

Openwork Stag Plaque

Caucasian

1st to 2nd Century A.D.

Bronze

L:20cm H:18cm

An extremely large bronze plaque, possibly from a belt clasp, featuring a central motif of a stylised stag turning its head away from a small dog or fox standing on its front leg. The stag's neck and back are curved into an S-shape, with the neck bending backwards over the slender waist. Each of the stag's legs is represented as an abstracted curve, as is the tail. High relief teardrops add a fur-like texture to the stag's neck. The central scene is surrounded by a border of openwork spirals, followed by a row of pillars, and a final solid border of tightly wounded spirals. The four corners are indented, possibly to hold feet, which have been lost over time. This plaque is exceptional for its large size; other extant Caucasian buckles range between circa 4 cm to 14 cm in width, and circa 2 cm to 10 cm in height.

Bronzes such as this were produced in the Caucasus region, beginning in the late second millennium B.C.. Highly stylised animals with small waists and arched necks and backs were the core motif of this style, and feature on a range of objects, including buckles, axes and pins. Examples have been found in Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the Northern Caucasus, dating from the beginning of the Late Bronze and Early Iron ages. Cast bronze belt clasps have been excavated in the Republic of Georgia, and are one of the region's distinct cultural outputs in the first few centuries A.D.. The openwork patterns may imitate thin plaques of gold and silver, which were decorated with twisted wire and filigree, and would have been nailed at the corners to wood and leather backings.

Exhibitions

La Découverte de l'Asie. Hommage à René Grousset, Musée Cernuschi, Paris, 15th May – 31st July 1954.

Literature:

La Découverte de l'Asie. Hommage à René Grousset, Musée Cernuschi, Paris, 15th May – 31st July 1954, no. 243, p. 60, pl. VIII.

Georges A. Salles and Daisy Lion-Goldschmidt, *Collection Adolphe Stoclet: choix d'oeuvres appartenant a Madame Feron-Stoclet (premiere partie)* (Brussels, 1956), pp. 302-303.