‘Four Dragons’ Mirror

Warring States Period, 481 B.C. – 221 B.C., Zhou Dynasty

China

Bronze

Diam: 11.6cm x Depth: 0.6 cm

A circular bronze mirror, polished to a high shine on one side to reflect. The reverse is decorated with a semi-abstract relief four dragons design. The dragons have long, angular bodies, with their heads and feet represented as curved points, and repeat around a central four-petalled boss. Delicate ridged line decoration fill the bodies of the dragons. A border of geometric ‘scale bands’ runs around the circumference of the mirror. Green patination and malachite encrustations appear across both surfaces.

Bronze mirrors were produced in China from Neolithic times, with early examples found in tombs of Qija culture, late Neolithic period, and Shang tombs at Yinxu. During the Warring States period, mirror making proliferated, with examples found in many regions demonstrating greater technical craftmanship and richer decorative motifs. During this period, bronzes were increasingly popular as individual luxury items. Warring States period mirrors can be divided into northern and southern types: those from the north are plainer, while those from the south (such as this example) are delicate and elaborately decorated. The decorations resemble those on contemporary luxury items in jade, lacquer, and textiles. Mirrors generally had a central knob or loop so that they could be easily held in the hand.

Exhibitions

Bronzes chinois des dynasties Tcheou, Ts'in et Han, Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris, 25th May – 18th June 1934.

Gallery II, International Exhibition of Chinese Art, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1935

Literature:

S. Umehara, 'Two Ancient Chinese Mirrors', Kôkogaku Zasshi (Tokyo, January 1930), XX:1, pp. 20-27.

Bronzes chinois des dynasties Tcheou, Ts'in et Han, Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris, 25th May – 18th June 1934, cat. no. 406, p. 208.

International Exhibition of Chinese Art, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 28th November 1935 – 7th March 1936, cat. no. 424, p. 32.

International Exhibition of Chinese Art: Illustrated Supplement to the Catalogue, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 28th November 1935 – 7th March 1936, cat. no. 424, p. 41.

H. F. E. Visser, Asiatic Art in Private Collections of Holland and Belgium (Amsterdam and Ireland, 1947), pp. 45-46, pl. 49, no. 79.

Georges A. Salles and Daisy Lion-Goldschmidt, Collection Adolphe Stoclet: choix d'oeuvres appartenant a Madame Feron-Stoclet (premiere partie) (Brussels, 1956), pp. 338-341.