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17 Lion figurine [13]

2300–2000 bc

Gold

1 x 2 1/4 in

Tsnori (Kakheti), Alazani Valley, kurgan 12

GSM 140-975:1

This exquisite figurine is cast around a core, with the center filled with white-colored paste. Covering the abruptly terminating snout and front paws, as well as serving as a stylized mane, is relief ornamentation that imitates granulation and filigree but is also part of the casting. The ears and eyes are blank projections, and numerous cast notches at the front of each of the paws suggest multiple claws. The paws have holes on the bottom, suggesting that the figurine was once attached to some support, and this is further suggested by the fact that the long curved tail extends below the level of the paws so that the lion cannot simply stand on a flat surface. EG

18 Goblet [18]

18th–17th century bc

Gold, carnelian, lapis lazuli, amber, jet

2 1/2 x 3 1/4 in

Trialeti (southeast Georgia), kurgan 17, Trialeti culture

GSM 9-63:981

This extraordinary double-walled gold goblet is decorated with filigree volutes set with colored stones. It was made on a lathe from a single piece of gold. The pedestal is hollow, with a flat, soldered bottom, also decorated. The volute cells were made separately and tightly attached to the walls by small hooks threaded through narrow soldered plates. The encrustation of colored jewels includes red sandline, carnelian, and lapis lazuli. [Blue-pointed ceramic substances which imitate lapis lazuli are also evident in this goblet, probably part of a later restoration. – ed.] Amber and jet are set into circular and cruciform settings on the bottom of the goblet. Filigree is used around the cells to divide zones of decoration, and at the edge of the foot. This goblet is absolutely without known parallels. EG

69 Pectoral [60]

First half of 4th century BC

Gold, inlaid with carnelian and turquoise

9 1/2 in

Vani (Imereti), grave 6

GSM 11-974:13

This trapezoidal hanging chest decoration is attached to a fibula clasp from its upper edge by a clasp and delicate chain. Eight more delicate chains hang from its lower edge, terminating in inlaid pomegranate-shaped beads. The pectoral plaque itself is inlaid with glass, turquoise, and sardonyx, and divided by gold strips into two wide and three narrow bands. In the center of the upper wide band a lotus flower is depicted in inlay, with back-to-back rampant griffins in profile, in gold. In the wide lower band two birds face to the left. The narrow bands are decorated with round sardonyx stones, three in the upper and middle registers and four in the lower register.

The background between the images is filled with opaque glass. The lines separating the bands are decorated with triangles made of alternating chunks of sardonyx and turquoise. The entirety is an exhilarating exercise in polychromy. The pectoral is made by the technique of inlay without a golden background. It is a unique example of the jeweler's art. This piece has no parallels in Georgia; it was no doubt imported, since this type of jewelry is known to have been fairly widespread in the Near East. There are some features typical of Egyptian art and also those reflecting the influence of Greek and Achaemenid jewelry schools. TD





107 Panel from an altarscreen [106]

8th–9th century AD

Limestone

28 x 22½ x 3½ in

Gveldesi

GSAM 146

This panel is part of an altarscreen from the church of St John the Baptist in Gveldesi, now an abandoned village, in the Kaspi region of the province of Kartli in central eastern Georgia.

The entire central portion of the altarscreen panel's rectangular plaque is framed by a wave motif and what may be construed as button-like ornamentation. Within this frame the larger portion of the composition, to the right, is comprised by a circle with four 'corner' loops, within which there is an octagonal figure – a kind of eight-point star – the interior of which is also decorated with loops. In the center of this figure is a circle echoing the exterior circle and the outermost frame of the entire composition with its series of perforations.

To the left of this geometric composition is a stylized image of a peacock, with a long neck, a pronounced eye, and its tail outspread. GG

[A fascinating instance of Georgian stone-carving of this period, this work synthesizes Islamic style – the extensive use of geometry, and in particular the eight-pointed star – with Christian symbolism. The peacock represents, among other things, the all-seeing church (by the myriad eyes ordinarily seen on its tail) and resurrection into eternal life (there is an old Egyptian tradition that its flesh does not rot after death). In such a context the eight-pointed Islamic star occupies the symbolic place ordinarily taken in Christian art by the octagon: representing rebirth, since, according to tradition, it was on the eighth day after his arrival into Jerusalem that Christ rose from the dead – ed.]