

DAVID AARON



Group of Ordos Bronzes

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1st Millennium B.C.

Central Asia

Bronze

(1) H:28 cm (2) H:27 cm (3) H:10.5 cm, W:14.8 cm (4) W:11.5 cm (5) W:11.5 cm (6) H:23 cm

- 1) Dagger with an openwork handle decorated with what could be highly stylised birds with long hooked beaks.
- 2) Dagger. The handle is adorned with deeply incised wavy and striated lines, the pommel with two stylized animal heads.
- 3) 'Ko' or dagger axe, decorated at the back with an oval with an openwork cross in the middle.
 - 4) Fragmented bit with ends shaped like lion protomes.
 - 5) Fragmented bit with ends shaped like lion protomes.
- 6) Knife with curved blade. The pommel is a ram's head whose ridged horns curve up to join the neck forming the handle.

In the first millennium BC the nomadic people in the Ordos Desert in northwest China lived as mobile herders moving in search of pasture. Covered by rich vegetation and watered with plenty of rivers and streams, the Ordos Plateau encompassed the best grazing lands on the Asian Steppe of the time. This area was home to the nomads between the 6th and 2nd century BC, until they were driven out of the region by the Xiongnu.

Archaeological finds of skeletal remains and bronze objects provide much of our information about the Ordos. Master metalworkers, their artifacts include belt buckles, small weapons, and funerary cart and canopy ornaments. In contrast to later cultures and their contemporaries further east, tinned bronze,

rather than silver or gold, was the most esteemed material. The bronzes are almost always zoomorphic, occasionally featuring predatory scenes, which has led to this art being termed 'Animal Style'. Because of their importance to the Ordos way of life, animals served as status markers and were associated with particular clans. The art style incorporates features of both Scythian and Chinese art of the period.

Ordos weapons found in tomb contexts particularly resemble those of Scythia and Saka.

Literature:

Olov Jansé, 'L'Empire des Steppes et les relations entre l'Europe et l'Extrême-Orient dans l'Antiquité' in *Revue des Arts Asiatiques* (March 1935, IX: 1); nos. 1 (pl. VI, fig. 10), 3 (pl. V, fig. 13), 5 (pl. VIII, fig. 3), 6 (pl. VII, fig. 4).

Collection D. David-Weill, *Bronzes des Steppes et de L'Iran*, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 28-29 June 1972; nos. 1 (Lot 45), 2 (Lot 27), 3 (Lot 64), 4 and 5 (Lot 9), and 6 (Lot 53).