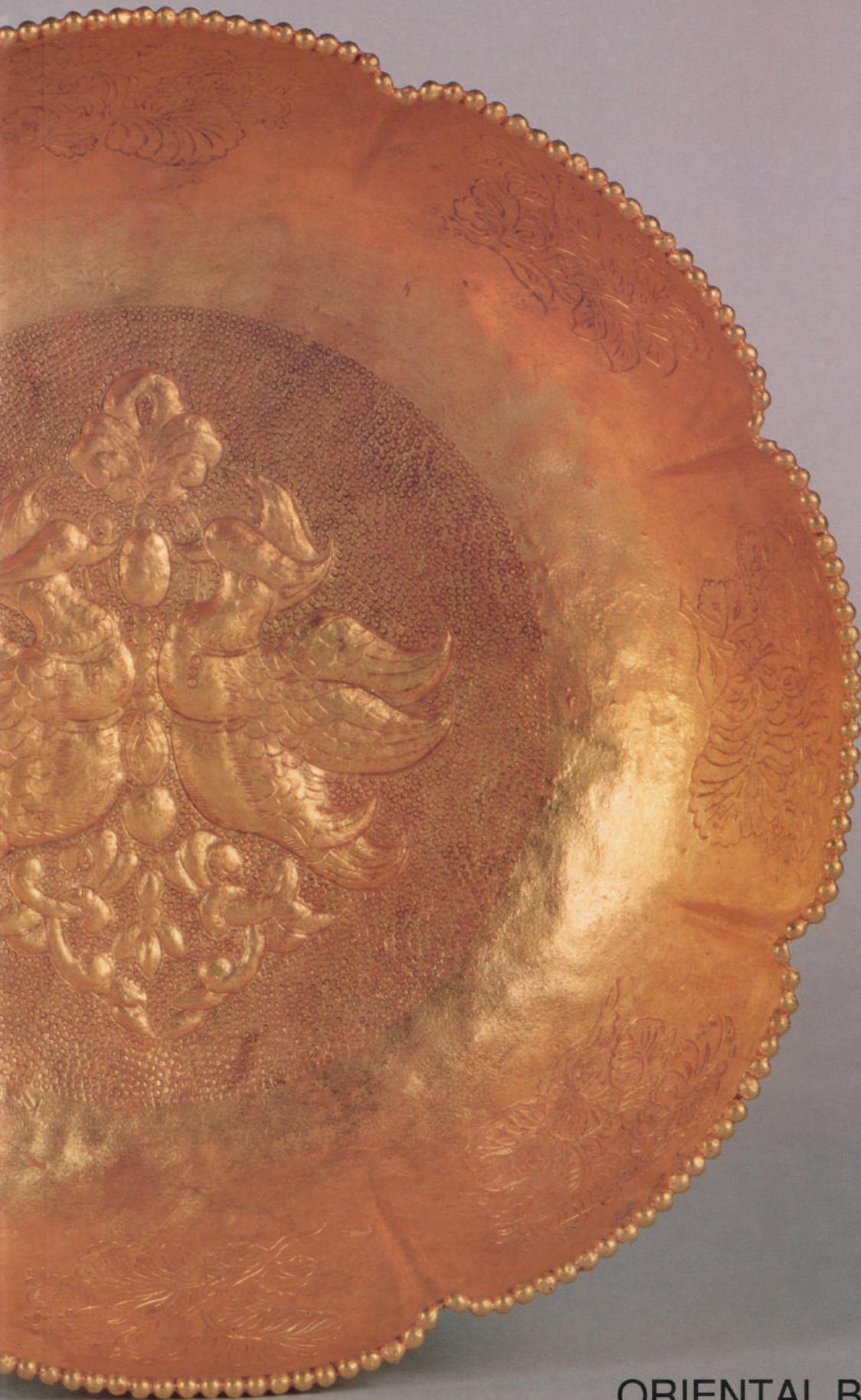


IMPERIAL GOLD FROM ANCIENT CHINA

part II



ORIENTAL BRONZES LTD.

Christian DEYDIER

Oriental Bronzes Ltd.

Christian DEYDIER

Figure 18
Illustrated on cover and on page 57

GOLD BOWL

Liao Dynasty, dated 1026 AD
Diameter: 15 cm.
Height: 4.2 cm.

Oriental Bronzes Ltd.

Christian DEYDIER

IMPERIAL GOLD FROM ANCIENT CHINA, part II
Grosvenor House Antiques Fair — 1991

June 12 — June 22, 1991

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FOREWORD

Since our opening in December 1985, we have strived to present annual exhibitions featuring the best and most interesting examples of the art of ancient China.

This year we have the opportunity, with our participation in the Grosvenor House Antiques Fair, to organize not one, but two exhibitions. The first in our gallery at 96 Mount Street, the second at the Grosvenor House Antiques Fair, each respectively dedicated to a specific theme:

- The Art of the Warring States and Han Periods
- Imperial Gold from Ancient China, part II

I would like to express my gratitude to Elizabeth Knight and Louisa Ching for the production of this catalogue and Prudence Cuming and her team in London who spent several days photographing each object.

I also wish to thank Robert H. Ellsworth and Anthony Carter for showing me remarkable examples related to the subjects of both exhibitions.

My thanks to Cynthia Looker and Ming Wilson for their assistance in translating the inscriptions on the Liao items; I am also very grateful to Dr Linda Cook Johnson for her scholarship and advice relating to the historical figures and the geographical intricacies discussed by these inscriptions.

Of the many others who have helped me in different ways in preparing these exhibitions, I would particularly like to thank Anna Plowden and Martin Bale for their invaluable assistance.

Finally, I am most grateful to my assistants Iola Lenzi and Ming Wilson for helping me write, research and organize these exhibitions.

Christian DEYDIER

Photography
Prudence Cuming Associated Ltd, London

Artwork by Eric Kwok

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INTRODUCTION

The present exhibition is our third devoted exclusively to the subject of Chinese gold and silver works of art. We presented our first exhibition on this theme in December 1985 and our second in June 1990, the latter included several important Liao Dynasty objects:

- 'Chinese Gold, Silver and Gilt Bronze up to the Tang Dynasty'
- 'Imperial Gold from Ancient China'

'Imperial Gold from Ancient China part II' further explores Liao metalwork, with eleven of the twenty-one pieces in the exhibition being of Liao origin, as confirmed by their inscriptions and dating. These objects, boxes, bowls and a spectacular belt, probably constitute the most important collection of Liao metalware formed to date outside China. Extremely refined in terms of workmanship and artistic interpretation, they are of either pure gold or parcel-gilt silver, much coveted and considered very precious by the Liao, who restricted their availability to those of highest social rank. As well as being exceptional works of art, they are also of great art historical importance, their long and detailed inscriptions shedding much light on the relatively unknown Liao.

The Liao Dynasty (916-1125) evolved from the nomadic tribes who roamed the north-eastern borders of China and were called the Qidan. In 916, having conquered much of Inner Mongolia, the leader of the tribe proclaimed himself Emperor; thus the Liao Dynasty was born. The second Qidan Emperor, Tai Zong, unified the territory in 947 and from then on referred to his people as the Liao.

Geographically, the empire ranged from Shanxi province to the Great Wall of China and to the east, as far as the north of Hebei province, encompassing all of Inner Mongolia.

Initially, under the Tang, the provincial governors of eastern China pledged allegiance to the Liao, wishing to maintain peace and prosperity along their borders with the new and powerful empire. With time however, maintaining the peace grew expensive and the Northern Song were obliged to pay the Liao a heavy annual tribute to placate their aggressive neighbours. Thus the Chinese sent the Liao princesses, silk and precious metals, namely gold and silver.

It is interesting to note that along with inventories of diplomatic gifts made by the Song to the Liao, Chinese history also documents the special protocol that applied to the

Liao ambassadors when they presented themselves at the Song court. Often they called at the Chinese Imperial court with a pre-established list of desired presents and an even greater privilege entitled them to wear a special "gilt silver headgear" which possibly refers to a crown of the type in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (in solid gold) or the second known Liao crown out of China, displayed in our last year exhibition 'Imperial Gold from Ancient China', catalogue no. 28. That these objects were buried with the dignitaries who received them, serves to emphasize the importance that the Liao attached to these Imperial gifts.

Commercial exchanges between the Liao and the Chinese encouraged cultural exchanges, the Liao thus inherited a sophisticated range of metalworking techniques as well as a rich decorative repertory from the Tang, rather than the Song.

In 1114 the Liao were defeated and dispersed by another nomadic tribe, the Jurchen, who in 1115 became what we know as the Jin Dynasty.

Recent discoveries have greatly added to the study of the Liao gold and silversmithing. The most important finds are listed below.

- In 1953, tombs belonging to Xiao Julie. Son-in-law of the first Liao Emperor, Taizu (907-927), were excavated at Chefong, Liaoning province. They revealed, amongst other precious objects, a gilt silver and repoussé bridle ornament. These finds are detailed in *Kaogu Xuebao* 1956, no. 3, p. 13, pl. 15.
- In November 1972, the village of Qianchuanghu, Liaoyang County, yielded a Liao crown decorated with two flying phoenix. This discovery is illustrated in *Wenwu* 1980, no. 2.
- In 1976, very important excavations were carried out at Karachin, Liaoning province.
- In 1977 a site in Heibei province uncovered another crown, this one with dragon decoration, illustrated in *Wenwu* 1982, no. 7.
- In August 1978, a hoard was found at Balin Yonqi, Ju Ud Meng, Inner Mongolia. This trove included pottery replicas of silverwares as well as an important selection of silverwares, namely an outstanding ewer and several bowls. These are illustrated in *Wenwu* 1980, no. 5.
- In 1979, at Chifeng, Liaoning province, an extremely rare and beautiful gilt silver

flask with a central deer motif was unearthed.

- In 1985, Inner Mongolia was the site of another important dig, this time bringing to light the tomb of a Liao princess and her husband, aristocrats from the State of Chen. The hoard included a gold mask, a pair of exquisite silver and parcel-gilt boots and an extremely fine silver and parcel-gilt open-work crown.
- Finally, only two years ago in November 1989, a silver-gilt pagoda and a gold Sarira-stupa were both unearthed at Beita, Chaoyang City, Liaoning province. They are illustrated in *Gems of China's Cultural Relics*, Beijing 1990.

Our June 1990 exhibition 'Imperial Gold from Ancient China' presented several very important Liao pieces:

- * three boxes, two in gilt silver, one of pure gold
- * a gold stem-bowl
- * a gold bowl
- * a very rare silver-gilt crown

The dated inscriptions of these vessels gave us an insight into Liao history, including customs and politics. The inscriptions all pay homage to military and political leaders of the time and one box, catalogue no. 24, is dedicated to the Empress Dowager.

'Imperial Gold from Ancient China part II', comprises even more exceptional examples of Liao gold and silver thereby furthering our knowledge of the period. Each piece, ten vessels and the magnificent belt, is dated and inscribed. The dates cover the period between 1024 and 1028 and the inscriptions, some of which are lengthy, (the longest being forty-four characters on the gold belt) cite several historical figures already researched for last year's exhibition. However, the inscriptions on these vessels and the belt have yielded extensive new information on the military and political structures of Liao civilization and we endeavour to explore these new ideas in the notes explaining the inscriptions.

'Imperial Gold from Ancient China part II' attempts not only to show rare works of art of exceptional beauty and quality, but also to shed some much needed light on the Liao Dynasty and its complex role in Chinese history.

Christian DEYDIER

CHRONOLOGY OF CHINESE DYNASTIES AND PERIODS

(according to Professor Dong Zuobin and based on oracle bone inscriptions of Shang Dynasty)

	BC	AD
Neolithic	circa 7000 – 1600	
Xia Dynasty	circa 2100 – 1600	
Shang Dynasty	circa 1600 – 1111	
Anyang phase	1370 – 1111	
Zhou Dynasty	1111 – 256	
Western Zhou	1111 – 770	
Eastern Zhou	770 – 256	
Spring and Autumn Period	722 – 481	
Warring States Period	453 – 221	
Qin Dynasty	221 – 206	
Han Dynasty	206 –	220
Western Han	206 –	6
Xin Dynasty (Wang Mang)		9 – 22
Eastern Han		25 – 220
Six Dynasties		220 – 581
Three Kingdoms		220 – 280
Western Jin		265 – 316
Southern Dynasties		
Eastern Jin		317 – 420
Liu Song		420 – 479
Southern Qi		479 – 502
Lian		502 – 557
Chen		557 – 589
Northern Dynasties		
Sixteen Kingdoms		304 – 439
Northern Wei		386 – 535
Eastern Wei		534 – 550
Western Wei		535 – 557
Northern Qi		550 – 577
Northern Zhou		557 – 581
Sui Dynasty		581 – 617
Tang Dynasty		618 – 906
Five Dynasties		907 – 960
Liao Dynasty		916 – 1125
Song Dynasty		960 – 1279
Northern Song		960 – 1127
Southern Song		1127 – 1279

Catalogue

IMPERIAL GOLD FROM ANCIENT CHINA,
part II

1

GOLD APPLIQUÉ 金鑲飾

Warring States Period, 5th-4th century BC

Height: 1.7 cm.

Width: 1.5 cm.

Cast gold appliqué decorated in relief with a roving dragon. The beast has two large doughnut shaped ears, curling claws, and his back is covered with fine bead-like scales.

Similar examples:

— four similar appliqués, inlaid into an iron garment hook, are illustrated by Lawton T., *Chinese Art of the Warring States Period, Change and Continuity, 480-222 BC*, Washington DC 1982, page 101, catalogue no. 51.

— belt-hooks exhibiting very similar plaques were excavated in 1957-1958 from tombs from the state of Chu, in Xinyang (Henan) and are illustrated in *Xinyang Chumu*, Beijing 1986, plate 64, nos. 1-3 and plate 65 no. 1.

2

GOLD PLAQUE 金鑲飾

Six Dynasties, 4th-5th Century AD

Height: 2.6 cm.

Width: 2.2 cm.

Sheet gold plaque with gold wire and granulated decoration. The spade-shaped plaque is embellished with gold wire forming tear drop and circular settings. Finer gold wire is used to create symmetrical scroll motifs and two concentric borders along the plaque's edge. Very fine granulated beads constitute the outer border and are enclosed within the wire scrolls. The plaque has holes for attachment at the base and top.

Similar technique:

— a piece of same shape and displaying similar workmanship was exhibited by Christian Deydier/Oriental Bronzes Ltd., 'Imperial Gold From Ancient China', London 1990, catalogue no.6



1



2

3

PAIR OF GOLD OPENWORK PLAQUES 金鏤空魚形飾一對

Tang Dynasty, 7th-8th century AD

Height: 6 cm.

Width: 5 cm.

Each of the matching plaques consists of two fish worked in repoussé, facing each other. The fish scales appear in relief and the tails and fins are finely incised with parallel hatched strokes. A delicate openwork ribbon joins the two fish at the top and centre of the plaques. The fish tails touch at the bottom and curve away from the bodies, further emphasizing the effect of the openwork technique.



4

SILVER AND PARCEL-GILT ROUND BOX 鑲金銀圓形盒

Tang Dynasty, 7th-8th century AD

Diameter: 4.7 cm.

Height: 2 cm.

Beaten silver and silver-gilt box with cover. The cover and base are finely incised with identical floral sprays, twisting vines and four gilt birds, three of which are flying. The birds surround a central roundel containing a gilt lion with curled tail and extended claws. The sides display a border of scrolling plants bearing lily-like flowers, edged with a plain gilt band. The background is decorated overall with fine ring-matting.

Provenance:

- Eskenazi Ltd, London.
- J.M.A.J. Dawson Collection.

Exhibited:

- Eskenazi Ltd, 'Ancient Chinese Bronze Vessels, Gilt Bronzes and Early Ceramics', London, 13 June-14 July 1973, catalogue no. 26.
- Eskenazi Ltd, 'Chinese Works of Art from the Collection of J.M.A.J. Dawson', London, 12-20 December 1980, catalogue no. 48.
- Oriental Bronzes Ltd/Christian Deydier, 'Chinese Gold, Silver and Gilt Bronze up to the Tang Dynasty', London, 10-11 December 1985, catalogue no. 26.

Published:

- Eskenazi Ltd, *Ancient Chinese Bronze Vessels, Gilt Bronzes and Early Ceramics*, London 1973, page 52, no. 26.
- Eskenazi Ltd, *Chinese Works of Art from the Collection of J.M.A.J. Dawson*, London 1980, no. 48.
- Oriental Bronzes Ltd/Christian Deydier, *Chinese Gold, Silver and Gilt Bronze up to the Tang Dynasty*, London 1985, page 42, no. 26.

Similar example:

- a similar box decorated with mandarin ducks is illustrated by Gyllensvard B., *Chinese Gold and Silver and Porcelain from the Carl Kempe Collection*, Stockholm 1971, catalogue no. 42.



5

SILVER AND PARCEL-GILT BOWL 鑲金銀碗

Tang Dynasty, 618-906 AD

Diameter: 15 cm.

Height: 4.3 cm.

Hammered silver and parcel-gilt shallow bowl with four lobed sides and supported on a slightly splayed foot. The interior rim is decorated with a border of parcel-gilt stylized half flower heads on a punched ground. The four lobed sides are incised with differing parcel-gilt foliate compositions, interspersed with four gilt moth-like insects with fully extended wings. The well of the dish depicts two swimming fish in slight relief worked in parcel-gilt repoussé. The fish are further decorated with finely engraved scales and realistic tails and heads. They swim in a background of parcel-gilt pansy sprays surrounded by an incised border of overlapping gilt leaves.



6

SILVER AND PARCEL-GILT BOWL 鑲金銀碗

Tang Dynasty, 618-906 AD

Diameter: 13.7 cm.

Height: 4 cm.

Hammered shallow silver bowl divided into four lobed sides and supported on a small, slightly splayed foot. The interior rim is decorated with a border of stylized flowers engraved on a finely punched and gilded ground. A second border halfway inside the dish is composed of engraved overlapping heart-shaped gilded leaves. At the centre of the vessel appears a repoussé kneeling rhinoceros with a horn positioned vertically on its head. The animal's body, including its tail, is further enhanced with finely engraved overlapping scales and is positioned in a background of engraved floral sprays on a punched ground. The floral medallion incorporating the animal is gilded throughout and surrounded by a scroll border.

Notes:

— the representation of the rhinoceros is rare in Chinese art and at the time when this one was depicted, the animal had already been extinct in China for nearly a thousand years. The anatomical portrayal of the animal is incorrect but is characteristic of its Chinese interpretation.

— according to the official texts recording the history of the period, rhinoceroses were sent to the Tang court by the South East Asians as tribute and gifts.

Rhinoceros motifs:

— generally found on Tang Dynasty silver, a standing rhinoceros featured on a Tang silver dish is illustrated by Gyllensvard B., *Chinese Gold and Silver in The Carl Kempe Collection*, Stockholm 1953, no. 120.

— a pair of walking rhinoceros, inlaid in mother-of-pearl, embellish a lacquer mirror now in the Shoso-in, Nara, Japan and are illustrated in *Metal Works in the Shoso-in*, Tokyo 1976, pl. 21.

— a bronze standing rhinoceros of the Tang Dynasty was illustrated in *Orientalia*, June 1990, p. 73, fig 4.



7

SET OF THREE SILVER AND PARCEL-GILT HAIRPINS 鍍金銀髮簪三隻

Late Tang Dynasty, 10th century AD

Length: 25.8 cm.

Three beaten sheet silver hairpins. The wide head of each elongated triangular-shaped pin is gilt and engraved with a dragon-fish. The fish has a dragon's head, and is chasing the sacred pearl in a background of stylized waves surrounded by a stylized feather border. The design, appearing on the reverse side of the pins in very slight repoussé, is also gilt.

Similar examples:

— a similar dragon-fish design appears on a Tang Dynasty dish illustrated in *Zhongguo Meishu Quanji Gongyi, Meishu pian* vol. 10, Jinyin Boli Falangqi, Beijing 1987, pl. 59.



8

GOLD POLYLOBED BOX 金八棱邊盒

Song Dynasty, 12th-13th century AD

Height: 3 cm.

Width: 5.5 cm.

Gold box with lobed and barbed octagonal sides. The slightly domed cover is worked in repoussé and decorated with two lions leaping amidst flowering stems enclosed in a barbed beaded border. An outer border of floral swags is enclosed within a border of leaves, ropetwist and rings, all surrounded by a raised outer edge. The sides of the box are engraved with two continuous flowering bands on a ring-punched ground.

Similar examples:

— a similar pair of boxes was sold by Christie's New York, in their sale on November 29, 1990, catalogue no. 37.

— another was sold by Christie's in London on December 10, 1990, catalogue no. 24.



9

GOLD FILIGREE AND OPENWORK DIADEM 金錐菱形鏤空細花髮釵

Song Dynasty, 10th-11th century AD

Length: 15.5 cm.

Depth: 1.7 cm.

Gold diadem with nine kernel-shaped filigree compartments supported behind an openwork frieze. The nine identical compartments are worked in filigree of stylized flower and trellis design, and are hollow and fully closed, with a pierced vertical slit at their base. The compartments are displayed in a semi-circle, espousing the shape of the wearer's head, and are united at their base by an openwork frieze. The frieze is composed of finely detailed repoussé birds and flowering sprays enclosed within a barbed beaded border. Two long prongs that would have served to secure the diadem to the hair, protrude toward the rear.

The nine filigree compartments would originally have been stuffed with perfumed herbs.

Similar examples:

— hairpins with similar filigree openwork compartment heads are illustrated in *Wenwu* 1984 no 5, plate nos. 2 and 5.



10

SILVER AND PARCEL-GILT SQUARE BOX 鑲金銀方形盒

Liao Dynasty, dated 1024 AD

Height: 6 cm.

Width and depth: 10.2 cm.

Square box and cover with straight and open-worked angled sides. A convex circular medallion rises from the cover and is decorated with four gilt repoussé goats, running on a ring-punched ground around a central repoussé gilt floral motif and separated one from the other by stylized gilt repoussé floral bouquets. The animals, with open mouths, appear to be laughing and are incised with crossed fur markings. The corners of the cover are embellished with gilt repoussé swag designs. Each of the cover's angled sides reveal four open-work lobed spade cut-outs, evenly dispersed along the edge.

Beneath this pierced border, two parallel gilt lozenge friezes embellish the straight sides of the cover as well as the sides of the box. The base of the box angles inward and is supported on a slightly splayed shallow foot.

— the interior of the box bears a thirty-one character inscription which can be read: "In the fourth year of the Taiping period, offered as tribute from the Ceremonial Institute of the Southern Court (Xuan Hui Nan Yuan) representing the Board of Personnel in charge of the management of officials, to (the Main Hall of) the Wenzhong Wangfu (for use at the alter) in order to evoke prosperity. Made of precious metal and presented."

真吉金做進
轉署諸臣合
徽南院本部提
祈福用四宮
忠王府大殿
太平四年文





Notes:

— The Liao Shi states that the name associated with the Wenzhong Wangfu was that of Han Derang (941-1011), a Chinese administrator and military commander under two Liao emperors. His brilliant career brought him high rank and honourable titles. In 1004 (second year of the Tonghe), he was conferred the Liao clan name Yelu. In 1010 he also received the Qidan name Longyun. Upon his death in 1011, he was given the title Wenzhong. Wenzhong Wangfu was an administration unit, as described in the Liao Shi: "... following the rules of various palaces, Wenzhong Wangfu was established, comprising 5000 normal households (Qidan), 8000 transferred households (captured Chinese) and 10,000 cavalry-men."

— the character *ming* 𠄎 has an archaic meaning. It is defined as the call to heaven from the Bird of Prayer. In this inscription it can be translated as a means of evocation, therefore the expression *yongming* 用𠄎 means to use the call of the Bird of Prayer. Whereas Christians pray for the longevity of their soul, the Chinese perform sacrificial rites and make offerings of beautiful pieces in the hope of being rewarded with longevity or good luck.

— Xuan Hui Nan Yuan is translated as the Ceremonial Institute of the Southern Court. The Liao Shi clearly distinguishes the Southern Court from the Northern Court, each having similar departments, for example Xuan Hui Bei Yuan or Xuan Hui Nan Yuan. It seems that a very bureaucratic system existed for each of the courts, administrative units being in charge of setting up tents and maintaining horses. It appears that travelling expeditions for members of the Imperial family were well organized.

11

SILVER AND PARCEL-GILT SQUARE BOX 鑲金銀方形盒

Liao Dynasty, dated 1024 AD

Height: 13 cm.

Width and depth: 13 cm.

Large square box and cover with angled and straight sides. The cover is decorated in relief with four repoussé and gilt flying birds, their outspread wings incised with feather engraving. They are positioned symmetrically at the four corners of a lozenge enclosing four flying musicians on opposite sides of a central medallion composed of incised and repoussé gilt swags and forming a stylized floral motif. The four musicians, including two flautists and two guitarists, have human faces, shoulders and arms holding their instruments, but sport long feathered tails, wings and headdresses. The four tails curl away from each other symmetrically and point toward the four gilt repoussé budding flowers at the corners of the cover. The angled and straight sides of the cover are bordered respectively with gilt cloud and lozenge friezes. Each of the box's four sides are embellished with a pair of naturalistically depicted dancing ladies, gilt and worked in repoussé with finely engraved silk veils, bangles, necklaces, belts and turbans. They twirl sensuously amongst gilt swirling ribbons held in their outspread arms. They are surrounded by incised and gilt floral-cloud motifs. The box is supported on a very shallow splayed foot and has an overall ring-punched background.

— the cover of the box is inscribed with four characters: "Peace and auspiciousness".

“太平清吉”



文忠王府大殿祈福
 祈壽用四宣徽南院
 行宮都部署諸臣合
 貢吉金造成太平四
 年三月廿又九日進

— the interior of the box bears a forty character inscription which can be read: "Offered as tribute from the Imperial official(s) and official(s) of the Ceremonial Institute of the Southern Court (Xuan Hui Nan Yuan) Mobile/Circulating Palace Administration to (the Main Hall of) the Wenzhong Wangfu (for use at the altar) in order to evoke prosperity and longevity. Made of precious metal and presented on the twenty-ninth day, third month, fourth year of the Taiping period."

Note:

— Xing Gong is defined as Mobile Palace. It is recorded that the Emperor would travel from Shangdu to Dadu accompanied by a portable administrative unit in charge of setting up court wherever he stopped.



12

SILVER AND PARCEL-GILT BOWL 鍍金銀碗

Liao Dynasty, dated 1025 AD

Diameter: 16.7 cm.

Height: 4.3 cm.

Hammered silver and parcel-gilt bowl with a granulated bead border at the rim. The well of the bowl is decorated in relief with a roving gilt dragon chasing the sacred pearl, displaying sharp claws and boldly engraved scales. The dragon is surrounded by gilt stylized clouds, engraved on a ring-punched ground. A border of gilt volute motifs, separated one from the other by stylized gilt florettes, decorates the inner sides of the bowl.

— a thirty character inscription appears on the base of the bowl and can be read: "In the fifth year of the Taiping period, respectfully offered to the (Main Hall of) Wenzhong Wangfu (to place at the altar) in order to evoke one hundred good fortunes (prosperity). Presented by the Ceremonial Institute of the Southern Court (Xuan Hui Nan Yuan) representing the Board of Personnel in charge of the management of all officials, and to show obeisance".

署各臣合拜
院本部提轄
用四宣徽南
大殿祈百福
奉文忠王府
太平五年進



13

SILVER AND PARCEL-GILT SQUARE BOX 鑲金銀方形盒

Liao Dynasty, dated 1025 AD

Height: 6 cm.

Width and depth: 6.2 cm.

Square box and cover with angled and straight sides. The cover is decorated in low relief with a gilded and engraved flying phoenix on whose back rides a flautist, playing his flute. The phoenix and rider are surrounded by parcel-gilt stylized cloud scrolls within a square gilded border.

The angled sides of the cover are incised with a band of parcel-gilt quatrefoil florettes. Each side of the box is ornamented with an incised parcel-gilt mask within square parcel-gilt borders.

The box is supported on a very shallow splayed foot.

— the interior of the box bears a sixteen character inscription which can be read: "Made to offer to the Wenzhong Wangfu, on an auspicious day of the fifth year of the Taiping period, (to place at the altar) to show obeisance".

太吉文殿
平日忠前
五造王供
年奉府養



14

GOLD BELT 金佩帶

Liao Dynasty, dated 1025 AD

Length: 38 cm.

Gold belt worked in repoussé and further decorated with three gold appliqués. Of elongated rectangular shape, the extremities of the belt are embellished with a pair of repoussé phoenix, all four flying toward the centre in a ring-punched ground enclosed within a geometric arch-patterned border. Finely engraved plumage adorns the birds' outspread wings, tails and heads.

The appliqué positioned at the centre of the belt boldly depicts a lion, viewed symmetrically and head-on, clutching clouds in his hand-like paws. The plaque is worked in low relief with incisions and ring-punching detailing the design. The lion's mane protrudes above the upper border of the belt, whereas an open-work bow terminates the appliqué below the belt's lower border.

The lion appliqué is flanked on either side by facing lions, seated, viewed in profile and each carrying a human figure on his back. The creatures' mane and teeth as well as the figures are decorated with fine incisions and pin-prick dots. The heads of the animals and humans extend beyond the upper border of the belt.

Four gold rings are affixed in pairs to the lower side of the belt whereas the reverse side bears four evenly spaced flattened gold loops for attachment to the fabric necessary to secure the belt around the wearer's waist.

— the reverse side of the belt is engraved with a forty four character inscription which can be read: "In the fifth year of the Taiping period, offered as tribute from Zhang Jian (concurrently holding the titles of) High (civil) Official and Military Supervising Officer of Wuding Jun (commandery). Made of metal (gold), completed by a wonderful craftsman, and bowing in deference, presented to the Wenzhong Wangfu, subject to the final inspection of the government office of the Mobile/Circulating Palace Administration."





進文忠王府行宮部署司點訖
 合貢金吉匠造成又合拜揖
 兼管諸軍檢事臣張儉等
 太平五年武定軍節度使

Notes:

— Zhang Jian (962-1053) is recorded in the Liao Shi (Liao History) in the liechuan 10, juan 80. Zhang was a High Imperial Official supervising the Commandery of Wuding. In the 5th year of the Taiping period (1025) he was transferred to Datong, Shanxi province. The following year, he was promoted to the rank of Left Prime Minister. He was instructed by the ailing Emperor Shengzong (984-1031) to help enthrone the prince, who became Emperor Xingzong in 1032. Zhang held the position of Prime Minister for over twenty years and died in the 22nd year of Zhongxi (1053) at the age of 91.

— Wuding Jun is a place name in Shaanxi province, recorded in the *Zhong Guo Gu Jin Di Ming Da Zi Dian* (Chinese Ancient Place Names Dictionary) page 504 as a place located in the vicinity of the present day Yang Xian (Tai Yangxian, Shaanxi province). Geographically, this could be considered the Western part of the Liao Kingdom, located within the bend of the Yellow River and possibly the site of the recent excavation. Wuding Jun was already in existence during the Tang Dynasty and was a type of tributary territory, making quarterly tax payments to the Imperial Court. This practice continued through the Liao.

— Jie Du literally means an area that remits taxes.

— Wuding Jun Jie Du Shi, associated with Zhang Jian's name, therefore indicates that Zhang was a high (civil) official, possibly with military responsibilities, governing or supervising the commandery of Wuding, the word Jun meaning commandery.

15

SILVER AND PARCEL-GILT BOWL 鑲金銀碗

Liao Dynasty, dated 1026 AD

Diameter: 17 cm.

Height: 4 cm.

Hammered silver and parcel-gilt lobed bowl with a granulated bead border at the rim. The well of the bowl is symmetrically decorated in relief with a pair of gilt ducks, facing each other and both clutching a branch of a gilt stylized flowering arrangement in their beaks. The birds have boldly engraved feathers and the central flowering motif is tied with engraved ribbons. The duck composition is represented on a circular ring-punched ground. The joins between each of the eight lobes inside the bowl are decorated with identical engraved and stylized flowering scroll designs.

— a twenty-five character inscription appears on the bowl's base which can be read: "Presented to the Wenzhong Wangfu in the bingyin year of the Taiping period, made of gilt silver, one hundred taels, under the direction of the officials of the Ceremonial Institute of the Southern Court (Xuan Hui Nan Yuan), and offered as tribute."

兩 臣 宣 進 太
造 合 徽 文 平
成 金 南 忠 丙
貢 銀 院 王 寅
進 百 諸 府 又



16

GOLD SQUARE BOX 金方形盒

Liao Dynasty, dated 1026 AD

Length and width: 6.4 cm.

Height: 4.4 cm.

Square box and cover with straight and angled sides, on a square splayed foot. The cover is decorated in repoussé with two flying phoenix, their out-spread feather-engraved wings forming a circular design in low relief. The birds are surrounded by stylized engraved floral sprays. The angled sides of the cover are embellished with stylized evenly spaced half-florettes. The straight sides of the box and cover are incised with lozenge borders. A ring-punched background decorates the box overall.

— the interior of the box bears a thirty-one character inscription which can be read: “ Completed on the sixth year of the Taiping period and offered as tribute to the Wenzhong Wangfu (to place at the altar) a sacrificial utensil to worship the successful government (distinguished by) boundless benevolence and filial piety. (Presented) by the official (chen) Zhang Jian, bowing in deference”.

崇仁廣孝功
成治定文忠
王府殿前祭
器太平六年
造成又貢臣張
儉等合拜揖

Similar example:

— a parcel-gilt box displaying two flying phoenix on its cover and also dated 1026 AD was exhibited by Christian Deydier/Oriental Bronzes Ltd., ‘Imperial Gold from Ancient China’, London 1990, catalogue no. 25.



17

GOLD SQUARE BOX 金方形盒

Liao Dynasty, dated 1026 AD

Height: 7.8 cm.

Width and depth: 7.5 cm.

Gold square box and cover with angled and straight sides. The cover is decorated in repoussé with a pair of ladies, dancing amongst twirling ribbons, their faces, clothing and headgear finely incised. The two figures are surrounded by engraved flowering scrolls, with a stylized quarter flower worked in repoussé at each corner. The angled sides of the cover are engraved with a border of the same stylized flowers, the straight sides with stylized clouds. Each side of the box is engraved with a pair of flying phoenix surrounded by flowers. A ring-punched ground decorates the box overall.

— the interior of the box bears a twenty-seven character inscription which can be read: "Completed by a wonderful craftsman by order of the official (chen) Zhang Jian, bowing in deference, offered to the Wenzhong Wangfu in the bingyin year of the Taiping period, (for use) as a sacrificial utensil to show obeisance."

造 成 又 合 拜 揖
臣 張 儉 等 命 吉 匠
忠 王 府 供 養 祭 器
太 平 丙 寅 進 奉 文

Notes:

— a parcel-gilt silver box of smaller proportions with similar incised decoration was exhibited by Christian Deydier/Oriental Bronzes Ltd., 'Imperial Gold from Ancient China', London 1990, catalogue no. 24.



18

GOLD BOWL 金棱邊碗

Liao Dynasty, dated 1026 AD

Diameter: 15 cm.

Height: 4.2 cm.

Beaten gold octalobe bowl with a granulated bead border at the rim. The well is decorated with two facing mandarin ducks in relief, flying in a ring-punched ground. The details of their plumage, beaks and eyes are finely engraved. Each of the eight inner lobes of the vessel is incised with a naturalistic floral arrangement, four different pairs in all, the matching motifs facing each other.

— the underside of the bowl is carved with a twenty-one character inscription which can be read: " Presented to (the Main Hall of) the Wenzhong Wangfu (for use at the altar in worship), in the bingyin year of the Taiping period, in order to evoke one hundred good fortunes (prosperity), 97."

祈百福
忠王府
太平丙寅
又進文
九拾柒
大殷供奉

Similar example:

— to our knowledge, no gold dish of this period as large as this one has been exhibited or recorded.



19

SILVER AND PARCEL-GILT SQUARE BOX 鑲金銀方形盒

Liao Dynasty, dated 1026 AD

Height: 6.5 cm

Width and depth: 7.2 cm.

Square box and cover with angled and straight sides. The cover is decorated in relief with a central parcel-gilt running hare, worked in repoussé with incised details. The animal is surrounded by a parcel-gilt flowering vine border, with the flower-heads worked in repoussé. The edges of the cover are bordered with a parcel-gilt band incised with stylized scrolling clouds. The angled sides of the cover are incised with a band of parcel-gilt quatrefoil florettes whereas the straight sides are ornamented with parcel-gilt incised lozenges. All four sides of the box are decorated with two parcel-gilt flying phoenix, facing each other. The birds' tails, wings and heads are incised with feather markings. A ring-punched background decorates the box overall, which is supported on a very narrow splayed foot.

— the interior of the box bears a twenty-four character inscription which can be read:
“Completed on an auspicious day, sixth year of the Taiping period, and offered as tribute to the Wenzhong Wangfu (for use) as a sacrificial utensil to show in the most virtuous way the respect of wise civil officials and brave military officials.”

吉日造成又貢
祭器太平六年
至德文忠王府
睿文英武尚道



20

GOLD BOWL 金碗

Liao Dynasty, dated 1028 AD

Diameter: 11.5 cm.

Height: 4.8 cm.

Beaten gold bowl on a flaring foot with a beaded edge. The interior of the mouth rim is incised with an overlapping stylized leaf border. The exterior of the rim is adorned with a border of stylized clouds. The well of the bowl is decorated with a hare worked in repoussé, shown running in a punched ground and surrounded by a scrolling floral border. This central decorative medallion is surrounded by an incised open elongated circle border.

— the underside of the bowl is carved with a twenty-six character inscription which can be read: "In the chengchen year of the Taiping period, official (chen) Xiao Shezhe, bowing in deference, offered to (the Main Hall of) the Wenzhong Wangfu, a sacrificial utensil (to furnish the altar) to show obeisance."

供進又合拜揖
器臣蕭木折等合
文忠王府大殿祭
太平戊辰進奉

Notes:

— Xiao Shezhe is mentioned in the Liao Shi (Liao History) juan 91. He was the son of the younger brother of the Emperor Muzong (951-969). In the 13th year of Zhongxi (1044), Xiao quelled the Li Yuanhao rebellion and was promoted as one of the Royal Guards in the Hingsheng Palace. Involved in a libel case against a general of higher rank, subsequently Xiao was stripped of his title. In another incident he was jailed, but then released at the request of the Empress Dowager. At the beginning of the Qingning period (1055-1064) Xiao was charged with corruption and again lost his title. Soon rehabilitated, he was appointed Xuanhuishui in the Northern Chamber. In the 9th year of Qingning period (1063) he was designated a military chief for the north-west regions, with orders to pacify various barbarian tribes. The following year he received the title of Wang (prince) of Liucheng County. In the 2nd year of Xianyong period (1066), Xiao was promoted to the rank of Prime Minister in the Northern Chamber. He was once again stripped of his title and ordered to lead the Yishun army. The date of his death is not known.

— Xiao Shezhe is also mentioned in the inscriptions on objects catalogued as nos. 26 and 27 in Christian Deydier/Oriental Bronzes Ltd., *Imperial Gold from Ancient China*, London 1990.



21

SILVER AND PARCEL-GILT BOWL 鑲金銀碗

Liao Dynasty, dated 1027 AD

Diameter: 12.5 cm.

Height: 3.9 cm.

Beaten silver and parcel-gilt shallow bowl with lobed hexafoil sides. The well is worked in repoussé with a gilded seated buddha decorated with engraved features. The buddha is centred on a circular finely ring-punched background surrounded by a narrow border composed of open-ended elongated circles. Each interior lobe is further decorated with a gilded and engraved floral spray. Three types of spray are depicted, each type facing its pair on the opposite lobe. The six floral clusters are separated by six single bunches of grapes. The rim is set with a beaded border above an engraved and gilded border of overlapping stylized leaves.

— the underside of the bowl bears a thirty-four character inscription which can be read: "In the dingmao year of the Taiping period, respectfully offered by Imperial official (chen) Zhang Jian representing the Ceremonial Institute of the Southern Court (Xuan Hui Nan Yuan) Mobile/Circulating Palace Administration, Wuding Jun (commandery), to (the Main Hall of) the Wenzhong Wangfu (to furnish the altar) to show obeisance."

府大殿供養
供進文忠王
侍中臣張儉
行宮都部署
宣徽南院
定軍節度使
太平丁卯武



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PREVIOUS EXHIBITIONS

- * December 1985 — Chinese Gold, Silver and Gilt Bronze up to the Tang Dynasty
- * June 1986 — Ancient Chinese Bronze Vessels, Gilt Bronzes and Early Ceramics
- * December 1987 — Opening Exhibition
- * June 1989 — Archaic Chinese Bronzes from Shang and Zhou Dynasties
- * June 1990 — Imperial Gold From Ancient China
- * June 1991 — The Art of the Warring States and Han Periods
- * June 1991 — Imperial Gold from Ancient China, part II
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御用黄金正産寶二

