Case 5-Asia-China-Liangzhu-Horse Hoof Hair Holder-Jade-3400-2250 BCE-8 in

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Asia-China-Liangzhu-Horse Hoof Hair Holder-Jade-3400-2250 BCE-8 in良渚 - 圆柱马蹄头 - 玉器

**Case no.: 5**

**Accession Number:**

Formal Label: Asia-China-Liangzhu-Horse Hoof Hair Holder-Jade-3400-2250 BCE-8 in

Display Description:

Liangzhu Horse Hoof Hair Holders from Niuheliang, Jianping county, Liaoning Province, were placed in graves with the deceased in order to contain hair so that it was protected from the decaying bodily fluids. These hair containers have been excavated from Liangzhu sites and have a proven archaeological record, despite the fact that their purpose is mostly misunderstood by art historians.

Niuheliang, Jianping county, Liaoning Province is also known as Nüshenmiao 女神廟 or ‘Female spirit temple’ since archaeologists have uncovered structures with remains of life-size figures in clay, including parts of a female sculpture with a large head and soft stones used as insets for the eyes. Niuheliang must have been a key ritualistic site and centre where important individuals of the Hongshan culture were buried, over a period of time, and in tombs located in the vicinity of the architectural structures. The graves, belonging to the cist-tomb tipe, are paved and lined with stone slabs, so that the structures resemble coffins in stone; in most burials the only funerary items placed to accompany the deceased are jades of various shapes, including tubular ornaments such as the present one which, in terms of material, form, dimensions, technique of carving and polishing can be related to those discovered in Hongshan elite burials excavated at Niuheliang.   
  
This type of jade is also labelled mati 马蹄 or ‘horse-hoof’ shape because the peculiar top outline of the ornament recalls the tip of a toe of an ungulate, while the base is flat and of a roundish or slightly oval section. In this tube, the jade was cut at a very sharp angle of about 35°: this emphasizes the difference in height between the lower, front side of the object and the rear one, which is higher and gently slanted towards the top. In this Lot the front side flattens towards the top opening, looking almost straight when the object is looked at frontally, while the back is gently curved and with a rounded outline. The walls of the jade are very thin, allowing the light to filter through the stone and enhance the natural texture of the nephrite which is of the actinolite type: this mineral is characterized by a high percentage of iron content, up to 50%, which is responsible not only for the green colour of the jade but also for the darkened areas and striations creating the beautiful textured effect. Two tiny holes are drilled at equidistant points at the bottom of the tubular ornament, probably for the insertion of a pin or rope. The holes are typical of Hongshan jades and have a strongly slanted outer edge, with the same horse-hoof outline of the jade ornament. Such holes, drilled on many, though not all known examples of this type, were linked to the practical function this jade had. Based on the position these ornaments have in the tombs, the general consensus amongst scholars is that these jades might have been used as hair ornaments: for example, in tomb 4, mound 1, locality 2 at Niuheliang, a similar jade has been found placed below the skull of the deceased (Yang Xiaoneng, photograph p. 80).

The jade tube was probably used to hold the hair, which passed through the ornament and which was then secured with a pin inserted through the holes drilled at the bottom of the object. The smooth, vertical grooves carved on the inside of the hollowed tube are a further detail which is also seen on excavated artefacts of this type. Since the entire surface and rims of the jade are highly polished and rounded so that the object feels completely smooth when handled, these grooves may have had a purely decorative function and might have been added only to jade ornaments reserved for special individuals. The grooves thus seem not to be linked to the carving of the jade which, after the object had been sketched from a block of raw material, required the laborious and time-demanding task of hollowing out the inside. This was accomplished by drilling a tiny hole through the entire length of the jade and then slowly ‘sawing’ the core until it could be taken out. The inside and the rest of the jade was then polished to a high sheen, thus removing any visible traces of the carving process and resulting in an object which appears light and almost ethereal despite being carved from nephrite jade, one of the hardest stones to work. That such tubes were hollowed in this way is also attested by the discovery of the jade cores of these ornaments in some Hongshan tombs, such as one from grave 15 at Niuheliang (reproduced in Zhang Shuwei and Li Xiangdong p.4).

LC Classification:

Date or Time Horizon: Hongshan Culture, Niuheliang Phase, circa 3500–3000 BCE

Geographical Area: Niuheliang

Map:

GPS coordinates:

Cultural Affiliation: Hongshan Culture, Niuheliang Phase, circa 3500–3000 BCE

Medium: nephrite

Dimensions:

Weight:

Condition: exposed to weathering for c 5,000 years

Provenance:

Discussion:

**COMPARABLE EXAMPLES:**  
  
**a) Excavations:**  
All comparable examples from excavations are from the Niuheliang archaeological area, where the most important sites are designated ‘localities’ and consist of stone-covered burial mounds containing stone tombs with jades as the primary, if not exclusive, burial goods:  
- a jade tube with similar flattened front side, cutting angle and material, measuring 11.5 cm in height, now in the Liaoning Provincial Museum, is illustrated in Mou Yongkang, Pl. 3 and described as unearthed at Niuheliang;   
- another tubular ornament with a similar outline, 13.6 cm in height has been unearthed from tomb 25, mound 1, locality 2: see Zhang Shuwei and Li Xiangdong p.62;  
- a third jade ornament 18.6 cm in height, with a slightly curved back side, internal grooves and two small holes pierced near the bottom rim has been discovered in tomb 4, mound 1, locality 2: see Zhang Shuwei and Li Xiangdong pp.60-61; it is also reproduced in Yang Xiaoneng, cat. No. 11, which has also a rear view of the object;  
- two further comparable examples from Niuheliang, measuring 17.2 cm and 12.7 cm in height come from tomb 2 and 9, mound 4, locality 2 and are reproduced in Zhang Shuwei and Li Xiangdong pp.59 and 63 respectively.

**b) Western public collections:**  
- two similar tubes from the Arthur M. Sackler collection are in the Freer/Sackler Galleries, Washington, D.C., object numbers S1987.842; and S1987.626;  
- a tube from the Avery Brundage collection and now in the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, acc. no. B60J226;  
- a jade tube from the Grenville L. Winthrop collection, Fogg Museum, is in the Harvard Art Museum, object number 1943.50.628;  
- an additional ornament from the Joseph Hotung collection and now on display in the ‘Jade gallery’ at the British Museum, London, is illustrated in Rawson, no. 1:2;  
  
**References:**  
Mou Yongkang 牟永抗, Zhongguo yuqi quanji - 1 Yuanshi shehui 中國玉器全集–1:原始社會 (Chinese Jades: Vol.1, Early Societies), Hebei Meishu Chubanshe, Shijiazhuang 1993  
  
Rawson, Jessica, Chinese Jade from the Neolithic to the Qing, British Museum Publications, London 1995 (reprinted by Art Media Resources, Chicago in 2002)  
  
Yang Xiaoneng (ed.), The Golden Age of Chinese Archaeology. Celebrated Discoveries from The People`s Republic of China, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1999  
  
Zhang Shuwei 張樹偉 and Li Xiangdong 李向東 (eds.), Shikong chuanyue: Hongshan wenhua chutu yuqi jing pin zhan 時空穿越:红山文化玉器精品展 (Through time and space: Unearthed jade articles of the Hongshan Culture), Beijing 2012  
  
**Internet links:**  
  
Sackler examples:  
[www.asia.si.edu/collections/edan/object.cfm](http://www.asia.si.edu/collections/edan/object.cfm?q=fsg_S1987.842)  
[www.asia.si.edu/collections/edan/object.cfm](http://www.asia.si.edu/collections/edan/object.cfm?q=fsg_S1987.626)  
  
Harvard Art Museum:  
[www.harvardartmuseums.org/collections/object/204580](http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/collections/object/204580?position=0)  
  
Asian Art Museum, San Francisco:  
<http://searchcollection.asianart.org/view/objects/asitem/nid/4051>

We are grateful to Filippo Salviati, Professor for Chinese Art and Archaeology, Italian Institute of Oriental Studies, ‘Sapienza’ University, Rome, for cataloguing the present lot.

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意大利罗马Sapienza大学的Filippo Salviati教授认为，根据这件玉器的尺寸，造型以及雕刻抛光的工艺特点判断，这件玉器应该属于中国辽宁牛河梁地区的红山文化文物。  
  
根据已出土的此类马蹄型的玉器在墓地中的位置（残骸脑骨后方），学者们一致认为这种玉器应该是被用来固定头发的。  
参考文献：  
河北美术出版社出1993年出版的牟永抗著的中国玉器全集 – 1：原始社会　第三图  
伦敦大英博物馆1995年出版的 Jessica Rawson 著作Chinese Jade from the Neolithic to the Qing  
耶鲁大学出版社1999年出版的杨晓能著作The Golden Age of Chinese Archaeology - Celebrated Discoveries from The People`s Republic of China 图录第11件  
北京2012张树伟和李向东主办的时空穿越：红山文化玉器精品展　图录59-63页

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