

Belt Plaque

1st-2nd Century A.D., Scythian

Bronze

L: 9.5 cm, H: 8.9 cm

A large bronze plaque, possibly from a belt clasp, featuring a central motif of a stylised stag turning its head away towards its rump. 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 abstracted into curves and a prolonged knee spur. Wide tri-pronged antlers extend from the stag's head to fill with width of the upper quarter of the composition. A small bird sits below the stag's body. The scene is framed with two rows of bands adorned with a braided pattern. A raised circular boss sits at each of the four corners.

Bronzes such as this were produced in the Caucasus region, from the late second millennium B.C. onwards. 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.

Literature:

The Ernest Brummer Collection, Sotheby & Co. London, 16-17 November 1964, Lot 173.