Stag Appliqué

5.8 x 0 cm (2 $^{1}/_{4}$ x 0 inches)

Gold
Scythian

An appliqué in the shape of a stag, fashioned from a single piece of thick, hammered gold. The stag is captured mid-movement, with its legs drawn up beneath its body. The slender curved neck is extended to tilt the head upwards, granting the stag a proud demeanour. Prominent antlers rise from the crown of the head, extending towards the stag's rump in an intricate arrangement of cascading curlicues. Additional detail has been added to suggest the texture of the stag's coat, with small incised lines along the tail, brow, ruff, and above the hooves. The facial features are also picked out in relief. The reverse of the stag features three small hoops, attached with a goldcopper alloy, that would have been used to affix the appliqué to clothing or a shield, allowing it to be worn by its wealthy Scythian owner. Altogether, this is a fine example of the 'Animal Style' art of the Eurasian Steppe in the first millennium BC.

Appliqués 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.

Literature:

Antiquities, Christie's, 5 July 2023, Lot 64.

David Aaron, IX, 2026, no. 4, pp. 11-14.