



A PASSAGE THROUGH ASIA

MARTIN DOUSTAR



# *A PASSAGE THROUGH ASIA*

Ancient art from Southern and Eastern Asia

MARTIN DOUSTAR

ANCIENT & TRIBAL ART



*Echoing the famous novel of Edward Morgan Forster, this voyage through the ancient cultures of Asia will begin on the shores of the Indus Valley civilization, which flourished in the middle of the third millennium before Christ, across northwestern India and Pakistan. Discovered only in the very first decades of the twentieth century, the cities of Harrapa and Mohenjo-daro revealed an extraordinarily developed society, complex and well established, with social classes, craft and writings, as well as long distance-trade with Mesopotamia and Central Asia. The numerous terracotta idols and decorated ceramics are the most important testimonies of this culture, and we will show several remarkable examples in this exhibition.*

*As a key period in the history of mankind, and particularly of this region, the Indus civilization gives us some clues to decipher the later cultural development in the Indian subcontinent. This will lead our journey into the Middle Ages with a group of stone sculptures, of which a spectacular Vyala in the round. Further north, we will cross the Himalaya and encounter the Ordos horsemen of Northern China and inner Mongolia, with a selection of bronze ornaments including several magnificent gilded examples.*

*Our itinerary throughout Asia will end with a prime choice of newly rediscovered bronze objects from the Dong Son period.*

*I do hope this broad selection of museum quality artifacts from diverse times and cultures will excite the curiosity of Asiaphiles, and arouse interest for the exploration of different, and sometimes neglected, fields of art.*

MARTIN DOUSTAR

June 2015



# Catalogue

## 1. A MOTHER GODDESS FIGURINE

Indus Civilization, Mehrgarh style, Pakistan, 3000-2500 BC

Terracotta

Height : 11 cm

Provenance : Private collection, London.

These female figurines, often labelled as “Mother Goddess”, were found in almost all households, indicating the presence of a cult related to goddess worship and fertility rituals. This striking example has very minimalistic features and a owl-like face which gives it a haunting presence.





## 2. TORSO OF A LARGE GODDESS FIGURE

Indus Civilization, Mehrgarh style, Pakistan, 3000-2500 BC  
Terracotta  
Height : 10 cm

Provenance : A. Eskenasy collection, Paris

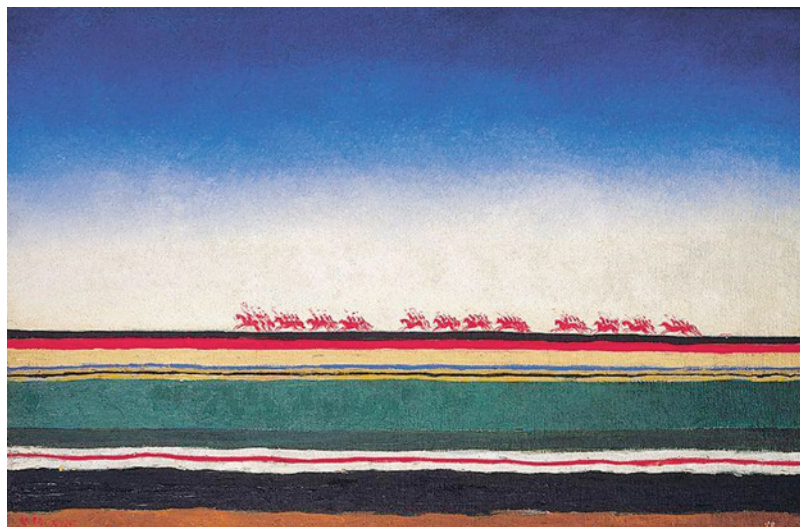
The ideal of beauty as depicted in female figures of the Neolithic period (pinched waist, broad hips, round breast...) has an obvious esthetical affinity with those of later dynasties, such as the Gupta.



### 3. AN EXTREMELY RARE POTTERY

Neolithic period, Pakistan/Iran, ca. 3rd/2nd millenium BC  
Terracotta, red pigment  
Diameter : 18 cm

This exquisite bowl has a slightly loose shape and a curved center point. It is painted with alternating bands of geometrical motifs, spirals evoking a snake, and a frieze of horses : a big one and a smaller horse whose heads are turned to the right, except for one big horse and a smaller one... The intention of the artist and the signification of these elements remain a mystery, and although the bowl was reputedly found in Balochistan, the iconography suggests an origin further north in Western Asia. This fascinating object is not without evoking the Mesopotamian incantation potteries, and one could imagine it was conceived to provide similar magical properties.



The Red Cavalry, circa 1928-1932, Kazimir Malevich

“I have conquered the lines of the colored sky, I have plucked the colors,  
put them into a bag I have made, and tied it with a knot.”

Kazimir Malevich, 1918



#### 4. A PAINTED TERRACOTTA BULL

Indus civilization, Nindowari, Pakistan, ca. 2600-2000 BC  
Terracotta, black and brown pigments  
Length : 13 cm

Provenance : Stefan Grusenmeyer, Bangkok

A large and beautiful terracotta of a humpbacked cow called zebu (*Bos taurus indicus*).  
The National Museum in Karachi owns comparable examples.

Ref. : *Nindowari, The Kulli Culture*, Centre de Recherches Archéologiques Indus-Balouchistan, Asie centrale et orientale. CNRS-Musée Guimet, Paris.



## 5. AN EXCEPTIONAL PAINTED POTTERY

Indus Civilization, Kulli culture, Southern Balochistan/Pakistan, 2500-2300 BC  
Terracotta, pigment  
Height : 22 cm

Provenance : Karim Grusenmeyer collection, Ghent

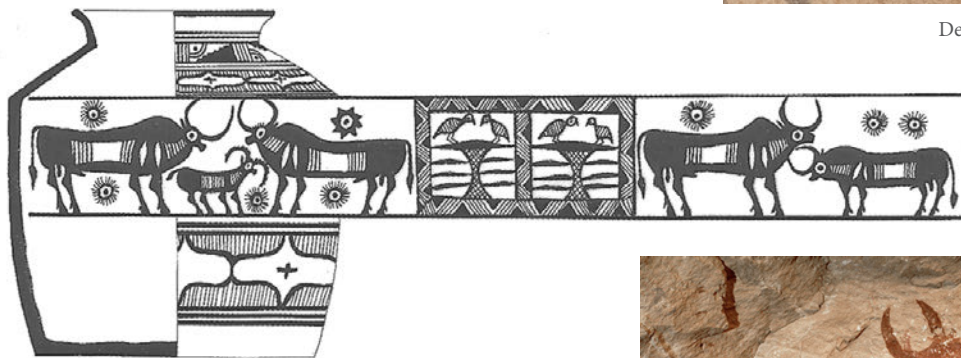
Publication : *Nindowari, The Kulli Culture*, Centre de Recherches Archéologiques Indus-Balouchistan, Asie centrale et orientale. CNRS-Musée Guimet, Paris. Fig. 23.3

The Kulli culture is the name of a prehistoric period in southern Balochistan in Pakistan circa 2500 - 2000 BCE. The pottery and other artifacts excavated are similar to those of the Indus Valley Civilization and it is not clear whether the Kulli culture is a local variation of the Indus Valley Civilization or an own cultural complex.

The present pottery was related to the style called "Kulli A" after the works and excavations of French archeologist Jean-Marie Casal in the site of Nindowari. The circular strip around the pottery is painted with a complex decor of vegetal motifs, plants, birds, and two groups of zebus (*Bos indicus*), which is the main subject on most potteries of the Kulli culture.



Detail of present pottery



3

One of the first depictions of a cow, dating back to 20.000 years, is from the caves of Lascaux, in southwestern France. In prehistorical times and neolithic cultures they were a symbol of strength and prosperity.



Rupestrial art in African Highlands, Chad





6. A SMALL PAINTED POTTERY

Indus Civilization, Kulli culture, Southern Balochistan/Pakistan, 2500-2300 BC  
Terracotta, pigment  
Diameter : 11 cm, Height : 8,4 cm

Provenance : Stefan Grusenmeyer collection, Bangkok

This elegant bowl is painted with a double row of sage leaf motifs, and it is in a perfect state of conservation.



## 7. A RARE AND EARLY FIGURATION OF YAKSHI

Sunga period or earlier, Pakistan/Northwestern India, ca. 300-200 BC  
Terracotta  
Height : 13,4 cm

Provenance : A. Eskenasy collection, Paris

Although the precise provenance of this rare figure is unclear, the iconography is characteristic of female idols from this period, while the style suggests an origin in the western region of the Sunga empire, in Pakistan. Here, the face and ornaments were modeled with great naturalism and much attention was paid to details such as the headdress and body adornments, suggesting the transparency of the skirt under rows of heavy jewelry.

In Indian mythology, Yakshi is a female goddess associated with the fertility of the earth, love, and beauty. She is often depicted with pinched waist and broad hips symbolizing fertility and maternal energy. Yakshi probably originated with the early Dravidians but have subsequently been absorbed into the imagery of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism. The goddess has been worshiped since prehistoric times in India.



Yakshi, Sunga period, 200-100 BC, Musee Guimet, Paris



## 8. AN IMPORTANT GANDHARAN HEAD OF BUDDHA

Taxila, Gandhara region, Pakistan, 300-500 AD

Stucco

Height : 27 cm

Provenance : La Reine Margot, Paris

A slightly larger than life-size stucco head, this expressive and sensitive rendition of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni displays powerful patrician features, with heavily lidded, almond shaped eyes under high arching brows, and full lips. His heart-shaped face framed by elongated, pierced ears, and wavy hair pulled back. The use of stucco, the treatment of the hair and the distinct facial features all indicate a Taxila origin.



9. HEAD OF A FEMALE DIVINITY

Gupta period, India, 5th century

Terracotta

Height : 15,4 cm

Provenance : Galerie Aethiopia, Paris





10. A RARE FEMALE HEAD

India, 600 - 800 AD  
Pink sandstone, traces of pigment  
Height : 30 cm

Provenance : Private collection, Paris

The headdress of this important head, with a centre parting leading to a small bun, recalls another head, slightly smaller and possibly later, in the famous collection of Nasli M. Heeramanek.

Ref. : *Masterpieces of Indian sculpture from the former collections of Nasli M. Heeramanek*, 1979, n°70.



## 11. IMPORTANT SCULPTURE OF A VYALA

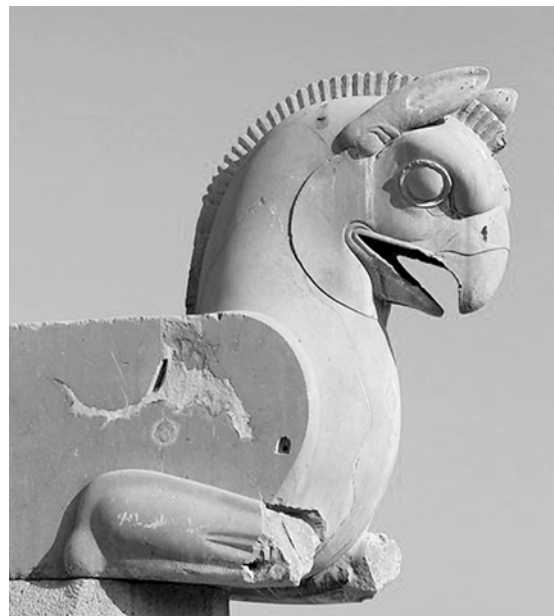
Madhya Pradesh, India, ca. 900-1000 AD  
Pink sandstone, traces of pigment  
Height : 71 cm

Provenance : La compagnie des Indes et de la Chine, Paris

The Vyala, also called Sardula, is a mythological creature of the Hindu pantheon, and a common figural motif of temple architecture. In Hindu legend, the Vyala is depicted with the body of a lion, the tail of a peacock, and the trunk and tusks of an elephant. They have also been described as a leogryph (part lion, part griffin), with some bird-like features. They were sometimes considered as guardians of temples, but actually they appear as symbolic representations of awesome natural forces and uncontrolled human passions which must be subdued in order to achieve inner peace...

The present sculpture, a lion-headed Vyala (simha-vyala), is one of the very rare examples, sculpted in the round, to appear on the market.

The Sanskrit word *vyāla* means “snake”, and is synonymous of “serpent of death”, or fierce monster. There is an obvious similarity between the Hindu creature and the Iranian griffin, both esthetically and mythologically, considering the common Proto-Indo-Iranian background. Indeed, the legendary animal is a recurrent theme in most Indo-European cultures, attested till the Middle Ages with the Gothic gargoyles. More than a frightening creature it represents the inner dragon of evil against which every human soul has to confront.



A monumental Achaemenid griffin Persepolis, Iran, ca. 500 BC



## 12. A MONUMENTAL HEAD OF SHIVA

Uttar Pradesh, India, 800-900 AD  
Buff sandstone, traces of pigment  
Height : 55,2 cm

Provenance : Collection of Jean-Claude Moreau-Gobard, Paris (ca. 1970)

This massive head would originally have belonged to an important monumental sculpture. The face is serene, with full cheeks and downcast eyes, the hair pulled into a chignon secured by an elaborate tiara. The ingenious treatment of the *jatamukuta* allows for deep shade to nestle between the waves of stylized hair, interspersed with skulls symbolizing the deity's creative and destructive aspects, a dramatic amplification of the gently swelling forms of the face.

Shiva (from the Sanskrit Śiva, meaning "The Auspicious One"), also known as Mahadeva ("Great God"), is one of the main deities of Hinduism. He is the supreme god within Shaivism, one of the three most influential denominations in contemporary Hinduism. He is one of the five primary forms of God in the Smarta tradition, and "the Destroyer" or "the Transformer" among the Trimurti, the Hindu Trinity of the primary aspects of the divine.

At the highest level, Shiva is regarded as limitless, transcendent, unchanging and formless. Shiva also has many benevolent and fearsome forms. In benevolent aspects, he is depicted as an omniscient Yogi who lives an ascetic life on Mount Kailash, as well as a householder with wife Parvati and his two children, Ganesha and Kartikeya, and in fierce aspects, he is often depicted slaying demons. Shiva is also regarded as the patron god of yoga and arts.



13. IMPORTANT HEAD OF BHAIRAVA

Uttar Pradesh, India, 900-1100 AD  
Pink sandstone, traces of pigment  
Height : 34 cm

Provenance : Louis & Geneviève Rodis, Paris  
Coll. of Louis and Geneviève Rodis, Loudmer, Paris, 6 Dec. 1994, lot 176  
Private collection, Paris

Bhairava means “terrifying” and is Shiva’s fearful aspect, a fierce manifestation associated with annihilation. In some myths, Shiva created Bhairava as an extension of himself, in order to chastise Brahma. Bhairava is the embodiment of fear, and it is said that those who meet him must confront the source of their own fears. His name describes the effect he has upon those who behold him, as it derives from the word *bhiru*, which means to become fearful - of feeling great fear.







#### 14. AN IMPORTANT STELE OF VISHNU

Madhya Pradesh, India, 800-900 AD  
Pink sandstone  
Height : 112 cm

Provenance : Christophe Hioco, Paris

Vishnu is a Hindu god, the Supreme God of Vaishnavism (one of the three principal denominations of Hinduism) and one of the three supreme deities (Trimurti) of Hinduism. He is also known as Narayana and Hari. As one of the five primary forms of God in the Smarta tradition, he is conceived as “the Preserver or the Protector” within the Trimurti, the Hindu Trinity of the divinity.

In Hindu sacred texts, Vishnu is usually described as having dark complexion of water-filled clouds and as having four arms. He is depicted as a pale blue being, as are his incarnations Rama and Krishna. He holds a padma (lotus flower) in his lower left hand, the Kaumodaki gada (mace) in his lower right hand, the Panchajanya shankha (conch) in his upper left hand and the discus weapon Sudarshana Chakra in his upper right hand.

Vishnu has ten avatars or worldly appearances, which are people, animals or a mix of both. He is Buddha, the heroes : Krishna, Rama and Parashurama, Nara-Simha or Narasimba (the man-lion), Vamana (the dwarf), Matsya (the fish), Kurma (the tortoise), Varaha (the boar) and finally he will be Kalki, who will appear when the world ends, riding a white horse and heralding the start of a new golden age.

This stele shows an extremely rare depiction of the god Vishnu in a seated position, in *vajra-paryanka-asana*, the “adamantine throne” position, made with the legs crossed at the ankles, and both soles of the feet showing, pointed upward. The two upper arms are missing but we can identify one of his attributes : the chakra, symbolizing the power of the spirit. He is wearing a tall headdress which rests on a circular halo. On the upper part of the stele we can see Varaha, the boar, and Narasimha the man-lion, surrounding Buddha. The characters underneath are certainly Brahmâ and Shiva, the two other gods of the Hindu trinity, respectively the creator and the destroyer in the position of *lalitâsana*.

At the bottom of the stele, the two standing divinity are in the position of *tribhanga*, or tri-bent pose, and we can recognize Lakshmi at the right.

The eyes are closed and the lips suggest a gentle smile, the face of the god is serene, and conveys an intense meditative expression. The proportions of the body are perfect, and the overall equilibre of the sculpture is harmonious.

15. HEAD OF A FEMALE DIVINITY

India, 1000-1200 AD

Sandstone

Height : 12,3 cm

Provenance : Private collection, Paris



16. A RARE MONKEY LIME POT

Sri Lanka, 1200 - 1400 AD  
Copper alloy, lime  
Height : 8,9 cm

Provenance : Spink & Son, London, 1984

Cast in a seated position with his arms resting on his knees drawn up to the chest, the right touching the chin and left with open palm begging. The face finely modeled with a broad smiling mouth and raised circular eyes under thick brows, an opening at the top with remnants of lime.



17. AN IMPORTANT SILK PANEL, *KESI*

Ming dynasty, China, 1368-1644

Woven in coloured silk mounted on panel and framed

Measurements : 53 x 34 cm (*kési*)

Provenance : Jacqueline Simcox, London

A rare red silk *kési* woven with an exuberant five-clawed dragon amongst clouds, with red flames streaming out behind him. One foreleg stretched upwards, with claws extended towards a flaming pearl.

Red was the dynastic colour of the Ming dynasty and a dragon with five claws was reserved only for the imperial family and those of high rank. The dragon was emblematic of the emperor, who was also the representative of the sun on earth; the pearl represented the moon.





18. A BELT HOOK IN THE SHAPE OF A DRAGON

Ordos style, Warring States period, Northern China, 400-300 BC  
Bronze  
Length : 11,4 cm

Provenance : Bruno Gay collection, Paris



19. A SUPERB BRONZE ORNAMENT

Ordos style, Warring States period, Northern China, 400-300 BC  
Bronze  
Width : 6,4 cm

Provenance : Serge Le Guennan, Paris



20. A RARE AND SUPERB BELT BUCKLE

Ordos, Eastern Mongolia/Southern Siberia, 600-400 BC  
Bronze  
Width : 9,6 cm

Provenance : Bruno Gay collection, Paris



## 21/ 22. TWO VERY RARE BRONZE MASKETTES

Scythian, Altai Massif, Southern Siberia, ca. 500 BC  
Bronze  
Height : 4,8 cm (20) ; 3,4 cm (21)

Provenance : Serge Le Guennan, Paris  
Bruno Gay collection, Paris

The anthropomorphic representations are extremely rare in the art of the Steppes. This small maskette and the following one must be related to a wooden mask with similar face found during the excavations of Griaznov in 1929, and which was used to adorn the harness of a horse.

This flatten face with animal features resembling a lion was probably an evocation of a demon-like divinity, a sort of local version of the Egyptian god *Bès*.

Ref. : *L'or des Scythes*, Trésors de l'Ermitage, Leningrad, 1991, p. 190  
Roudenko, Sergei I., *Frozen Tombs*, 1953, plate 92



## 23. A RARE DEER HEAD ORNAMENT

Scythian, Southern Siberia, ca. 500 BC  
Bronze  
Width : 8 cm

Provenance : Bruno Gay collection, Paris





21



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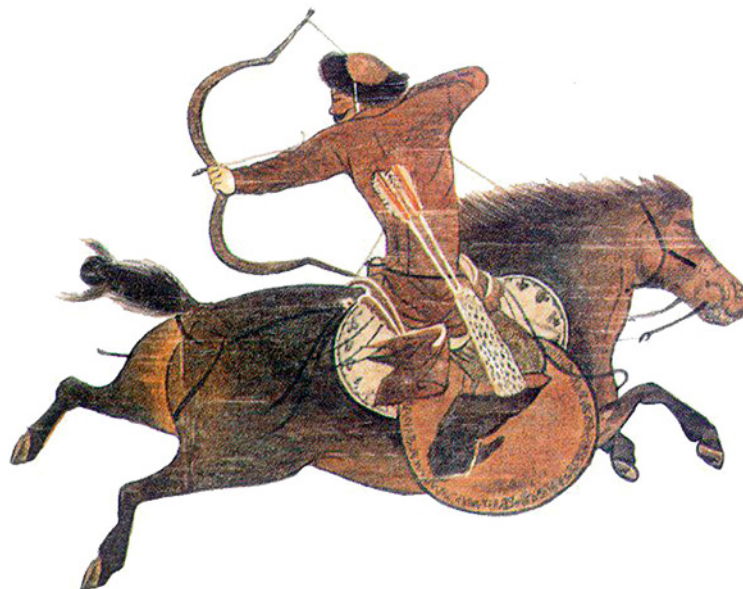
24. A SUPERB GILDED PECTORAL

Hebei province, Northern China, ca. 600 BC  
Gilded bronze and turquoise  
Length : 11,5 cm

Provenance : Private collection, Beijing.  
A. Eskenasy, Paris

This large ornamental plaque of a bouncing onager is quite a rare and important example, gilded and inlaid with turquoise.  
For a comparable gold pectoral of a leopard previously in the collection of Joseph Gerena see the reference below.

Ref. : BUNKER, Emma, *Nomadic Art of the Eastern Eurasian Steppes*, 2002, p.171 n°157.



Horseman of the Steppes



25. A RARE GILDED PHALERA

Ordos, Northwestern China, 300-200 BC  
Gilded bronze  
Diameter : 11 cm

Provenance : Rupert Wace, London

The phalera is a circular adornment used on the harnessing of horses. This large and remarkable example is of a rare type, decorated with a ram head in its center and an attachment hook on the back. In 1923, the legendary dealer C.T. Loo offered a comparable phalera decorated with a reclining bear to the Musée Cernuschi in Paris.



## 26. A RARE AND IMPORTANT PAIR OF BELT BUCKLES

Ordos or Western Han Dynasty, Inner Mongolia/Northern China, 300-100 BC  
Gilded bronze  
Length : 10,6 cm and 10,3 cm

Provenance : Private collection, München

As a comparison, recently exhibited at St. Petersburg's Hermitage (Treasures From the Shanghai Museum/No.89), see the Ordos Region gold plaque, decorated with an eagle-headed beast with antlers. This is said to also be a known motif from the Altai Culture of Russian Siberia. See also The Robert Hatfield Ellsworth Collection (Lots 85-88/Sotheby's NewYork/19.3.2002) for other plaques, all in gilt-bronze and dated between the 4th and 2nd Centuries BC.

Similar plaques, again depicting a variety of mythological and other animals, are thought to have originated in South Russia. Their designs presumably migrated eastwards in conjunction with the nomadic, horse cultures who employed bronze, gilded bronze, silver and gold in the creation of this entirely original genre. In the apparent absence of an established literature here, the chronology and evolution of these forms is somewhat uncertain. Dame Jessica Rawson in *Ancient China/Art and Archaeology* (1980) underlines the connection between a belt buckle from the Ordos Region (400-300 BC) and similar plaques from the culture of Eastern Siberia, the latter collected by Peter The Great and now in The Hermitage, St. Petersburg. At the time of writing, however, Dame Jessica concluded that there was both a dearth of excavated evidence, and little attempt to establish an accurate chronology.

Indeed, appraisal of the dissemination and influence of this metalwork has remained a challenging prospect. Professor William Watson, writing in 1995 (*The Arts of China to AD 900*), inclines towards the view that the term "Ordos" includes similar objects from Inner Mongolia, and that the animist designs represent a specific culture, encompassing a large geographic region which included both Eastern Mongolia and Southern Siberia. Professor Watson also makes the significant point that the extant examples are largely "undocumented finds". He concludes, however, that the artistic links between plaques produced by the Nomadic Khans of The Xiongnu (circa 200 BC), and those from the earlier nomadic peoples of Southern Siberia, form a straight line of unbroken tradition.

Ref. : RAWSON, Jessica, *Ancient China/ Art and Archaeology*, 1980.

WATSON, William, *The Arts of China to AD 900*, 1995.



27. A LARGE SILK PANEL, *KESI*

Ming dynasty, China, 1368-1644  
Woven in coloured silk mounted on panel and framed  
Measurements : 90 x 34 cm (*kesi*)

Provenance : Private collection, London

A large *kesi* representing a flower of lotus in a poly-lobed cartouche in the form of a ruyi head in the high part, two in-flight cranes among rocks and stylised clouds, border embroidered with flowers and characters.





28. A RARE PAIR OF BELT BUCKLE

Dong Son culture, Northern Vietnam, 300-200 BC  
Bronze  
Length : 10 cm and 10,1 cm

Provenance : Private collection, Paris

The Musée Barbier-Mueller in Geneva owns two comparable pairs of belt buckles.

Ref. : Barbier-Mueller, Le profane et le divin : Arts de l'Antiquité, Fleurons du Musée Barbier-Mueller, 2008, p. 454-455.

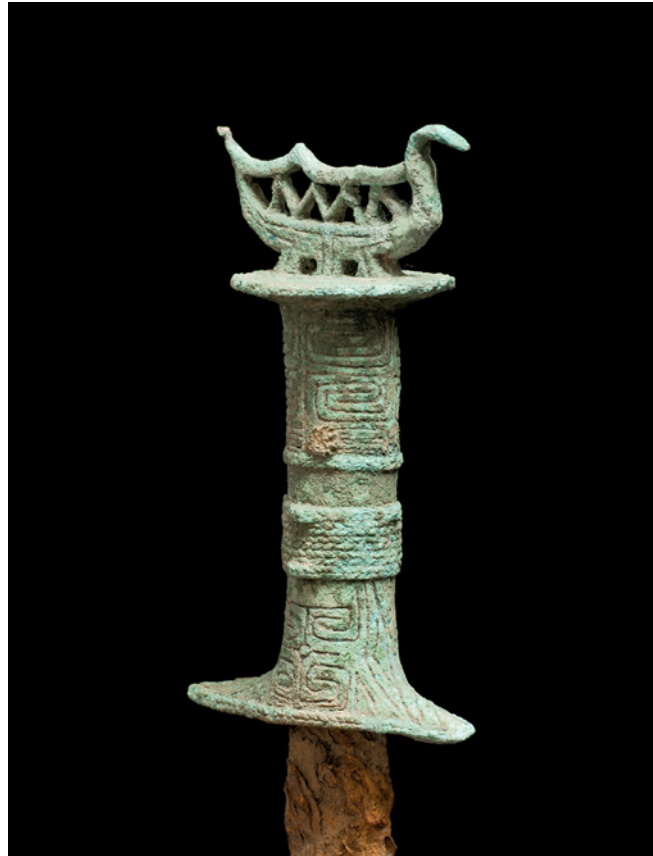


29. AN EXCEPTIONAL BRONZE SWORD

Dong Son culture, Northern Vietnam, 500-300 BC  
Bronze, iron  
Height : 48,5 cm

Provenance : A. Eskenasy collection, Paris

The magnificent bronze handle of this sword is decorated with a “soul-boat” at its tip, a recurring theme in early Southeast Asian history, characteristic of the Dong Son period. This important sword was probably the property of a noble of high rank, a possession of prestige used only in a ceremonial context. To our knowledge, this is a unique example.





30. A MAGNIFICENT BRONZE BELL

Ban Chiang culture, Northeast Thailand, 300-100 BC

Bronze

Height : 8,4 cm

Provenance : Dr. Kurt Sandmair collection, München

A large number of bronze bells decorated with a bull head have been found, but without a doubt this striking example is the most perfect one. The cast, of large size, has a beautiful patina and smooth surface decorated with elegant rope-like motifs and a sharp powerful bull head.





31. AN ORNAMENTAL PLAQUE

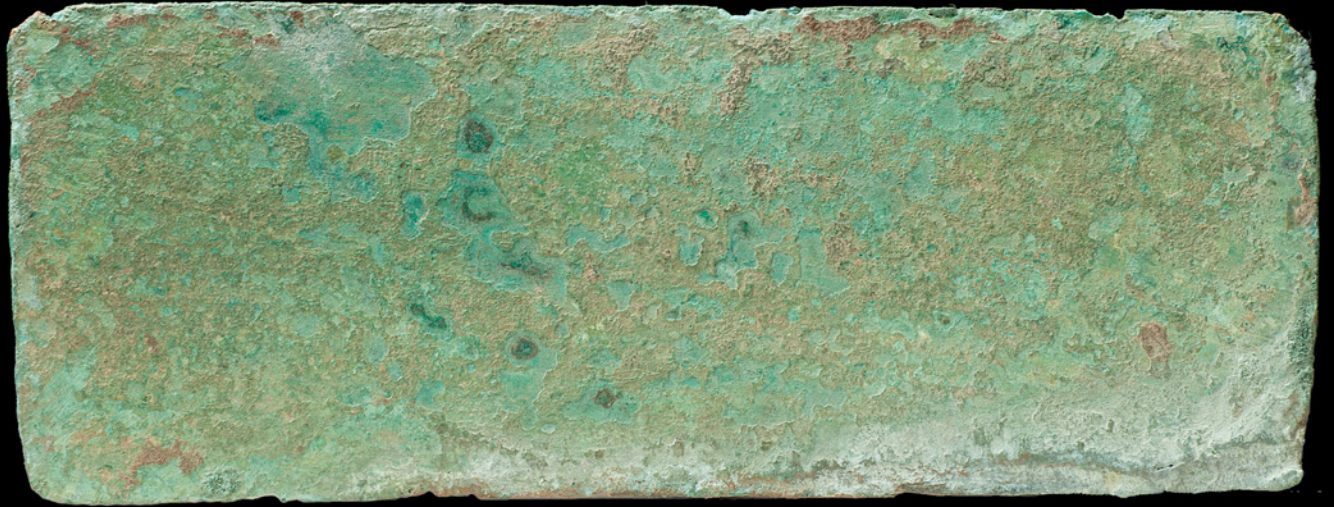
Dong Son culture, Northern Vietnam, 200-100 BC  
Bronze  
Length : 23,2 cm

Provenance : Dr. Kurt Sandmair collection, München

A similar bronze plaque, with identical seated figures wearing tall feather headdresses, is in the collection of the Musée Barbier-Mueller in Geneva.

Ref. : Barbier-Mueller, *Le profane et le divin : Arts de l'Antiquité, Fleurons du Musée Barbier-Mueller*, 2008, p. 468-469.





32. A RARE BRONZE BELL

Ban Chiang culture, Northeast Thailand, 400-200 BC

Bronze

Height : 10,2 cm

Provenance : Dr Kurt Sandmair collection, München

This bell and another one of the same rare type, decorated with a bird flanked on the front side, both from the Sandmair collection, were found on the same site in Northeast Thailand. To our knowledge, extremely few, possibly no other examples are known.

Ref. : DOUSTAR, Martin, *The Art of the Bronze Age in Southeast Asia*, 2014, n° 28.



### 33. AN IMPORTANT DAGGER

Dong Son culture, Vietnam, 500-200 BC  
Bronze  
Height : 33,3 cm

Provenance : Marc Delorme collection, Paris

A similar dagger is in the collection of Christophe Hioco, who notes : This short sword with an anthropomorphic handle is exceptional in more than one way: in its rarity while we only know a few ones in the Dong Son sculpture and by the sculpture that ornaments its hilt. Archaeologists are used to call this short sword as “Nui Nua sword”, because a very similar Dongsonian one was found in Nua mount of Thanh Hoa province. It is now exhibited in the Museum of Thanh Hóa, a city in the North Central Coast region of Vietnam.

The rarest feature of this sword is its representation of a woman, identifiable by her long sarong. Men, for their part, wore short loincloths. These anthropomorphic pieces effectively played a precious role in furthering knowledge of apparel in times past. The sarong is decorated with spirals and hatching, both very typical of Dong Son bronzes. (..) Jewellery was very important for Dong Son men as much as for women. This woman is wearing a heavy necklace, large earrings and an impressive headdress. The force of the object and the richness of its decoration suggests a ritual (or sacrificial) use during important events or ceremonies, that seem to have been very frequent in Dong Son society, if we consider the numerous representations of dancers and musicians on ritual objects such as drums, situlas and knives.



DESIGN & PHOTOGRAPHY

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