Belt Plaque

L: 10.1 cm, H: 9.7 cm

Bronze

Scythian

1st-2nd Century AD1st-2nd Century AD

A bronze belt plaque depicting a highly stylised stag. Within a rectangular border decorated with a braided pattern and marked at each corner by a round boss, a heavily abstracted stag stands. The four hooves are spread across the horizontal line of the base, the legs thin and elongated sharply bent at the knee before meeting the body. The body is formed from two globules attached by a thin spine. From the right of the body extends the neck, curving backwards of the body so that the head is positioned centrally within the plaque. A large circular eye is the only visible feature on the head, above which projects broad antlers, which occupy the full width of the plaque. From the left of the body, a long tail curls upwards, terminating in a tight coil.

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 AD. 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.