Inlaid Bronze Garment Hook with Plaques of Jade and Gold

錯金銀嵌玉金牌銅帶鈎

Length: 21.9 cm. (8 5/8 in.)
Eastern Zhou, Warring States period
5th-4th century B.C.

長21.9厘米
東周 • 戰國

The gently bowed bronze garment hook is straight at one end, the wide shaft inset with jade and gold plaques, the shaft then morphing into a wide but streamlined dragon head with upturned snout from which issues a narrow neck terminating in the small dragon-head hook. The face of the dragon on the body of the shaft is gilded while the eyes and sharp horns are picked out in silver. Behind the horns on each side are amoeba-like bird forms inlaid with silver. The actual hook at the end is formed by a less mature dragon head or *qilong* with its docile face gilded. Behind its rounded and flattened ears are open-beaked birds inlaid and dotted with silver, while the reverse of the hook is decorated with gold dotting and gilt stripes. The shaft is set with large alternating gold and jade plaques that produce the main decorative impact of the accoutrement. These plaques are surrounded by the intricately gilded and silvered designs of the shaft that consist of geometric angles and diamond and Z-shapes infilled with tight coils or scrolls. The four greyish white jade plaques are carved with comma curls. Three of the five gold plaques are square and similarly cast in relief with small dragons contorted to conform to the square space, their small heads with distinctive bug-like eyes and prominent horns, their bodies a mass of raised curls, their writhing spines emphasized with gold beading, and their tri-clawed feet emerging on one side and at the rear of each plaque. The remaining two gold plaques are slimmer and conform to the narrowing shape of the shaft with gold dragons facing each other in a more confined and tightly organized space. The reverse is finished with gold dotting and gilt stripes above the plain silver back interrupted by a button inlaid with a faint whorl motif.

An iron garment hook in the Freer collection is configured with similar jade and gold plaques arranged in an identical manner to that of the present garment hook (fig. 1); another was in the Singer collection (fig. 2); and similar gold and jade plaques, separated from the original metal garment hook also believed to have been made from iron, were in the former Carl Kempe collection (fig. 3).[1] The gold

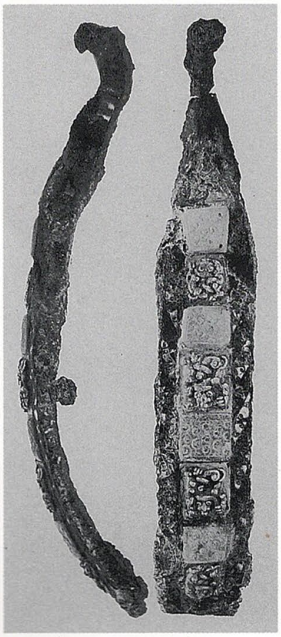

Fig. 1: Iron garment hook with jade and gold plaques, Zhou dynasty, Warring States period, 5th-4th century B.C., Freer Gallery of Art, after Thomas Lawton, *Chinese Art of the Warring States Period: Change and Continuity, 480-222 B.C.*, Washington D.C., 1982, no. 51, p. 101.

Fig. 2: Iron garment hook with jade and gold plaques, Zhou dynasty, Warring States period, 5th-4th century B.C., after Max Loehr, *Relics of Ancient China from the Collection of Dr. Paul Singer*, New York, 1965, pl. 85:c, p. 107.

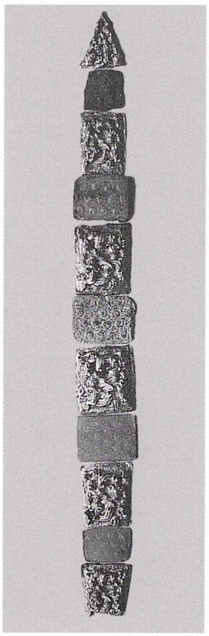

Fig. 3: Jade and cast gold plaques, late Zhou period, reportedly from Loyang, Henan province, after Bo Gyllensvard, *Chinese Gold and Silver in the Carl Kempe Collection*, Stockholm, 1953, fig. 2b, p. 63.

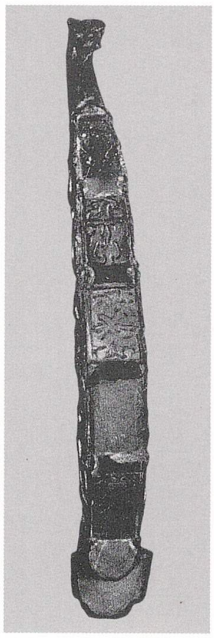

Fig. 4: Bronze garment hook inlaid with jade plaques, late Zhou period, after Jean-Pierre Dubosc, *Mostra d'Arte Cinese* ("Exhibition of Chinese Art"), Venice, 1954, no. 111.

plaques are all cast in the form of intertwined dragons with small curls enlivening the surfaces while the jade pieces are carved with repeated comma curls in raised relief against flat backgrounds. According to Thomas Lawton, two of the jade plaques in the Freer example are done in an abbreviated manner and may be replacement pieces.[2] Interlaced or intertwined designs were the forté of late Zhou designers and craftsmen and appear in cast gold accoutrement of the period such as belt buckles. Gold plaques for attachment to leather belts and horse trappings were also produced in this style. Bronze garment hooks with the same shaft form as the present and inlaid with jade plaques of similar form, though with more varied carved designs, are also known (fig. 4), providing a fuller context for the present garment hook.

Whereas the gold and silver inlaid designs on the shaft of the Freer iron garment hook are discernable despite the corrosion of the iron, a thorough cleaning of the stable bronze material of the present hook revealed quite clearly the inlaid silver and parcel gilt designs. The geometric and bird forms are quite typical of the craftwork of the late Zhou period. However, the term "typical," in regard to avian creatures in the art of the late Zhou and Han, really refers to conformity to a rather wild assemblage of inventive and often imaginary creatures, many of which appear to have come into being simply to accommodate areas of specific, unusual and sometimes even unique shape and size.

Garment hooks are among the most varied personal accoutrements produced during the late Zhou and Han periods. In no other product were so many materials utilized and combined to produce such stunning and unusual effects. Bronze and iron, gold and silver, jade and turquoise, glass and crystal and all manner of semi-precious stones were combined in ways that resulted in a range of effects from great sculptural dynamism and material overkill to subdued beauty and grace. The present hook stands midway between those extremes with its intertwined golden beasts, small seas of jade, and dizzying coils of precious metals all contained within a simple symmetrical form lorded over by the calm and sober head of a dragon.

Only a culture very advanced in its sensitivity to couture and the decorative arts would produce such elaborate personal adornment, and this is but one example in a category that was as varied as the individuals who donned such apparel. It is difficult to imagine such items actually being worn, but we are reminded from the literature of the period that fanciful garment hooks did indeed adorn the living. Attributed to Qu Yuan, the Chu poet active during the late Zhou dynasty in the 4th to 3rd century B.C., are the lines:

> The lovely girls are drunk with wine, their faces flushed and red.
> With amorous glances and flirting looks, their eyes like wavelets sparkle;
> Dressed in embroideries, clad in finest silks, splendid but not showy;
> Their long hair, falling from high chignons, hangs low in lovely tresses.
> Two rows of eight, in perfect time, perform a dance of Cheng;
> Their *hsi-pi* buckles of Chin workmanship glitter like bright suns.[3]

1. Thomas Lawton refers to two additional garment hooks from a Warring States period tomb in Xinyang in Henan province in Thomas Lawton, *Chinese Art of the Warring States Period: Change and Continuity, 480-222 B.C.*, Washington D.C., 1982, p. 102. The Xinyang garment hooks are illustrated in *Xinyang Chumu*, Beijing, 1986, color pl. 6 and pls. 64-65. Bo Gyllensvard mentions further examples in the

Detail of cat. 2

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Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Stoclet collection in Brussels in Bo Gyllensvard, *Chinese Gold and Silver in the Carl Kempe Collection*, Stockholm, 1953, p. 62.

2. Thomas Lawton, *ibid.*, p. 101.
3. Taken from David Hawkes' translation of the *Zhao Hun* ("Summoning the Soul") in *Ch'u Tz'u: The Songs of the South*, Boston, 1962, pp. 107-108. *Hsi-pi* (*xibi*) refers to the skin of a rhinoceros and by extension to decorative painted, carved, woven or inlaid patterning.