

Important Gold Fragment

Ancient Iran

7th - 5th Century B.C.

Gold

H: 9.5 x W: 9 cm

This fragment forms part of the famed Ziwiye hoard of treasure, reputably found in 1947 in modern day Kurdistan. As the contents of a royal tomb of a great ancient king, the pieces were quickly dispersed and only in the following years did the huge significance become understood in scholarship. These objects have become famous as the keystone in explaining underpinning socio-economic and political cultural ties across the silk route, reflected by these works of art. These objects exhibit styles and motifs associated with the four pre-eminent cultures at this juncture in history: Assyrian, Scythian, proto-Achaemenid and the provincial native pieces. The Scythians, a seminomadic people from the Eurasian steppes who moved out from Southern Russia into the territory between the Don and the Danube and then into Mesopotamia are responsible for the basis of an ‘animal style’ design found on the elaborate metalwork and jewellery produced in Central Asian ancient world. This style starts to appear in the 7th century B.C typically on pierced plaques made of gold and silver, which depict running or fighting animals (reindeer, lions, tigers, horses) alone or in pairs facing each other, embossed with powerful plasticity and free interpretation of the forms. The animal- style had a strong influence in western Asia during the 7th century B.C. Such ornaments as necklaces, bracelets, pectorals, diadems, and earrings making up the Ziwiye treasure (discovered in Iran near the border between Kurdistan and Azerbaijan) provide evidence of this Asiatic phase of Scythian gold-working art. The ornaments are characterized by highly expressive animal forms. This Central Asian Scythian-Iranian style passed by way of Phoenician trading in the 8th century B.C into the Mediterranean and into Western jewellery. This gold sheet is decorated by the repeated motif of striding ibexes and stags in repoussé design with multiple branched, curling antlers. They are separated by decorated scrollwork of coils and volutes which end in faces of otherworldly creatures. An exceptional example of its kind, the plaque is pierced three times

along its left side and three times along the bottom for attachment. This gold plaque is one of the iconic symbols of this period. There are very few examples of this period as artistic and sophisticated as this gold plaque. Furthermore, it is a fragment for one of the most famous and widely published ancient gold objects. In the most major institutions around the world including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, British Museum and the Louvre there are fragments of this belt. However this is the only piece known of the 43 to still be in private hands. An upper part of the same gold belt, with the same repoussé design and of similar size, but not a corner piece exists in the British Museum. Of similar condition, the British Museum piece has been much exhibited and remains on public display as a highlight of their ancient Persian art collection. It represents a unique and important opportunity for a discerning collector to acquire a major ancient gold artwork that illuminates and celebrates the artistic achievements of the silk route with a distinguished provenance and publication history.

Exhibitions

Jerusalem Museum, 1960s.

Literature:

P. Amandry. 'Propos du Treissor du Ziwiyei' in R. Ghirshman and L. Vanden Berghe. 1966. 'Iranica Antiqua' Vol. VI. E.J. Brill. p109-129. Plate 1, 2.

L'orient Ancien: histoire et civilisations, Bordas, B. Hrouda, 1991, p421.

David Aaron Ltd, 2017, No. 27.