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JADE III. JADE CARVING, 4TH CENTURY B.C.E TO 15TH CENTURY C.E.

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The eleven ancient and medieval jades illustrated in the plates are representatives of a very large and expanding corpus of ancient and medieval Iranian jades. They are primarily discussed as works of art, but the ways in which they document the technological sophistication of the hardstone industries in Iran, and Iran's cultural interrelationships with neighbors and far-off contacts, are also examined.

Since the Al-Sabah Collection in Kuwait is the only center known to have systematically sought and secured West Asian jades, most of the illustrations and the ensuing discussion focus on pieces in this collection. In the legends, the order of measurements is height (ht.), width (w.), thickness (th.); weights are also given. Unless otherwise stated, the pieces in the Al-Sabah Collection have not been published before. Brief publication histories are provided for pieces not in the Al-Sabah Collection.

The figurine of a couchant hound bitch of a breed for hunting fierce prey such

as lions (PLATE I) is the earliest piece among the presently known ancient Iranian jades. This is a large piece of astounding quality, carved by a supreme artist thoroughly schooled in Greek art, but probably of the Samarqand region, or, possibly, of what is now northern Afghanistan or southern Tajikistan. The artistic quality embodied in the piece (including the mastery of anatomy and the rendering of detail) is unsurpassed in the finest of Hellenistic Greek marbles, indeed of Greek art generally; yet the artist was almost certainly a native Central Asian, as is shown by the treatment of the end of the tail and the extreme exaggeration of the vertebrae of the spine. Although such stylization of the spine was inspired by realistic Greek examples, the only parallels for what we see here are Chinese examples of later date and comparatively inferior quality. The only other possibility, that this was carved by a Greek artist, would entail the supposition that he was a longtime resident in Central Asia and schooled in Central and East Asian art, a much less plausible conjecture than the above. Aside from its beauty, this most impressive carving is of prime importance for the history of Asian art generally, ranking alongside the horses of the terracotta army uncovered in the tomb of the first Chinese emperor, Qin Shihuangdi (d. 210 B.C.E.). Like these horses, the jade piece demonstrates some of the earliest phases of the enormous and lasting but little-recognized influence of Greek art on that of China. It is evident that this influence in certain cases (notably that of the terracotta army) can only have been direct.

On the whole, Chinese art does not fundamentally evince a great interest in the literal appearance of things in this world. It is overwhelmingly expressionistic and visionary, brilliantly suggesting moods or materializing other worlds. There are Chinese objects, particularly renditions of animals, which embody wonderful observation and highly sophisticated training from long before the era of Classical Greece, yet nothing in earlier Chinese art presages the art of Shihuangdi's tomb. In general approach as well as with respect to a number of tell-tale motifs or preoccupations, this Qin art has earlier Greek models. Therefore, it is a reasonable conclusion that just as the artistic achievements of the Greeks—especially in the realm of realism—had spawned hybrid Greek-Steppe art schools in South Russia and Central Asia, this process, at least for a brief period, found a home as far north and east as the present-day Chinese province of Shanxi. Although the fall of the Qin dynasty in 207 B.C.E. seems to have marked the end of a strongly Greek art in China proper, the art of China was imprinted by the phenomenon in a myriad of ways and for millennia afterward. Seen within the context of the

comparative study of Greek and Chinese art, the terracotta army, and especially the horses, document an intensive training in Greek traditions. These horses embody anatomical interest and knowledge that could not have originated outside the Greek school of art.

One specific element, which is highly characteristic of these horses, as well as of Tang ceramic horses and, to a lesser extent, of Han horse figures in various media, is a pronounced, stylized, bifurcated forelock which sweeps out from between the ears and around their bases on either side. This is also a feature of earlier Greek art, notably the “Satrap Sarcophagus” of the 5th century B.C.E. and the “Alexander Sarcophagus” of the last quarter of the 4th, both in the Archaeological Museum, Istanbul, and both from the Royal Necropolis of Sidon (inv. nos. 367 T and 370 T, respectively: for the Satrap Sarcophagus, cf. Hamdy and Reinach, pl. XX, Kleeman, pls. 2 and esp. 10; for the Alexander Sarcophagus, Hamdy and Reinach, pls. XXVII; Winter, pls. X-XI, XVII; Boardman, 1993, pp. 172-73 pls. 162A, XIII; Boardman, 1995, figs. 228.1-2; Jidejian, pls. on pp. 277, 279-80). The bifurcated forelock is also well represented on coinage from the 4th and 3rd century B.C.E. (e.g., Kraay, no. 874; Head, pl. 31, no. 21; and Parrot, pp. 210-11 pl. 231). In the Oxus region, representation of this type of forelock continued, and was probably the direct source of inspiration of its use for Tang horses. It seems that depiction of the bifurcated forelock died out during the Han period and thereafter was not present in Chinese art until the Tang. On the other hand, a very well-modeled stucco horse with the forelock in this fashion was excavated at Khalchayan (Pugachenkova, 1966, pl. XX; Pugachenkova and Rempel’, p. 48 color pl.), and it appears again later at Varakhsha (Shishkin, fig. 104).

In line with their intense study of anatomy and its representation, as well as with the lessons learned from Pharaonic art, Greek artists rendered not only the hair, skin, and muscles of the creatures forming their subjects, but also their skeletal structure. Hundreds of extant sculptures show strongly rendered ribs, and there are examples of vertebrae taking a prominent, serially knobbed form. In the white jade bitch this has been taken to an intensified, stylized level, but it certainly started from Greek originals (e.g., the lion pair from the Nereid Monument at Xanthos, British Museum, inv. nos. BM Sc. 929-30; cf. Childs, pls. 156-58; Boardman, 1995, fig. 218.2). Large numbers of Chinese jade figurines of dogs and other animals, real and imagined, are modeled on this white jade bitch (considered as a type), though none is as early or as anatomically informed. A large percentage of these are most easily

compared with the Sogdian original because of their highly stylized spines. But various pieces, especially the hound figurines, share other characteristics as well: the couchant position, often with crossed front feet; the general breed type; large paws with prominent claws, often sharply detailed; the treatment of the ears; the prominently modeled ribs; the curlicue tail, and so on. Uniquely comparable, though very decidedly inferior to the piece under discussion, is a carving that appeared recently in the art market (Tajan, 21 Nov. 2005, lot 143). That hound figurine should also be from Sogdiana, and probably was carved about a century or two later than our white jade one. The Tajan piece shows conclusively that our piece was not without descendants, which in turn form a bridge to the later Chinese tradition.

Of all the areas which had been influenced by Greek art, Sogdiana preserved the Classical and Hellenistic achievements for the longest duration, in terms of both finesse and the anatomical information incorporated in artworks. This situation even persisted during the early Islamic period. Further examples of classical-period Sogdian models for Chinese jade types could be cited, and Sogdiana served as a reservoir of classical knowledge of the rendering of anatomy when Samarqand was a Tang protectorate. Greek influence is recognizable in the sharp turn toward realism in Tang art generally, which in turn furnished important models for the Chinese art of later periods.

The sizable and powerfully expressive mare (PLATE II) is probably the only known example of a fully in the round rendition of the Steppe art subject of a contorted horse; she rolls on the ground and is twisted in multiple dimensions. What the piece reveals of artistic currents in early Central Asia makes it of extremely high interest for the history of art. As indicated, the subject was popular in Steppe art, and the artist was deeply steeped in this tradition. Large numbers of low-relief and two-dimensional Steppe art pieces are known in which a sinuous bodied animal, most commonly a horse, is seen in side view, with the fore- and hindquarters twisted with respect to each other by a full 180o. This kind of stylization reflects an ingrained tendency in Steppe art; for example, there is the early tradition of a quadruped whose serpentine body forms a circle, with the head ending up behind the rump. And the present piece also has descendants in Chinese jades; noteworthy is a horse performing a similar type of trick, but carved centuries later and devoid of the expressive power, the anatomical interest, and the art-historical importance of our mare (Sotheby's Hong Kong 23 Oct., 2005, lot 17, attributed to the Ming period). Its knobby spine also represents the heritage in Chinese art from pieces such as

the jade bitch (above, PLATE I).

A contorted horse in Steppe art is typically executed in low relief or two dimensions, and the existence and character of this subject's three-dimensional version indicates the impact of Classical tradition. A number of general and individual features further testify to the strength of this impact: these include the spatial conceptualization and general full-roundness, and details such as the eyes, the teeth, the tongue, and the bottoms of the hooves. On the other hand, this plastically conceived horse exhibits a pervasive stylization; but despite the fact that the artist took liberties with the animal (especially the rubbery insect-like legs and the hippopotamus-like head), the mare's position is still a possible one. The figurine betrays an intimate knowledge of the behavior of the horse, which, among large ungulates, is especially fond of rolling on the ground, and even of contortion. The subject was sure to have wide appeal at the time, and the fact that the fore- and hindquarters are only torqued by 90o with respect to each other—a feat which poses no problem even for human beings—probably enhanced this appeal. Still, it is the artistic value that impresses most about this piece, and its inventiveness and expressionism are especially remarkable. The compositional and representational elements are cleverly found within the boulder, which is fully exploited to create the levels and internal details, while the orchestration of all elements convey the subject's frenzy.

The figurine is slightly off-white, with superficial dark accretions. The stone is not jade, though it is of a very similar appearance, and the material has not yet been identified. It is almost as hard as nephrite, and there are various indications that its toughness is comparable with jade as well. The material exhibits tiny sparkling points, and microscope observation reveals in the stone large, elongated blocky structures, presumably some sort of crystals. Since these two features do not accord with jade as it is known up to now, only examination by a mineralogist will resolve the issue.

The figurine of a warrior, mounted on a lion (PLATE III), is not among the finest Central Asian jades that were produced shortly before the Islamic conquest. Yet the piece is of great interest on several counts. The subject of a helmeted man riding a lion is highly unusual, and supports its attribution to the Oxus region. The iconography of Nana astride a lion was a standard image in the area's art, and appears, for example, in a mural at Panjikant (q.v. at *iranica.com*), dated to the 8th century C.E. (Azarpay, p. 68, fig. 32). Literature attests that lions raised their young in the thickets along the Oxus river system,

and that they were often captured young and tamed (Rossabi, 1983, pp. 55-56). In 628 C.E., a tame lion was sent from Samarqand to the Chinese court (Juliano in Juliano, p. 325) The Samanid ruler Aḥmad b. Esmāʿil (r. 907-14) is reported to have had a lion guarding his door as he slept (Naršaḵi, pp. 94-95). In 1413, the Chinese court is documented as having received lions as part of the "tribute payments" of Samarqand and Herat (Rossabi, 1976, p. 30). That the practice of depicting humans with tame lions at the leash goes back to ancient times in Central Asia is documented by the fragment of a rhyton from Nisa. This is in repoussé-worked silver, and dated to the 2nd century C.E. (Pugachenkova, 1986, p. 106, upper illus.).

The artistic style and indications of costume are most convincing for the figurine's placement. Domical caps and helmets (see HELMET) were common in the region in the period in question. The rider's helmet has an apparently quilted neck defense, and this headgear is close in form to the known examples from the period, both extant and recorded in depictions. A number of preserved helmets, attributed to the Sasanian period, are of this general form, while depictions in Central Asian paintings of the first several centuries C.E. provide close analogues. Tall conical and rounded helmets, many with suspended mail to protect the neck—and often the shoulders and face as well—abound in the murals of Panjikant (Azarpay, figs. 43-45 and pl. 4). Caps similar in form to that in the jade carving also appear frequently; some include a cloth element that is suspended down the back of the neck, in the manner of the jade figurine (Azarpay, fig. 43, note the far left figure, lower register, right panel, and pl. 8).

Three other jade lion figurines in a similar style are in the Al-Sabah Collection, and these are also putatively from Central Asia. Taken together, these four pieces suggest the existence of a particular school of jade carving in the Oxus region, immediately before the period of the Islamic conquest. They deal with subjects and stories current in the area at the time, and are unlikely to be the products of a princely atelier. The presence of the transverse hole in our figurine suggests that the piece was threaded on a cord or leather strip, perhaps as part of a fob, securing a purse or other necessary item suspended on a sash or belt.

The form of this fine, thin bowl of translucent white jade with greenish undertones (PLATE IV) is a close analogue with one of the most popular shapes of Islamic ceramics between the 8th and 10th centuries. These Islamic vessels include the prestigious Mesopotamian types of ceramics covered with opaque

white glazes, among which are the following: undecorated; with cobalt blue overglaze-painted decoration; and monochrome and polychrome overglaze luster-painted wares. Unfortunately, a great deal of uncertainty surrounds the dating and placement of most types of plain jade vessels, particularly of simple bowls. Far too little attention has been paid to careful study of matters related to forms, and far too much weight has been given to Chinese manufacture in general, and the Qing period (1644-1911/1912) in particular. But poems of the great Qing emperor and jade connoisseur Qianlong testify that exceptionally fine jade bowls were made to the west of China, and that many of these were in his collection.

The prevailing conventional wisdom is that because early Chinese porcelains enjoyed an unrivalled status, they inspired both the use of the white glaze and the form of the wares in the Islamic world. While this is surely true for the white glaze, much work remains to be done on comparative dating and careful study of form, in conjunction with the best evidence for the dating of shape evolution, both Chinese and Islamic. It is intriguing that pottery of essentially this form was made in the Oxus region in the centuries on either side of the B.C.E./C.E. divide (Pugachenkova, 1966, figs. 11, 17, 19, 33, 40 and 53; 1978, fig. 56, left). This evidence could significantly neutralize the mystique built around the bowl's shape in the literature on Islamic ceramics.

The most likely place of manufacture of this elegant, masterfully cut bowl is Samarqand, particularly in light of its status as an ancient lapidary center, including its fame at the Chinese court in the period as a source of worthy hardstone objects (cf. Schafer, pp. 226-28; Teng 1983, p. 77 and n. 22-23 on p. 106; Pinder-Wilson, 1992, p. 36).

The magnificent large platter of dark green jade (PLATE V) in the Cleveland Museum of Art has generally been taken to be of Mughal Indian manufacture (see INDIA v-vi). Until recently it was generally accepted in the Islamic art-historical literature that jade was not carved in West and South Asia before the 15th century; and since this piece did not fit in well with the known Iranian or Turkish corpus, India seemed the obvious candidate. S. E. Lee (p. 42, fig. 163) identified the vessel as Mughal Indian, and dated it to the 17th century. S. Markel (pp. 52, 54, fig. 1) essentially followed Lee, though he placed it approximately in the last quarter of the 16th century. Markel (pp. 52 and 54, fig. 4) argued for his attribution by citing dark green vessels depicted in Mughal miniatures, and analogies with Chinese porcelain of generally related form. But it is not certain that the depicted dark vessels are jade, and, even

more importantly, their shapes do no relate them usefully to this piece. Markel's suggestion of possible inspiration from Chinese porcelains, generally of the earlier 15th century and decorated with cobalt-blue painting, has also been considered. The present author has taken detailed measurements of such a Chinese piece in the Al-Sabah Collection (inv. no. LNS 769 C; cf. Watson, no. W.1). These measurements show that the shape cannot be used to support the attribution of the Cleveland jade. Moreover, such porcelains would have been in the collections of every prince and sovereign in the central and eastern Islamic world. The drift of Markel's argument for the Cleveland charger could, for example, have led him to attribute it to Ottoman Turkey, which is also known to have had a long-lasting jade-cutting industry, as well as a thriving production of ceramics of generally similar form to the cited Chinese porcelains. Still, this proposition of possible Ottoman origin cannot be entertained for a variety of reasons, which are beyond the scope of this survey.

The jade platter does, however, have such precise, interrelated and very carefully executed proportions that any really close parallel in ceramics would make a strong argument; in such a case, the suggestion that the jade and ceramics would have been made in the same milieu must be taken seriously. Uniquely, Samanid ceramic types of the 10th century do show close shape analogies with this grand dish. A simple visual comparison already shows that the shape is identical, and no other vessels, in ceramics or otherwise, can provide so close an analogy. The author's personal examination of the Cleveland jade has furthermore made possible the conclusion that certain members of this class of Samanid ceramics hew uncannily close to the charger's proportions and ratios. They have not only the exact shape, but also the exact same proportional relationship between the whole and the parts, specifically the overall diameter, the foot diameter, and the rim width.

The high level of planning and control in execution embodied in the jade piece allows the demonstration of its remarkably close relationship with the Samanid ceramics in question. The vessel features a wide, near-flat rim, a well that plunges sharply downward and then inward in a quarter-arc, and afterwards continuously increases the diameter of the arc to a near-flat center. It has an assertive, sharp, relatively high foot-ring. The author's drawings and calculations on the basis of his measurements show that this piece embodies an extraordinary set of extremely close and quite intriguing proportional consonances. On the top surface, the width of the rim is 1/10 of the overall

diameter; and two incised, linear grooves around the rim are each 0.4 cm from the rim edge which it parallels, which is 1/10 of the width of the rim itself. On the bottom surface, the lip width, like that of the top, is 1/10 of the overall diameter; the diameter of the belly from the point at which it drops sharply from the underside of the rim is 4/5 (8/10) of the overall diameter; the outside diameter of the footring is 2/5 resp. 4/10 of the overall diameter; and the thickness of the footring at its edge is 1/2 of its height. The closest shape parallels possible are to be found in some pieces of the Samanid pottery excavated at Nishapur. The correspondences between the jade charger and one plate in particular among the Nishapur ceramics (Wilkinson, 1973, no. 5:36) are identical. Working from the platter's published photos (Wilkinson, 1973, p. 175 top and bottom views; profile drawing p. 167), the author calculated that it embodies the same mathematical ratios. Specifically, the plate's belly is 4/5 resp. 8/10 of the diameter of the piece, leaving the width of the rim 1/10 of that overall diameter; and the outside diameter of the footring is .40 or 2/5 of the overall diameter. It is also noteworthy that the excavations at Varakhsha again unearthed a model distinctly similar in form to the Samanid dishes (Shishkin, fig. 63, top).

The size and perfection of the Cleveland jade, in conjunction with the above comparisons, strongly suggest that in the 10th century the Samanids supported a developed and sophisticated jade-carving industry, even though specialists of both Islamic and Chinese art may find this difficult to accept. But this attribution is further supported by the prolific and sophisticated hardstone industry that is attested in eastern Iran, specifically Nishapur, for the early Islamic period (Keene, 1981). The very first pre-Timurid Islamic jade to be published came from the excavations at Nishapur (Keene in Jenkins and Keene, no. 12). Furthermore, the region, as mentioned above, was almost certainly the main west Asian jade-working area in both ancient and Islamic times, with Samarqand and Balkh as probably its greatest centers. The already discussed jades, notably the white jade bitch (above, PLATE I) show that this industry was of long standing and of the highest order of sophistication, technically and artistically. Large jade objects of the first centuries after the Islamic conquest are mentioned in the contemporary literary sources; with regard to the early Islamic lapidary establishments in general, pieces such as the huge rock crystal vase with a Kufic inscription in the Treasury of St. Mark's Cathedral (Alcouffe in *Trésor*, no. 37), attest to their high sophistication and technical capabilities.

Three other very large jade platters (two of them approximately one-and-one-half times the size of the Cleveland example) in the National Palace Museum, Beijing, are clearly representatives of the same school which produced the Cleveland piece (Teng, 2004, pp. 41-43, pls. 44-46). To judge from the illustrations, the closest piece is that in fig. 44; and measurements from the photo and calculations based thereon indicate, again, that the rim width is 1/10, and the well diameter 8/10, of the overall diameter. Teng draws the parallel between these pieces and the Cleveland platter (p. 41), and she refers to Qianlong's own stated opinion that the likes of these had been passed down for generations in Central Asia, concluding: "From what we know of the three pieces . . . it is probably safe to assume that the plate in the Cleveland Museum was also used by the ancestors of the Mughal emperors in the Central Asian plains" (p. 41).

The Qaṣr-e Abu Naṣr dish (discussed above under "Pre-Islamic Iranian Jades") seems to be more at home with the present piece than in the Achaemenian context which has been proposed for it, and calculations made from its illustrations reveal a similar concern for mathematical ratios. The fact that, among other indications, the diameter of the base is 3/4 that of the dish overall reveals a similar concern with ratios internal to the piece.

The fine seal ring (PLATE VI), made from a single piece of white jade (i.e., hololithic) is inscribed with the name Moḥammad b. ʿAbd-al-ʿAziz. Such rings have been Near Eastern luxury accoutrements since Pharaonic times. "Hololithic" rings were made not only of hardstones such as carnelian, agate and rock crystal, but also of soft stones and other materials such as shell, horn, faience, and glass, for those who could not afford one cut from semiprecious stones harder than steel. Due to its toughness, jade is the most perfect of the available choices for hololithic finger rings, and the indications are that they were made in the thousands, especially in the eastern parts of the Islamic world. The majority of the known examples were inscribed in reverse, on the top of their bezel, to serve as seal rings, and normally the style of the inscription's calligraphy is extremely helpful in determining place and date of manufacture. Another very useful tool for dating is comparison of hololithic rings' form with those executed in metal, mostly gold, silver, and various copper alloys (bronze, brass). Surviving rings of metal exist in much greater numbers, and are very frequently shaped or decorated in styles which can be attributed with some accuracy.

This jade ring exhibits two features that are frequently encountered in finger

rings from eastern Iran. The first is a marked fondness for very high bezels, which is often much more radically expressed than here. The second feature is the use of wedge-shaped “claws” on the upper bezel, the original purpose of which was to keep a set stone in place. In hololithic rings such as this one, the non-functional “claws” are, of course, a visual pun, but such non-functional claws were popular as part of the form and decoration not only of hololithic rings but of cast metal rings without stones as well.

The pear-shaped belt-fitting (PLATE VII) is made of translucent jade with a pale, grayish green hue. Belt-fittings were among the objects most commonly made of jade: the stone’s toughness guaranteed the fitting’s serviceability in the rugged life of the cavalier, while jade’s putative status as the “victory stone” further insured its popularity (Keene, 2004, p. 208 n. 5).

On the basis of stylistic criteria, the belt-fitting can be dated to the 13th or 14th century, when the Mongol dynasty of the Il-khanids (q.v.) dominated the region. The Il-khanid style was heavily influenced by that of the Liao of northern China, and that influence is reflected here. The fitting’s imagery draws on the iconography of the backward-looking hare that the Mongols inherited from Chinese symbolism (for the pre-Tang Chinese tradition of associating the hare with the moon, see Rawson, p. 335). The story of the hare whose image is put on the moon because he was willing to sacrifice himself as food when King Shakra had appeared in the disguise of a beggar (Beal, pp. 59-60) belongs to the Buddhist narrative tradition. A Chinese jade, dated to the 12th or 13th century (Rawson, no. 25:11) shows closely related imagery: a hare, amidst lingzhi fungi, is looking at the moon. The two jades constitute yet another piece of evidence for a trans-Asian artistic sharing, which is particularly well documented in Eastern Iranian jades. During the Mongol period, however, this phenomenon is less surprising than in earlier times, when it is also evidenced.

The thick-walled hemispherical vessel (PLATE VIII), which is missing its lid and precious-metal interior lining, is made of waxy middle-green jade, and retains some of its gold inlay. The piece is of great art-historical importance, because it is the earliest precious-metal-inlaid hardstone object known. In the Islamic tradition of inlaid hardstones, as well as in the Islamic tradition of precious-metal inlay in objects of copper alloy, the inlay is mechanically locked in place by forcing the precious metal into grooves, undercuts, and sometimes drilled holes in the areas excavated in the substrate. Most of the linear inlay in Iranian jades—on this vessel as well as the subsequently

discussed examples of inlaid jade—exhibits a concave V-shaped cross-section, imparted by the presumably V-shaped tool used to force the inlay down into the recesses prepared by wheel-cutting.

This vessel was presented as an Ottoman object in two auction sales (Christie's London 24 April 1990, lot 366; Christie's London 25 April 1997, lot 316), even though it exhibits no close parallels with any artifact known to be Ottoman. Its decoration, in fact, places it squarely in the decorative tradition that derived from the highly creative schools of art of the Ghaznavids. The author's very comprehensive collection of comparative material, which strongly supports the Ghaznavid attribution, can in this context only be summarized (see the introductory paragraphs preceding the Bibliography below).

The gold inlay was intentionally removed in ancient times, as is revealed by microscopic examination: the recesses cut to hold the inlay are filled with the dark accretions of the ages, but seven tiny remaining bits of gold have been observed under these accretions (Keene, 2001, p. 5 and figs. 11-12, the latter a photomicrograph of one remaining bit of inlay). The vessel's inlay was definitely not set with precious stones, as has been asserted repeatedly (both auction catalogues cited above; Melikian-Chirvani, 1997/2000, p. 147). The setting of stones into the inlay of hardstones is a 15th century Timurid development, and in any case it would have been physically impossible for this piece, as study of the cut recesses shows.

This piece's decoration is unique with regard to its position in developments that ultimately led to the highly influential Timurid classical type of arabesque, while at the same time being of a singularly particular nature. It constitutes an important early monument in this line of development, and it cannot, for a variety of reasons, be made to fit in with the decoration of the Timurid School or its descendants in Iran, Turkey, and India. It belongs, rather, to an early, inventive, and formative stage, full of features that were to prove fundamental for much of what was to come in later centuries. The creation of overlapping compartments of arch-like aspect, filled with arabesque designs, and featuring "hipped," or "lump-jawed" half-palmettes, appears in scores of examples of the carved-marble dado panels from the Palace of Masʿud III (r. 1099-1115), which was built at Ghazni (q.v.), in the second decade of the 12th century (e.g., Bombaci, 1966, pls. V.6, VI.8, IX.12-13, X.14-15, XII.18-19, XIII.20-21, XXXIX.137-39, XL.140-41, XLI.142).

The design of one panel not among those unearthed in the official

archeological excavations of the palace but very much of the same suite (in the Kabul museum—see Bombaci, pl. XLI.142), is composed in a way which is especially close to our jade piece. Like the rest of the panels from the palace, from which it must also have come, it has the running repetition of trefoil arches that interweave with ogival networks of split-leaf resp. split-palmette arabesques. In this panel, however, the upper, undulating segment of the vines has a prominence and visual aspect that is particularly reminiscent of the same feature on the jade. The similarity between this panel and the vessel is further strengthened by the resolutely round form of the ends of split-leaf lobes. On this and the other panels from Masʿud's palace, the skeletal structure of the design consists of a running trefoil arch system, current in Iran at the time, and overlaid on another widely evidenced running design of counterchanging heart-shaped compartments.

This earliest known example of inlaid jade was unquestionably made in eastern Iran in the 12th century. It is worth noting that it was in this same historical and regional context that the inlaying of copper-alloy objects was enjoying an efflorescence. According to contemporary literary evidence (Melikian-Chirvani, 1997/2000, p. 129) jade was even used in the decoration of a Ghaznavid palace, this time built for Amir Yusof, brother of Maḥmud (r. 998-1030); and in light of the discussed parallels in the relief-carved marbles of Masʿud III's palace, there is a distinct possibility that our vessel was made there as well.

The small jug (PLATE IX) is made from darkish green jade and inlaid with gold. The author places its origin in Central Asia in the period leading up to the rise of the Timurid dynasty (1370-1507). This jade is preserved in the Freer Gallery, and the museum's official attribution, as well as the piece's previous publication, place its manufacture in early Ottoman Turkey. It would seem that the Ottoman attribution has persisted, unchallenged, due to insufficiencies in both the study of arabesque development and of observation and understanding of technical matters.

Robert Skelton in particular has argued the case for the vessel's Ottoman context. He states (1978, p. 796) that its excavated areas are solidly and completely filled, so that the gold inlay is flush with the surface of the jade. This description indeed fits one of two main types of Ottoman hardstone gold inlay, although this had some precedence in Timurid and earlier inlay in steel (e.g., Melikian-Chirvani, 1976, fig. 3; and several 12th century knife blades in the Al-Sabah Collection). This flush style of inlay was also used for hardstones

in India, especially in certain fine pieces of the reign of Shah Jahan (r. 1628-57). But the author's personal examination (Washington, D.C., 2 July 2002) has revealed that this type of gold inlay is not present in the Freer jug.

The jug's inlay is far from flush with the surface; it is composed of gold so thin that it may best be characterized as foil. The inlay's general technical nature (as well as aspects of its design) places it in the same east Iranian tradition as the previous vessel (above, PLATE VIII) and presages the classic Timurid inlay of the 15th century, the character of which has been summarized above. Close observation of such inlay reveals the undercuts at the sides of the excavated areas and, occasionally, (e.g., the probably Ghaznavid vessel just mentioned) drilled holes. Both undercuts and holes are measures to lock the inlay in place. In these earlier pieces, the central area of each excavated mass has a kind of gabled profile, the center being higher than the edges. In none of the work in this tradition, including the later Timurid and Safavid material, does the inlay actually lie flush and smooth with the surface.

Architectural decoration again provides helpful comparisons for the context from which the Freer jug must issue. The Sogdian school of architecture of the 14th century exhibits in its tilework numerous examples of the kind of arabesque that covers the jug's body, in which overlapping systems of scrolls and compartments form a maze and carry half-palmettes, often straddled by elaborated crescent-like brackets. Among the closest comparisons is the field of the third stage of the cenotaph of Qoṭām b. ʿAbbās (Golombek and Wilber, I, p. 235; for illustrations, see Pugachenkova, 1959, pl. [20]; Voronina, pl. 74; Chuvin, pl. 544). Qoṭām, whose tomb formed the nucleus around which the Shāh-e Zenda complex at Samarqand developed, died in 677 C.E. The cenotaph bears an inscription identifying the interred and giving the year of his death, but none dating its manufacture. Golombek and Wilber refer to this as the "original" cenotaph, just as they refer to the present *ziārat-ḵāna* as the "original mausoleum." The latter is dated 735/1334-35 in a tile band at the top of the wall, and Golombek and Wilber seem to imply that the two are of the same date. The cenotaph's decorative and technical features make this a distinct possibility.

The neck of the jug is encircled by a three-filament half-palmette plait. This motif does appear in Ottoman art, and this may have influenced the previous attributions to Ottoman Turkey. At first glance, the motif on the neck of a similarly shaped silver jug preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Atil, 1987, no. 51) might be taken as the same as that on the Freer jug,

but closer examination reveals that they are in fact fundamentally different in structure. The scroll on the silver jug is actually a one-filament scroll, with complex curling side-branches that bear half-palmettes, giving the illusion of more than one main filament. Although the three-filament half-palmette scroll does indeed occur to the west of Iran, including Anatolia, as early as the 13th century, it originated and developed earlier in eastern Iran. Of course, multi-element plaits *per se*, often with a great number of filaments, were widespread in the ancient world long before and during the Classical period. In eastern Iran, the plain three-filament plait was certainly in vogue in the 11th century, and probably in the 10th (cf. the interlace around the middle of a pair of unpublished copper-alloy vases, Al-Sabah Collection, LNS 966 M). The fashion continued into the late 12th to early 13th century, and can be observed on east Iranian silver-inlaid bronzes of this period. The most important early occurrence of plaits composed of vines bearing half-palmettes is in the borders of practically all the already mentioned marble dado panels from the palace of Masʿud III in Ghazni (Bombaci); but in these panels, the half-palmette scrolls are based on a two- and not a three-filament plait.

Thus, all the elements for the three-filament half-palmette scroll were present in eastern Iran, and those which are very close in structure and appearance to the scroll on the Freer jug are found in the already mentioned school of 14th-century Sogdian architectural decoration. They are to be seen in the narrow horizontal borders of colonnettes at the corners of the entrance blocks of two mausolea in the above mentioned Shāh-e Zenda burial complex. The earliest of these is popularly known as Qotluq Āqā (thus ascribing it to one of the wives of Timur, though this is not supported by any reliable record; Hill and Grabar, fig. 89). This mausoleum is dated 13 Ṣafar 762/23 December 1360 (the date is given as 12 December 1361 in Golombek and Wilber, I, p. 237). The second mausoleum, that of Shad-e Molk Āqā, was built in 1371 or shortly thereafter (Cohn-Wiener, pls. XXVI, XXIX-XXX; Knobloch, pl. 70; Golombek and Wilber, I, p. 237, II, pl. 22; Chuvin and Degeorge, p. 53; Degeorge and Porter, 2002, pp. 112 and 114). The same close similarity to the scroll on the Freer jug is also to be seen in a horizontal band encircling a 14th century wooden column in the Baghbanly Mosque at Khiva (Pugachenkova, 1981, pl. 160; the date is wrongly published as 15th century). A cup in the Topkapi Museum (Rogers and Köseoglu, cat. 62) shows that this type of scroll was applied to Timurid inlaid jades; the original Timurid borders around the foot-ring and the lip take the form of this motif, while the side-walls have subsequently been inlaid and set with stones in the typical Ottoman salient technique and style,

with many examples from the 16th century onward. The practice of "adorning" earlier objects in the Ottoman Imperial collections in this fashion is attested in multitudes of objects, including Chinese porcelains (e.g., Rogers and Köseoglu, cat. 63-64, 67; Atil, 1987, cat. 68-69, pp. 135-36).

The shape of the Freer jug can be seen as an ancestor of all the Timurid, Safavid, and Ottoman examples, but the whole series must in fact rely on silver and pottery jugs that were made between the 9th and early 11th centuries. An early group of these are earthenware jugs, mostly unglazed, which were excavated at Nishapur and dated to the 9th century (Wilkinson, 1973, cat. nos. 7.15-16, esp. 12.12, 12.15). Silver vessels with a similar shape—in this case a spheroidal body with a neck which begins cylindrically and then flares at the lip, but without a handle—appear in the Tang period (Thorp, fig. 76). A hoard found near Hamadān included an Islamic silver vessel essentially of the shape of the jade examples. This piece is dated to the beginning of the 11th century and thought to be of west Iranian manufacture (Allan, fig. 1, left; for the comparison with a 10th century glazed jug from Samarqand, see Raby, p. 186, fig. 18). It is not clear that this silver jug and the Samanid pottery are derived from Chinese models such as the Tang silver vase. It is noteworthy that certain of the pottery pieces cited for their similarity in shape to the Freer jug, as well as an analogous relief-cut rock crystal cup excavated at Samarqand and made in the 9th or 10th century (see Chuvin, pl. 495, but disregard the mistaken description as "verre soufflé, décor taillé"), have a molding at the base of the neck. Such a molding is a standard feature of the Timurid jade pieces of this form, although it is absent from the Freer jug. Finally, one should note here that a further question is raised by a bronze vessel (British Museum, inv. no. ANE 136355; cf. Curtis, 1977) whose form is identical to the Tang silver vessel. This bronze dates to the 9th or 8th century B.C.E. and is attributed to western Iran. It has a semicircular bail handle, and engraved figures in Assyrian-style dress just under the rim. Due to the shape analogy, including the molding at the base of the neck, it poses the question whether the shape enjoyed a continued existence over the one-and-a-half millennia involved.

The gold-inlaid slab pendant of darkish, middle-green jade (PLATE X) incorporates, as part of the original inlay, the date 868/1463-64, and so, in contrast to the already discussed jade vessels with gold inlay (PLATES VIII, IX, X), there is no room for argument about the date of manufacture. Thus, the piece provides a fixed point of reference for other jades, inlaid and otherwise,

which share features embodied in it. Yet, the pendant's significance is far from having been widely understood and exploited by scholars.

While the pendant type descends from certain 11th-12th century Islamic jade examples, lobed escutcheon-shaped slab pendants of the present type are characteristic for Iran and India between the 14th and 16th centuries. These are not normally inlaid but variously decorated by incuse carving, featuring vegetal motifs that are at times supplemented by inscriptions. Their decoration often also includes the outline of other pendants or necklace elements of the general type, and this curious feature is also present on this inlaid pendant.

The piece's inlay—like that of the other inlaid pieces here (PLATES VIII, IX)—descends from its edge toward the center of the inlaid area, and the linear elements finish in a V-shaped cross-section. But the centers of the flowers are raised in a manner reminiscent of jades and other luxury objects of the Timurid school, in which the inlay is scooped downward and lifted up and over to form a setting for small gemstones (Pope, VI, pl. 1428D; Lentz and Lowry, 1989, no. 121; *Anatolian Civilizations*, no. E.87; Atil, 1987, pp. 141-42; no. 77).

Another hardstone, which is dated by association, displays a second and more well-known style of Timurid gold inlay. Melikian-Chirvani (1976, fig. 1; cf. Lentz and Lowry, 1989, p. 353, footnote of no. 121) has identified this as jade. Yet it is in fact a translucent, colorless chalcedony (which has also been called agate, despite the absence of contrasting colors forming patterns; Laking, no. 1414). This example forms the hilt of a dagger that is dated in an inscription on the blade. There is little reason to doubt that blade and hilt are original to each other, though a gem-set collar was added around the hilt's lower end in the late 19th or early 20th century. In addition to the already discussed incuse V-section inlay, this hilt features nearly flush-set inlaid split-palmettes with relief introduced in the form of tiny volutes cut as interior details, a style that is much associated with Timurid hardstone inlay.

The superb belt-fitting entirely composed of a contorted, writhing five-toed dragon (PLATE XI) is unique in the published corpus of Iranian jades. Executed in multi-level open-work from pure translucent white jade, it belongs to the early, highly sinicizing phase of Timurid art, which provides many parallels, especially in drawings and paintings. This belt-fitting would conventionally be taken as of the Ming period, but careful study of its features

and manner of execution shows that it does not belong with the known Chinese pieces of any period. Of course, in a general sense, the dragon is of Chinese type in essentially all its disposition, composition, and general details, and quite close typological parallels for this fitting occur in Chinese jades *per se*, including examples roughly contemporary with the Timurid period. For example, certain of the white jade belt plaques from the tomb of Wang Xingzu, Marquis of Dongsheng, who died in 1371 (Nanjing City Museum; cf. Thorp, pp. 156-57) are very similar in their general composition and subject matter. They exhibit all the elements of the Iranian belt-fitting, with the addition of a pearl in the sole which is presented to the viewer. Incidentally, they also comprise a kind of high point in one aspect of the development of the Chinese dragon, since these have six toes, rather than five, which was the typical number in later Chinese art.

This classic version of the five-toed Chinese dragon was fully developed at least as early as the Yuan dynasty (1206-1368), and was standard by the time the discussed pieces were made. Five-toed dragons are featured, for example, on two outstanding objects that belong to the Yuan period: a silk embroidery of the Heavenly King of the West (National Museum of Chinese History, Beijing; cf. *China*, no. 84); and the justly celebrated jade wine vessel in the Round Fort, Beijing (Watt, p. 22 fig. 2; for color reproduction of different views, Yang, p. 130 fig. 5; Cang, fig. 50). It is noteworthy that the dragon on this enormous (182 x 135 x 70 cm) and truly wonderful jade has turned the sole of one of its front feet toward the viewer, just as in our belt-fitting, and like the Ming fittings, it is holding up a pearl. In another Yuan jade, a five-toed dragon is cavorting amid lotus blossoms (Imperial Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei; cf. Toyka-Fuong, no. 162).

One point of comparison between the belt-fitting in PLATE XI and east Asian as well as Sogdian dragons is the manner in which the tusks come out over the lip. This is seen in a number of pieces of the period. Examples include a Yuan marble architectural finial (Inner Mongolia Museum, Hohhot; cf. Komaroff, no. 204, fig. 21) and a large Yuan jade dragon-head finial (Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington; cf. Komaroff, no. 206, fig. 23). A particularly interesting instance of this usage is in a Sogdian mural painting at Panjikant (see SOGDIANA. v. SOGDIAN ART at *iranica.com*), dated to the 6th century (Azarpay, pp. 43-44, pl. 27, fig. 13). Here, both canines extend over the lip of an Oxus-type dragon (wolf-dragon) on which the four-armed goddess rides.

As indicated at the outset, the closest analogues to this belt-fitting are to be

found in the distinctive and powerful renditions of Timurid art, even though the general dragon type is modeled on Chinese examples. We have also indicated that the overall handling, and especially that of the dragon, is not close to the Ming belt-fitting cited. Therefore, it would be extremely interesting to see a high level of detail, if such be present, of the fittings that are depicted in an early Timurid drawing of a bearded man (*Islamic Art* 1, fig. 86). His belt is extensively mounted with lobed plaques which must be of white jade, and at least one of these is surely depicted as consisting of a writhing dragon, immediately calling to mind the present piece.

In jades, probably the closest comparison piece for the head of this dragon is found on a near-black Timurid quillon-block (Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 02.18.765; cf. Lentz and Lowry, no. 51, p. 143). The rendering of the dragon heads which form the terminals of the quillon-block is very similar, especially noticeable in the strongly modeled form of the jaws and the curls which encircle the jaws' back end. A number of instances which are close in the treatment of the jaws can also be seen in the dragon heads that top a series of copper-alloy Timurid candlesticks (e.g., Grube, 1989a, figs. 1-2, 7-8, 12-14, 18; Lentz and Lowry, no. 122, p. 223).

For comparison with the drawing of the dragon as a whole, one can point to the one carved in relief on the lid of a Timurid sandalwood box (Grube, 1989b, figs. 24 and 31; for color photo of the lid, see Lentz and Lowry, no. 49, p. 207, bottom). The box was made for Ulugh Beg (1394-1449), who was the governor of Samarqand between 1408 and 1447, when he became Timurid sultan, for a brief and troubled reign before being killed in 1449. The dragons' most notable similarities include the following: the manner of containment within the shape; the dragons' general lines and posture; the saw-tooth spine fin; and the foot with the sole displayed toward the viewer. On the box, the creature presents three pearls on the soles of both the left front and right rear feet. Another feature of the dragon on the box which is more closely Chinese than in the fitting is the head, with its long, elephant-like snout, curled downward, whereas in the jade the dragon head is of the well-exampled Iranian type. Another closely related dragon is depicted in a Shirazi miniature painting (Topkapi Saray Library, MS Pers. hazine 1511, fol. 203 verso; cf. Gray, p. 63; dated to approximately the last decades of the 14th century), which shows Bahrām Gur (see BAHRĀM V) in combat with the dragon.

The belt-fitting seems to be earlier than the casket of Ulugh Beg and the cited candlesticks. It could very well have been one of the plaques mounted on the

jade belts of young princes, the sight of which scandalized the Chinese ambassador Ch'en Ch'eng during his mission to the court of Ulugh Beg's father, the Timurid sultan Šāhroḵ (Shah Rukh), in Herat about 1414. Ch'en Ch'eng, a high-level bureaucrat in the highly regulated Chinese society, was not prepared to see "young boys wearing richly embroidered robes cinched in with solid jade belts." By contrast, this ambassador "wore a simple dark blue silken gown embroidered only on the chest and back with an egret insignia designating his official rank" (Hecker, p. 94).

In Ming society, belts with jade plaques belonged to the emblems of rank which distinguished court officials; official regulations were issued, as for example in 1393, to control their use. A cap with seven ridges, a leather belt with jade plaques, and a sash of four-colored silk embroidery were restricted to officials of the First Rank, who dressed in red robes. Belts with rhinoceros horn plaques were worn by Second Rank court officials, while belts with gold, silver, or horn ornaments were allowed for officials of lower ranks (Thorp, p. 155). The passage from Ch'en Ch'eng is particularly interesting, because it suggests that belts covered with jade fittings were much in evidence in Herat at the court of Šāhroḵ. This impression is strengthened by a number of drawings and paintings—in addition to the one discussed above—in which men wear belts with plaques which are probably jade, the shapes of which are analogous to the one under discussion.

This fitting is one of the two purest white jade pieces that the author has seen. The other example is the hilt of a 17th-century Indian dagger and has the form of a masterfully carved horse's head (Al-Sabah Collection, inv. no. LNS 70 HS; cf. Keene and Kaoukji, no. 8.17). Both jades are of a very high level of translucency, and—a most unusual circumstance—have not the slightest hint of any color undertones. Objects of such ultimate material can be taken as made for those at the highest rank of society, whenever and wherever they occur.

After the Timurid period, the use of jade declined in the Iranian world, and from the 16th to the end of the 19th century India was the main Asian area of jade carving west of China. Of course, it can be assumed that jade cutters from the Iranian world found patronage in India, as they did in Ottoman Turkey. And although much of courtly and learned culture in India at the time was Persian, this truly must, for a variety of reasons, be treated as a separate subject. The Iranian tradition in jade cutting is among the very most distinguished in world history, but it is yet to be fully credited for its

accomplishments and influence.

In the past two decades, however, there have been some attempts to redress the situation. In April and November 1998, the present contributor delivered a lecture on “Pre-Timurid Islamic Jades” before the Islamic Art Circle at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, and in the lecture series of the Dār-al-Aṯār al-Eslāmiya, Kuwait, respectively. The lecture covered in excess of one hundred ancient western Asian, Islamic, and Chinese specimens to demonstrate the history of Iranian jade carving, with comparison material in other media, and included a review of the literary evidence. The jade examples comprised buckles and other belt and strap fittings, horse trappings, sword and quiver fittings, hololithic finger rings, seal-stones, stamp seals, beads, necklace pendants, earring pendants, figurines, chess pieces and vessels, including the provision of material for the identification of the earliest development of gold-inlay technique in Iranian jades (the vessel in PLATE VIII). A brief summary of the lecture was published in 2001, and is listed below.

This contributor also curated *Treasury of the World*, an exhibition of Mughal era jeweled arts from the Al-Sabah Collection, which opened at the British Museum, London, in 2001, and then traveled to seven museums in North America and Europe. This exhibition broke new ground not only for the understanding of Indian jewelry, but also of Iranian jades. It was accompanied by a catalog (also listed below), but the supplemental early background and comparison material exhibited was not included in this catalog, nor were most of the texts incorporated in the exhibition.

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