

**MEDIEVAL CHINESE MIRRORS FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE STATE
MUSEUM OF HISTORY OF UZBEKISTAN**

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Annotation: In this article are presented for the first-time mirrors from China which are stored in collection of the State Museum of the history of Uzbekistan (Tashkent). On the basis of the resulted analogies authors determine dating of mirrors, and also assort symbolics of images.

Key words: Chinese mirrors, collection, Central Asia, hemispherical protrusion, collection, the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan

The trade, economic and cultural ties between the peoples of Central Asia and China go back to ancient times. This is also evidenced by numerous finds of Chinese bronze mirrors, which began to be imported into Central Asia especially widely as a result of trade relations from the 2nd century BC.

At present, the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan has several Chinese mirrors, most of which are from the Han era and date back to the 1st century BC. - 1st century AD.

But in addition to these ancient mirrors, the Museum holds two Chinese mirrors from medieval times.

Unfortunately, it is unknown where these two Chinese mirrors were found and where and when they came to the museum. Most likely, these exhibits are from pre-1917 collections.

Here is a description of these mirrors.

Of undoubted interest among them is a round mirror with a handle, depicting a musician and boys (fig. 1), Inventory No. 188/128. The mirror is made of yellowish bronze, cast, the handle is half broken off. The mirror is 9 cm in diameter, 0.2-0.5 cm thick, the handle is 2.5 cm long and 1.6 cm wide.

The front side is flat, polished, and served as a reflective surface. The handle is edged with a rim.



Fig. 1. Bronze mirror, China, XI-XIII cc.

Collection of the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan

At the edge of the mirror there is a narrow protruding smooth rim, it outlines a buried relief image, on which in the upper part on the right side there is an overhanging branch with eleven fruits of a peach or apple tree. Under the tree are three small figures of children, apparently boys, picking up fallen fruit from the ground. The first child - below, closer to the handle of the mirror

- is shown kneeling and picking fruit. The other two children are shown full-length: one of them is standing in profile, with his left arm perpendicular to his torso and his right arm raised at the level of his head; the other is shown in front, with his arms raised up. Clothing on the figures of children consists of trousers and girt shirts. On the left side of the mirror is a seated man with his legs half-bent, his left leg tucked under him and his right leg held out in front. The man's head is turned to the left of him, towards the boys; on his head is an oval cap; a wedge-shaped beard is marked on his face, the facial features are not traceable. His arms are bent at the elbows and folded across his chest. With his right hand he is clasping some conical musical instrument resembling a harp. On the left at waist level are two fluttering ribbons. In the background in the distance some landscape is shown in relief with broken lines.

The second mirror (Fig. 2) is round, cast, diameter 10.2 cm, thickness 0.2-0.4 cm; Inventory No. 188/133.



Fig. 2. Bronze mirror, China, XI-XIII cc.

Collection of the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan

The mirror is deformed. The front side is flat, polished, it served as a reflective surface. In the centre of the back side, apparently, there was a hemispherical protrusion - handle with a horizontal hole for hanging (the middle of the mirror, where the handle-loop was located, is broken out). The centre of the mirror is flanked by three relief smooth circles 3.8, 4.8 and 6.3 cm in diameter, two of which are strongly projecting, sloping, and one, located between them, is flat, made in low relief. Then there is a circular band of inscription with poorly discernible, almost

erased hieroglyphic signs, framed on both sides by narrow relief lines. The rim is narrow, smooth, sloping. There is a layer of oxide on the surface.

Let us consider the questions of typology, territorial affiliation and chronological definition of the above-described mirrors.

An exact copy of our first Chinese mirror comes from South Siberia, from the Minusinsk Basin. This mirror was found in the village of Kapterevo, Krasnoyarsk Krai and is stored in the local history museum of Minusinsk; it is made of yellow metal, diameter is 8.7 cm [Lubo-Lesnichenko, 1975, p. 75, fig. 63, No. 153].



Fig. 3. Bronze mirror, China, XI-XIII cc.

Collection of the Museum of Local History Minusinsk (Russia)

The absolute similarity of these mirrors - even their handles are broken off in the same way - allows us to assume that they were made not only by one master, but maybe even cast in the same mould. E.I. Lubo-Lesnichenko connects the scene depicted on the mirror with benevolent symbolism, namely with the wish of longevity (peaches) and numerous male offspring (playing

boys). Having penetrated from India to China in Tang times, these images became widespread [Lubo-Lesnichenko, 1975, pp. 26-27]. According to the type and technique of manufacture Minusinsk mirror is dated by the author to the 11th-13th centuries.

The only thing in which we do not quite agree with E.I. Lubo-Lesnichenko is his interpretation of the musical instrument played by the man as a lute. As it seems to us, it is rather a harp.

The Minusinsk museum has another such mirror (No. 5171, diameter 9 cm), which was discovered near the village of Izykh. Two similar mirrors from the Minusinsk Basin are in the collection of the State Hermitage Museum and the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography in St. Petersburg [Lubo-Lesnichenko, 1975, pp. 75-76, nos. 154-156].

The published Chinese bronze mirror depicting boys playing is the first mirror of this type found in Central Asia.

Our second mirror of Chinese origin also has analogues among the mirrors of the Minusinsk Basin. It is, in particular, a mirror found in the village of Krivaya; it is made of white metal with dark patina, diameter 11.2 cm [Lubo-Lesnichenko, 1975, fig. 107, No. 346]. The mirror dates from the 11th-13th centuries and belongs to the Sung-Jing period. Such mirrors were widespread in China in the 2nd-Ist centuries B.C. (early Han era), and were often copied afterwards. This was explained by the increased interest in antiquity, the use of Han mirrors as amulets, etc. [Lubo-Lesnichenko, 1975, pp. 34-35].



Fig. 4. Bronze mirror, China, XI-XIII cc.

Collection of the Minusinsk Museum of Local History (Russia)

The main decoration of such mirrors are inscriptions in archaic Zhuan handwriting, which express sorrow for the loss of the ruler's favour [Lubo-Lesnichenko, 1975, p. 34]. On the mirror from the Minusinsk museum, unlike ours, the relief circles surrounding the centre and the inscription on the surface have parallel stripes. On it the author managed to read two hieroglyphs: jing bei - 'to the north of the capital' [Lubo-Lesnichenko [Lubo-Lesnichenko, 1975, p. 118]. Apparently, due to numerous castings, the inscription on the mirror is poorly recognisable.

As for the ways of making mirrors, it should be noted that they are all cast, but they were cast in different ways: either in a rigid (stone) mould - these are products with a pronounced and well-crafted relief, or in a clay mould made by impression of the finished mirror. These methods were widely used in the 12th-14th centuries in Volga Bulgaria, in the Lower Volga region [Fedorov-Davydov, 1994, p. 202; Nedashkovsky, 2000, p. 66].

Thus, on the basis of the comparative material we can draw the following conclusions on the dating of the published mirrors.

Chronologically, both Chinese mirrors can be dated to the 11th-13th centuries.

Finds of Chinese mirrors of the 11th-13th centuries in Central Asia speak of the revival and strengthening of old trade and cultural ties of the peoples inhabiting Uzbekistan with these countries in the pre-Mongol, Mongolian times.

The spread of Chinese mirrors among the peoples of Central Asia and the penetration of Central Asian artistic motifs into Chinese art belong to this time.

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