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## **Allegories of Kingship: animal motifs in equestrian equipment and banquet ware of the Tibetan Empire.**

by David Pritzker

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Despite the strong commitment in Tibetan toreutics to animal imagery over that of figural or textual scenes (as was common in Sasanian art), there is an enormous amount of allegorical narrative imbued within the animal and floral motifs which have been freely adapted to meet the tastes of the royal Tibetan patrons. The animal figures not only work in concert with each other: interacting, playing, dancing, chasing each other, and so forth, but are also individually filled with emotive meanings, the combination of which can often result in significant allegorical narratives. As in the art of the Sasanian Empire, where the pictorial display of kingship through hunts, banquets and investiture scenes is filled with motifs and topoi central to the culture's ideas of power and divinity, so does the animal imagery in Tibetan toreutics convey relevant information as to the social, cultural, and historical significance of the objects.

Defining the early toreutic art of Imperial Tibet is not a clear-cut task. Due to the paucity of textual material, little is known of the social atmosphere, or rather the social life of the object. Through a close study of form, function, technical execution, iconography, and patterns of décor, particular trends in the visual language become clearer and seemingly disparate objects may then begin to take on more precise attributions with regard to craftsmanship, origin, patronage, iconography, and relative dating. In order to push the field forward it seems worthwhile, therefore, to expand the tools of deduction and allow for a new hypotheses to be tested against the whole. It is in this spirit that this preliminary theory on the allegories found in Old Tibetan silver and gold will be presented, with the hope to provoke further conversations on the rich material culture of the Royal Court of Tibet.



**Silver Decorations for a Saddle Pommel (16 pieces in the set)**

Central Asia or Tibet

Tubo period (608–866), 8th century

Mount base length: 36.5 cm; width: 15 cm; height: 32 cm

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