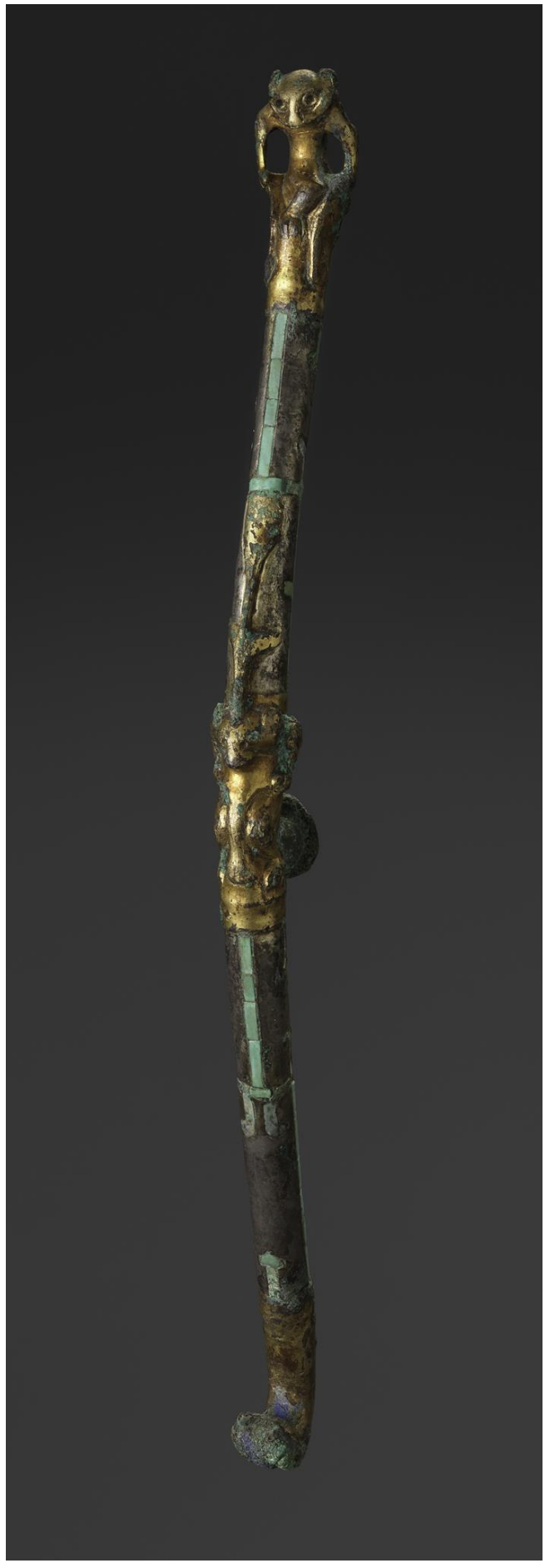

Turquoise Inlaid Gilt and Silvered Bronze Garment Hook

鍍金銀綠松石 銅熊紋 頂飾
東周・春秋-戰國 時期

Length: 21.5 cm. (8 1/2 in.)
Eastern Zhou dynasty
3rd century B.C.

Formerly the Hosokawa collection

The long, curved, slender-bodied shaft is cast on one end, opposite the hook, with a gilt-bronze bear sitting upright, its large eyes, probably once inlaid with turquoise, wide open and its forearms cast in openwork. Another gilt bear, positioned upright on its haunches, is cast in the midsection with a trefoil motif issuing above its head extending up the shaft, flanked by inlaid turquoise borders, with further geometric turquoise inlaid in the silver ground above. The inlay decoration is repeated below the midsection bear, the accoutrement terminating in a gilt dragon-head hook cast with two slightly raised horizontal neck bandings. A small button encrusted with a light green patina is on the reverse directly behind the bear in the midsection of the shaft.

Fifty years ago the great Swedish sinologist Bernard Karlgren (1889-1978) published a study on garment hooks entitled "Chinese Agraffes in Two Swedish Collections.1While garment hooks were to be found in other collections in Sweden as well, the two on which he focused provided more than sufficient material for an illuminating categorization of one of the most intriguing products from the end of China's great age of bronze.2 As noted in a previous *Kaikodo Journal*, "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."3

The present garment hooks falls within Karlgren's category "K" in which images of animals have invaded the body of the piece (figs. 1-2), as the bears here, appearing at one end and in the midsection of the shaft. Whereas compressed dragon heads usually complete the fitting at the end opposite the hook in this category, here the terminal is in the form of a bear, both bears in full frontal posture, dominating the accoutrement with their unexpected presence.

Fig. 1: Examples of Karlgren's "K" category each with gilding and turquoise inlay, after Bernard Karlgren, "Chinese Agraffes in Two Swedish Collections, *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquity*, no. 38, Stockholm, 1966, pl. 48 (K23-26).

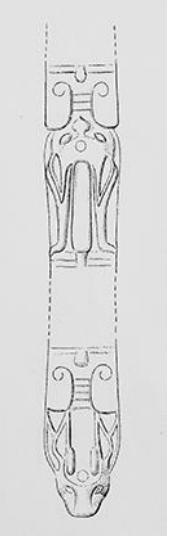

Fig. 2: Drawing of a section of the shaft from K23, after Bernard Karlgren, "Chinese Agraffes in Two Swedish Collections," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquity*, no. 38, Stockholm, 1966, n.p.

The bear was an ubiquitous motif in the arts of the Han dynasty when it was imbued with unprecedented symbolic, spiritual, and totemic importance. The presence of the bear on the garment hook here, however, does not necessarily suggest a Han date of production. Legend and lore concerning the bear, and regard for and fascination with this creature, predate the Han by centuries and images of the bear were also produced in various media and in various contexts before the Han dynasty. The bear in the center of the shaft here is not unlike those serving as feet to hoist bronze vessels and their ceramic counterparts as well, so prevalent during the Han. The images on the present garment hook thus provide precedents for their far better known successors produced during the Han dynasty.

Fig. 3: Garment hook, gilt bronze and turquoise inlay, Eastern Zhou dynasty, 4th century B.C., after Jessica Rawson and Emma Bunker, *Ancient Chinese and Ordos Bronzes*, Hong Kong, 1990, pl. 132.

While Karlgren notes the difficulty in dating this group, he suggests Jincun near Luoyang in Henan province—an important site for late Zhou material—as a possible provenance, as well as assigning a Huai designation to some. A related garment hook with animal heads forming the hook, the opposite end, as well as the center of the shaft, and further with gilding and inlaid turquoise, is ascribed to the Eastern Zhou period during the 4th century B.C. (fig. 3). Another example from this quite distinctive group is attributed to the end of the late Zhou period, during the 4th century B.C. (fig. 4).

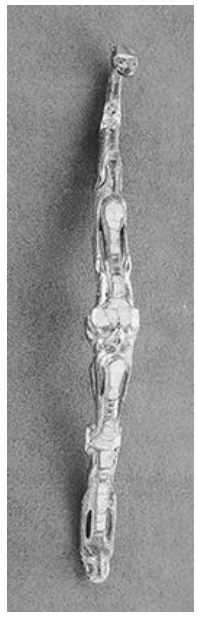

Fig. 4: Garment hook, gilt and silvered bronze and turquoise inlay, Eastern Zhou dynasty, 3rd century B.C., after Julia White and Emma C. Bunker, *Adornment for Eternity*, Denver, 1994, pl. 23, p. 102.

The Hosokawa provenance adds further luster to the object. The clan traces its ancestry to a ninth-century emperor, its line continuing unbroken through the centuries, becoming among the greatest and wealthiest of the *daimyo* families of later Japan, and the modern-day heads of the clan, in our own lifetimes, dedicated collectors and the current head of the clan an artist-potter in his own right.

1. Bernard Karlgren, "Chinese Agraffes in Two Swedish Collections," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquity,* no. 38, Stockholm, 1966, pp. 83-191.
2. Although "belthook" is the more commonly used term for this kind of accouterment, not all were used on the waist belt.
3. *Kaikodo Journal* XXV ("Time Travellers"), 2009, p. 24. Also see Thomas Lawton, *Chinese Art of the Warring States Period: Change and Continuity, 480-222 B.C.*, Washington D.C., 1982, pp. 89-94.