but also suspension loops imitating actual bell hangers. Bell-shaped mirrors were sometimes cast in the form of contemporaneous bells, and, interestingly, a shape as simple as a plain rectangle was thought to be an acceptable mirror form (fig. 9).

The seal-script style of calligraphy used in the inscriptions cast on some of these later mirrors was also based on Bronze Age styles. Standard script, such as that on the present mirror, was also current during the Song and both informative inscriptions that name, for

example, artists or workshops, and inscriptions of a celebratory or auspicious nature, such as the present, are common. The four characters here seem to have been a popular combination either complete as a four-character phrase or incorporated into longer inscriptions.

The contrast between Tang and Song dynasty mirror style is a colossal one. The Tang jubilee of foliate shapes, exotic subjects, heraldic arrangements and juxtapositions, relief designs intricately and complexly cast, compositions developed with an eye to decorative richness, and the silvering of surfaces, along with gold and silver filigree appliques on lacquered grounds, and, finally, inlays of semi-precious stones gives way to a sobriety of spirit during subsequent periods. There were of course Song mirrors that were made in continuation of Tang achievement and tradition but usually in a diluted form while the most relevant mirrors have a straightforwardness and simplicity that comprise their great appeal.

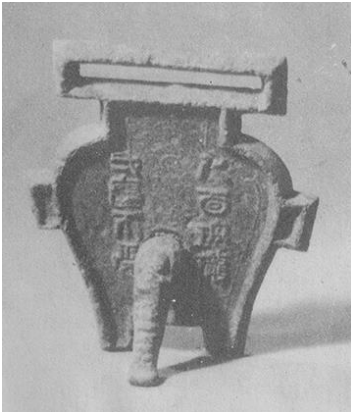


Fig. 1: *Ding*-tripod shaped bronze mirror with hinged foot, Southern Song period, 13th century A.D., excavated in the tomb of Xu Jun (d. A.D. 1272) and two wives, Fuzhou, Fujian province, Shanghai Museum, after *Wemu*, 1995:10, fig. 16, p. 27.



Fig. 2: Mirror figure 1 on exhibition at the Shanghai Museum. Photograph by Carol Conover.

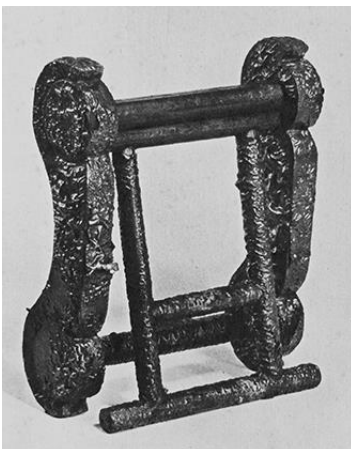


Fig. 3: Lacquer mirror stand, Southern Song period, 13th century A.D., from the tomb of the wife of Zhao Yujun (nee Huang Sheng, d. A.D. 1243), excavated near Fuzhou, Fujian province, after *Fuzhou Nan Song Huang Sheng mu*, Beijing, 1982, pl. 99, p. 73.



Fig. 4: Round bronze mirror cast with stand and decorated with “The Moon Palace,” Southern Song period, 13th century A.D., Shanghai Museum, excavated in Sichuan province, after Mao Ziliang and Xu Rucong, eds., *Ancient Bronze Mirrors from the Shanghai Museum*, Shanghai, 2005, pl. 116, p. 311.



Fig. 5: Round bronze mirror cast with stand and decorated “The Moon Palace,” Southern Song period, 13th century A.D., Hunan Provincial Museum, after Zhou Shi Rong, *The Bronze Mirrors*, Taipei, 1995, fig. 395, p. 139.

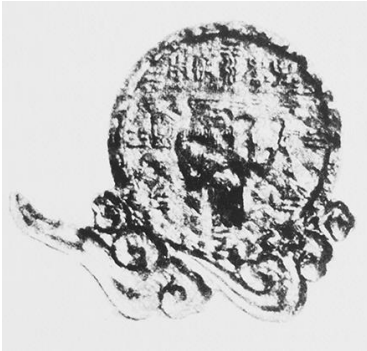


Fig. 6: Round bronze mirror cast with stand and decorated with auspicious inscription,]]] Southern Song period, 13th century A.D., excavated in Sichuan province, after Chen Xiejun and Wang Qingzheng, eds., *Ancient Bronze Mirrors from the Shanghai Museum*, Shanghai, 2005, fig. 40, p. 65.



Fig. 7: Bell-shaped bronze mirror, Southern Song period, 13th century A.D., after Zhang Daolai and Wei Quanlai, *Shandong minjian canjing*, Ji’nan, 2006, no. 263, p. 186.



Fig. 8: Foliate bronze long-handled mirror, Southern Song period, 12th-13th century A.D., after Zhang Daolai and Wei Quanlai, *Shandong minjian canjing*, Ji'nan, 2006, no. 262, p. 184.



Fig 9: Rectangular bronze mirror, Southern Song, 13th century A.D., excavated in the tomb of Xu Jun, Fuzhou, Fujian province, after *Wenwu*, 1995:10, fig. 15, p. 27.