

JADE, AMBER, AND IVORY

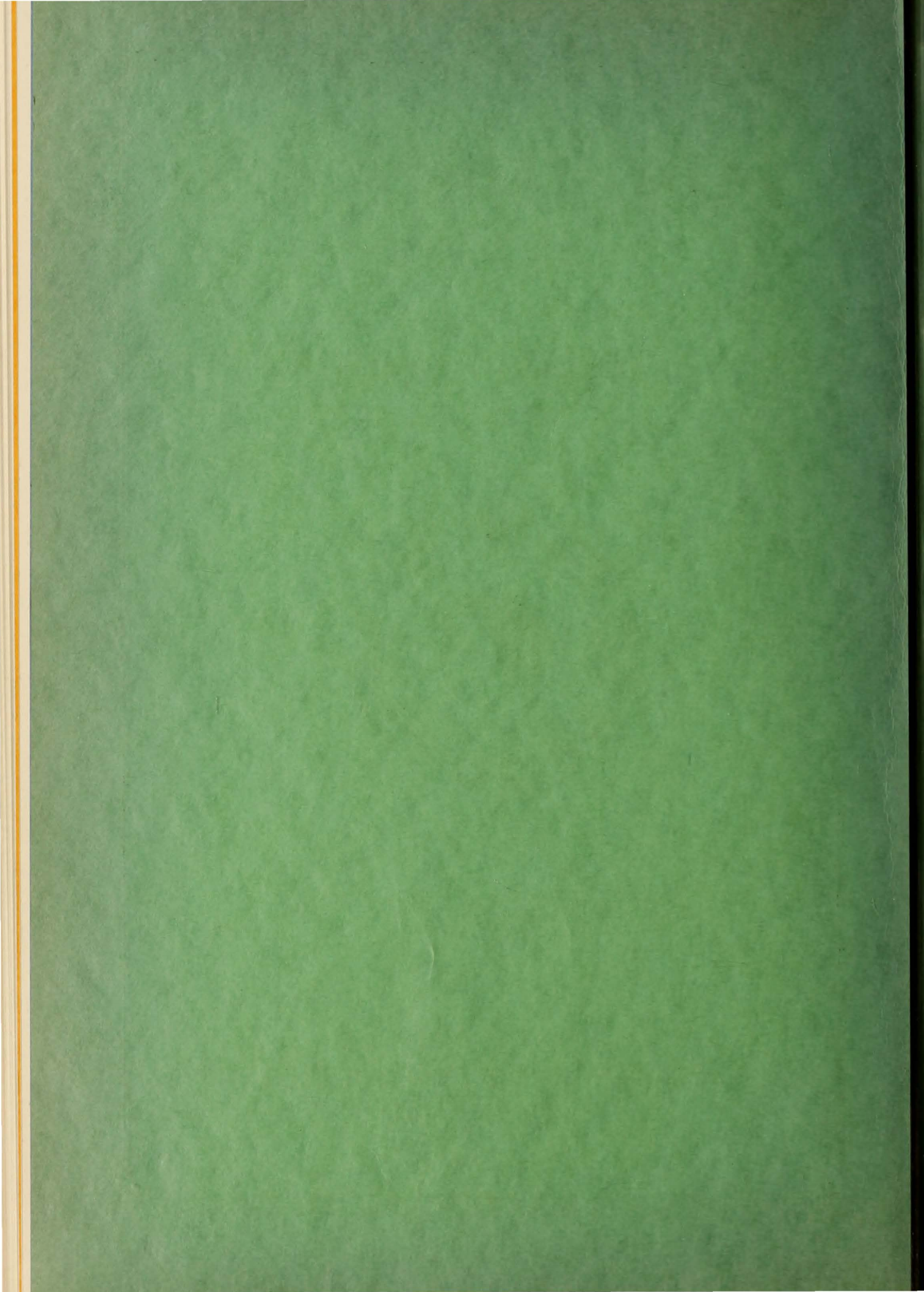
By HERBERT P. WHITLOCK

Curator of Minerals and Gems, American Museum



*Reprinted from Natural History Magazine
for September, 1934*

GUIDE LEAFLET SERIES, No. 84
THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
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26 Photographs
by the American Museum
Staff Photographers

AMONG the court officials who attended the Chinese emperors of the Chou dynasty (B.C. 1122-255) there was, it is said, a steward of the treasury whose task it was to attend to the preservation of the Hall of the Ancestor of the Imperial House, in which were kept all the precious objects handed down from generation to generation. This stewardship of the treasury, however, has long since been abolished. Even the latest dynasty of Chinese emperors has passed away and with it much of the tradition and romance that are always attached to what is old and what is regal. Yet, although there is no longer an imperial treasury in Peiping, there has been created during the past six months, in the American Museum in New York, a veritable "Hall of Ancestors," a treasure house in which are gathered the beautiful and precious objects representative of Chinese and Japanese culture brought together through the life work of a man whose knowledge and taste in these matters rendered him an authority of high standing.

This new acquisition of the American Museum is the collection of the late Dr. I. Wyman Drummond, which came to the Museum through the gift of his sister, Mrs. Katherine W. D. Herbert. In reality it is not merely a collection. Instead, it is a group of collections, each correlated with and supplementing the others; and with so keen an appreciation and such ripened knowledge have these units been chosen, that it seems

Precious and beautiful carvings of the Drummond Collection depicting not only the art, but also the ancient myths and legends of China and Japan

as though the touch of beauty passing from hard, cold jade to glowing amber and vitalized ivory, carries with it all the wealth of tradition and symbolism of the two great oriental races.

In the matter of jade alone the Drummond Collection, which is now the Drummond Memorial, is a rich and well balanced series, representative of all periods, and covering a cultural range of more than thirty centuries. Exceptional indeed is the splendid group of ancient jade ceremonial weapons which has no counterpart in other museums of the world. By far the most important piece in the series of carved jade, however, is the superb composite piece of white jade that constituted the gift to the Emperor Kien lung by the officials of his court upon the event of his fiftieth birthday.

In solving the problem of the display of the Drummond Memorial in the round tower room at the southwest corner of the fourth floor of the American Museum, this famous piece of jade has been made the center of the installation. From it, like the spokes of a wheel, radiate the eight upright cases, some of which are equipped with glass shelves, while others are treated in panel fashion.

The left half of the room is devoted to jade arranged by periods, and the right half is given over to amber, ivory, lacquer, and bronze sword guards. Around the walls between the window spaces are ranged the cabinets which contain the units of the Drummond Collection as they were formerly displayed at Doctor Drummond's residence. With these latter cases care has been taken to retain the original arrangement, so that every piece occupies exactly the position with respect to its neighbors that it did in the



The ivory statuette of K'wan Yin of the Fish is characteristically Japanese both in conception and rendering. It immortalizes in ivory the story of the princely fisherman who set up a shrine to this goddess after her image had repeatedly appeared in his net, taking the place of the fish he sought

K'wan Yin
of the Fish

Japanese

Figures

Left:—A miniature carving in ivory of the celebrated Buddha of Kamakara sitting in eternal meditation. Behind the master spread the wonderful conventionalized flames symbolizing purification



Above:—An elaborately carved ivory figure of K'wan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy, holding a vase which is one of the traditional objects associated with her. The wealth of detail and marked realism of this Japanese figurine is in strong contrast with the formal conventionality that stamps the Chinese rendition of such a subject

Left:—A charming and elaborately wrought figure of Lan Ts'ai-Ho, the work of a Japanese ivory-carver. Lan Ts'ai-Ho was one of the Taoist immortals who wandered through the streets singing of the futility of earthly pleasures



Carved In Ivory

Right

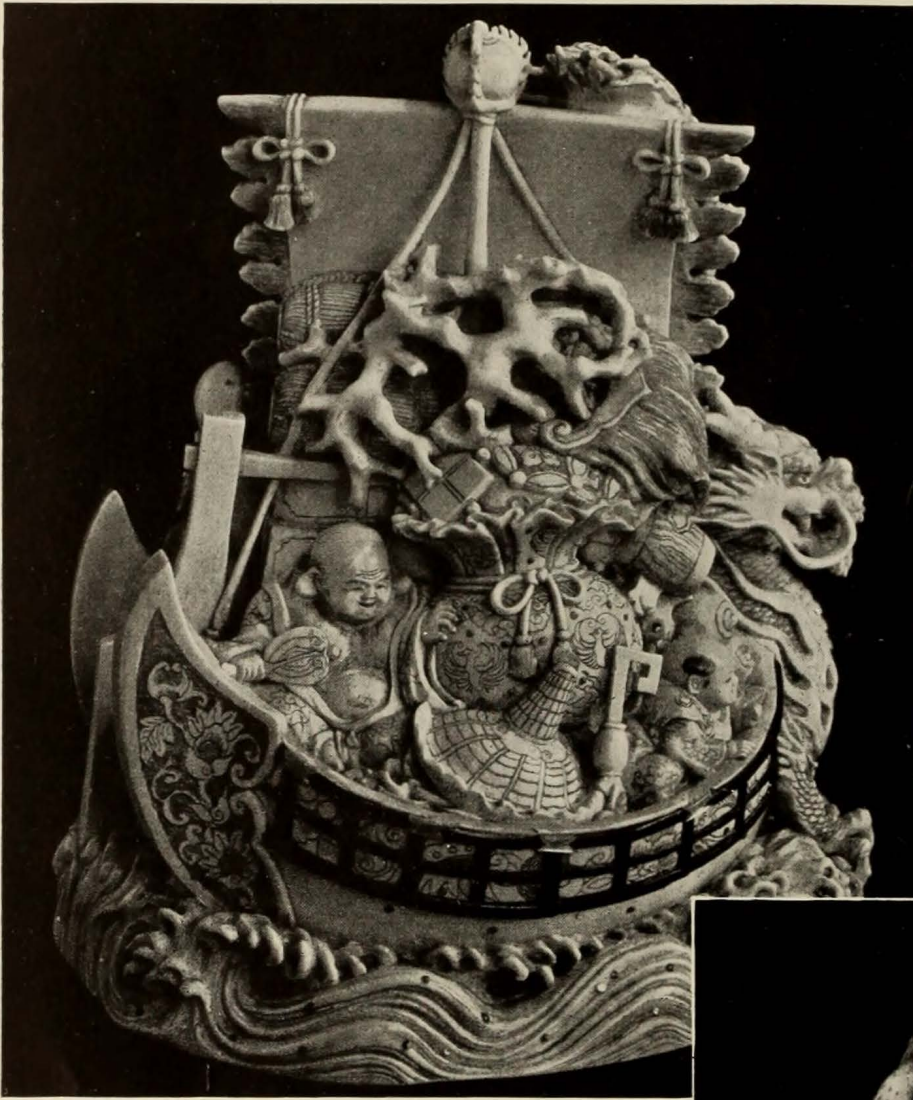
Wang Mu, the Chinese Queen of the Fairies, attended by one of her jewel maidens, who holds a basket filled with the immortal peaches. A very charming little group in Japanese carved ivory



Left

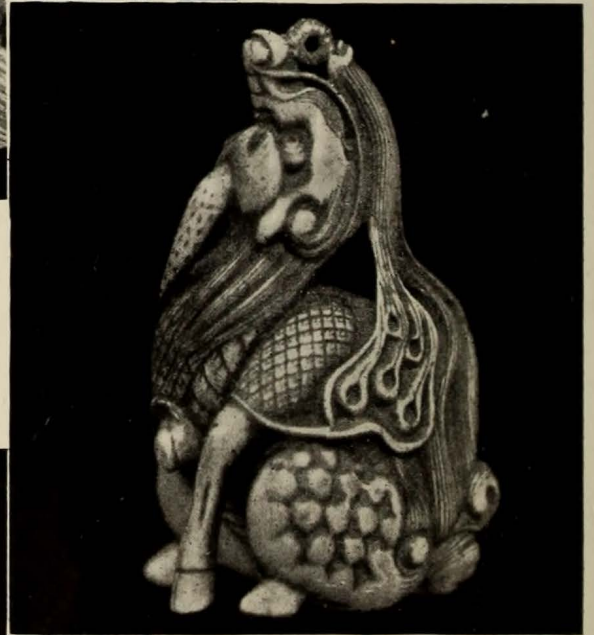
The Three Heroes of Han, legendary Chinese warriors of the Han dynasty (200 B.C. to 250 A.D.). They are represented in this ivory carving as drinking sake in a kind of Japanese Valhalla

Chinese and Japanese Ivory



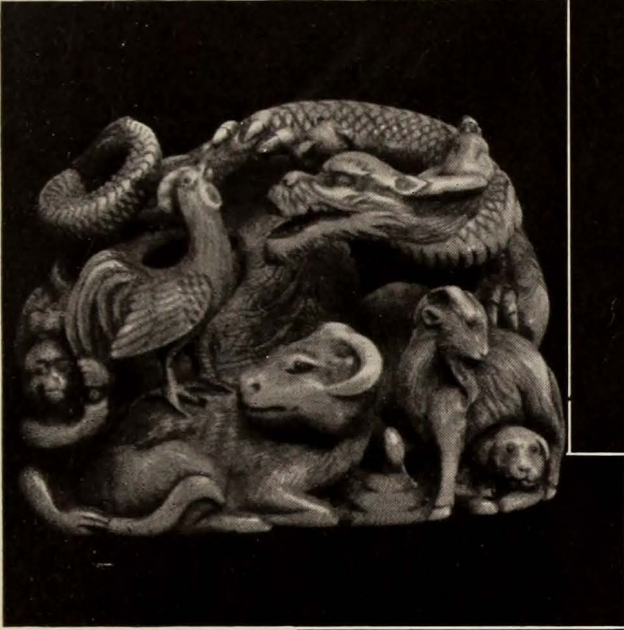
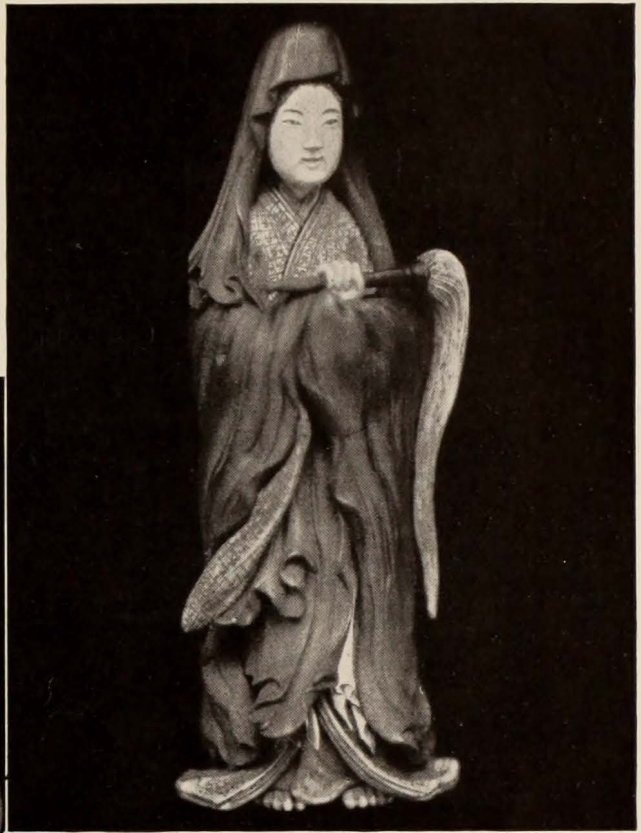
Left:—This intricate Japanese carving in ivory represents the Dragon Boat, laden with immortals and magical treasures. It is being guided to the Western Paradise by the crane, the messenger of the gods

Below:—The reverse of the group representing the Chinese Zodiac pictured at the left of the opposite page



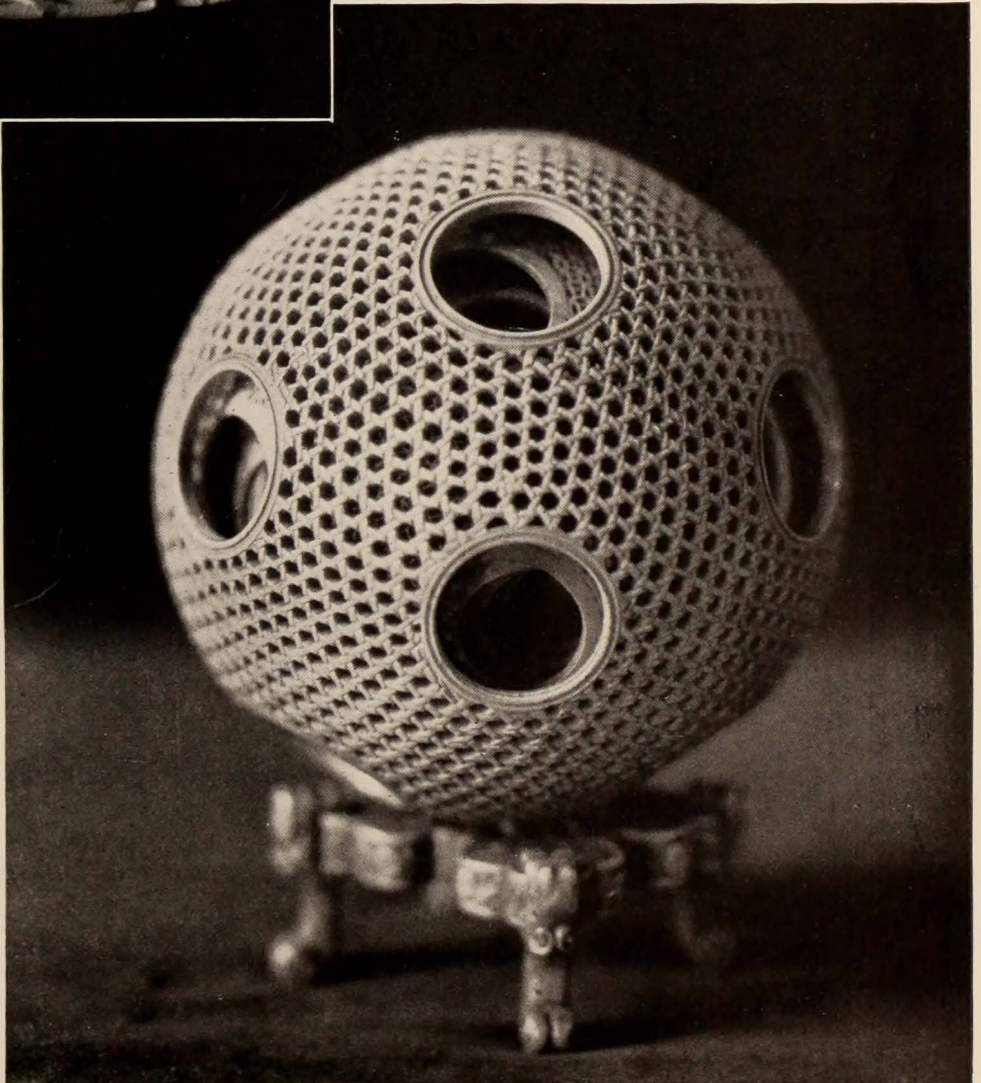
Above:—Among the outlandish animals originating in Chinese mythology, one of the strangest is the Baku, the creature that feeds upon the bad dreams of mortals. This Baku is carved from ivory by a Japanese artist

Right:—The miniature figure of Ho Hsien-ku (only three inches high) is carved from ivory and dark wood. She is supposed to have lived in the Seventh Century, and, having attained immortality, became a fairy. In her hand she carries a fly whisk



Above:—This little masterpiece in ivory pictures a realistic group of the twelve creatures (the back of the group is shown on the opposite page) that represent the Twelve Terrestrial Branches, the Chinese zodiac. As seen they are the dragon, the rat, the cock, the monkey, the ox, the serpent, the goat, and the dog

The carving of a "puzzle ball," such as this one, is a feat of ivory carving performed only by Chinese artists. Carved from a single piece of ivory, this ball incloses eight others, each smaller than and separated from the next outer one



lifetime of this famous connoisseur, the charming taste and sense of color that have always characterized his displayed collection thus being retained.

Particularly is this the case with the series illustrating the various colors of jade of relatively modern date, which includes among others the rare lavender tint very much prized among collectors.

The magnificent suite of Burmese amber, which also speaks eloquently of Doctor Drummond's taste in color arrangement, has been conceded to be the finest assemblage of oriental amber in the world. Here ruby-red colors contrast with limpid honey-yellow and mottled orange in wonderful and intricate carvings.

Of the six wall cases that contain the varied and important collection of Chinese snuff bottles, one is filled with those fashioned almost exclusively of oriental amber.

JADE

Perhaps no one material other than jade can turn back so successfully the pages of time and permit us to read the record of a culture that was old when our own was struggling to emerge out of barbarism. Here, among these old jade objects, many of which have been buried for centuries, we find the beginnings of a philosophy, cosmic in its inception, that in China has outlasted dynasties.

Among the most ancient of the symbols carved in antique jade is the group of designs called the Twelve Ornaments. More than 2000 years B.C. the Emperor Shun, referring to these designs, said, "I wish to see the emblematic figures of the ancients embroidered in five colors to decorate the official robes." Only the Emperor had the right to wear the complete set of twelve emblems on his ceremonial robes. Nobles of the first rank were restricted from using the symbols of the highest order. With decreasing rank further restrictions in the display of the remaining nine ornaments defined five sets of official robes. In the Drummond Collection an ancient and beautifully carved jade piece,

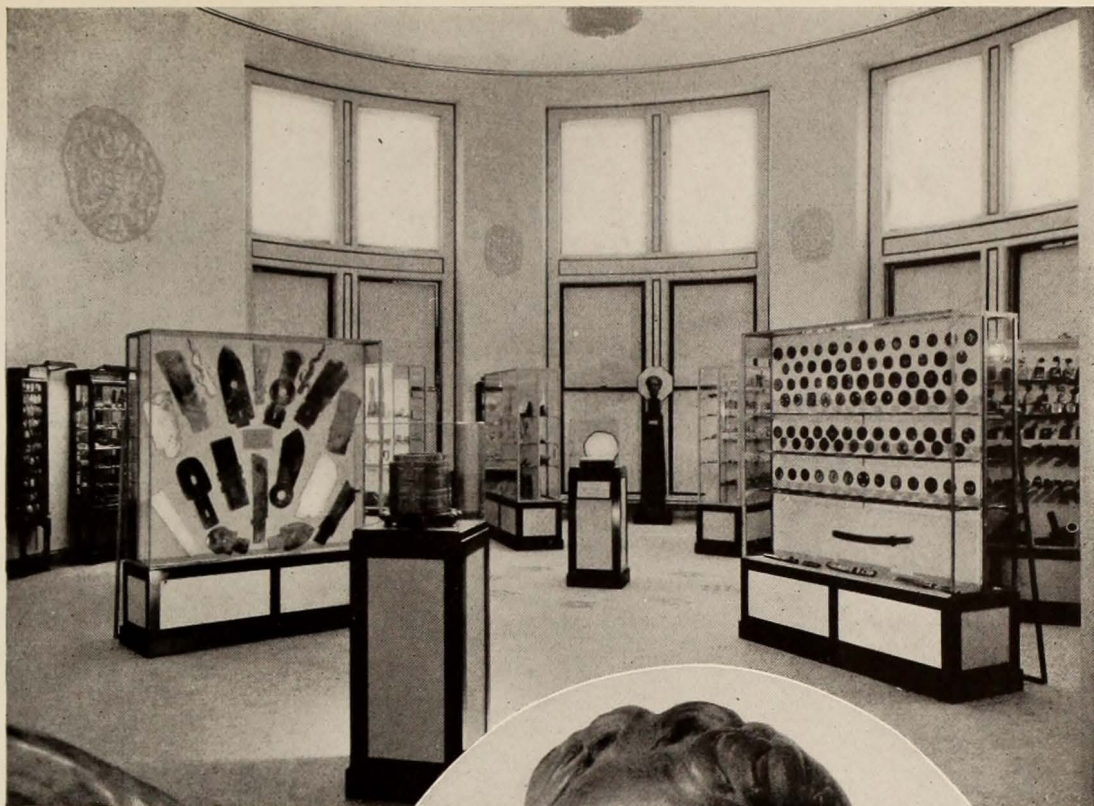
representing the deity Earth, expressed by the Chinese as being square outside and round inside, represents on one of its faces these ancient Twelve Ornaments.

A very fine piece of white jade of the Kien lung period of renaissance in glyptic art is in the form of a "Scepter of Good Luck" (Joo-i scepter). On the long handle of this piece are carved in high relief the figures of the Eight Immortals, the half mythical, half historical personages so often represented in Taoist art. Each of these carries some characteristic object, such as the flute of Han Hsiang-tzu, whose marvelous tone caused flowers to grow and blossom instantly.

Singularly enough, there is, in the Drummond Collection, a Chinese flute carved from pure white jade, and while those of us who were privileged to hear M. Georges Barrère play upon it at the opening of the Drummond Hall, might need to stretch our imaginations a little in order to credit it with causing the spring flowers to bloom, it nevertheless has a remarkable tone, quite capable of producing exquisite music. Incidentally, it was made in 1488 in the Studio of the Eternal Spring. Many symbolic designs, have, through the reverence that all Chinese have for what is old and traditional, persisted throughout jade and amber carvings down to the present day. (See the author's article on "Jade" in *NATURAL HISTORY* for September-October, 1932.)

JAPANESE CARVINGS

In sharp contrast to the conventional treatment and traditional recurrence of designs in Chinese carving, is the realistic freedom that characterizes the work of Japanese carvers in ivory and wood, scores of examples of which are included in the Drummond Collection. Hampered by no such formalism as that which has been handed down through generations of Chinese lapidaries, the Japanese artists, working in ivory, produce graceful and impressive figures of the sages and immortals, charming and often grotesque statuettes,



Above:—A general view of the Drummond Hall

Circle:—A portrait head of the late Doctor Drummond, modeled by James Drummond Herbert

Below:—In the center stands the assemblage of jade pieces which was presented to the Chinese emperor Kien lung on his fiftieth birthday



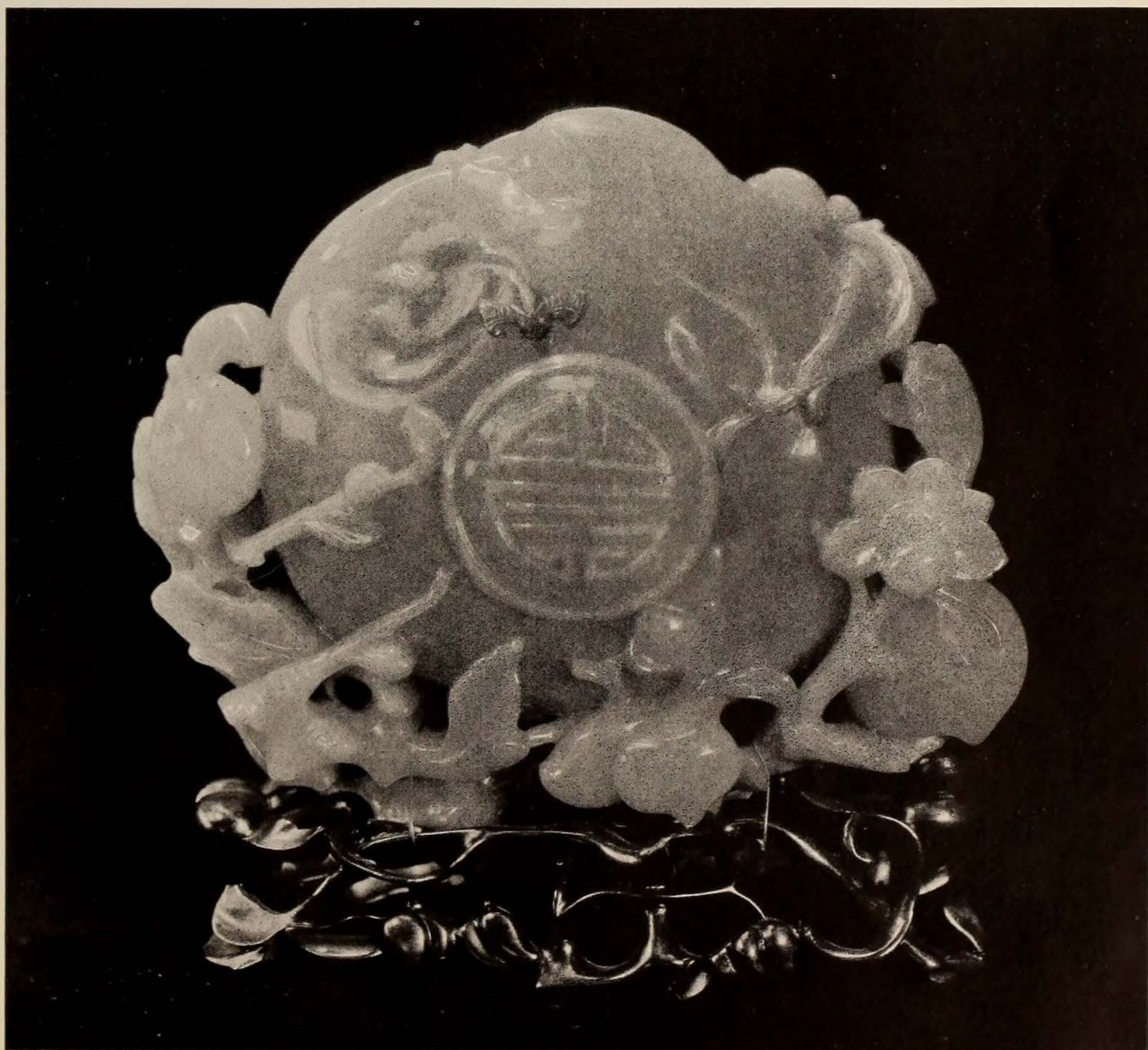
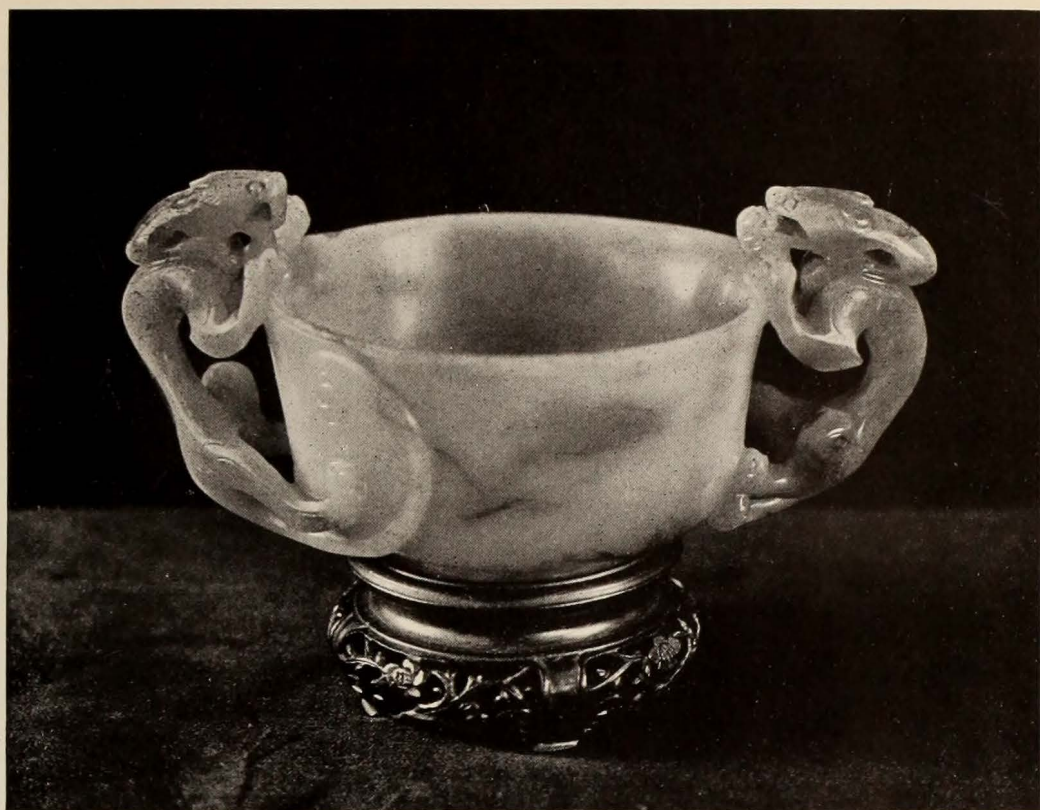


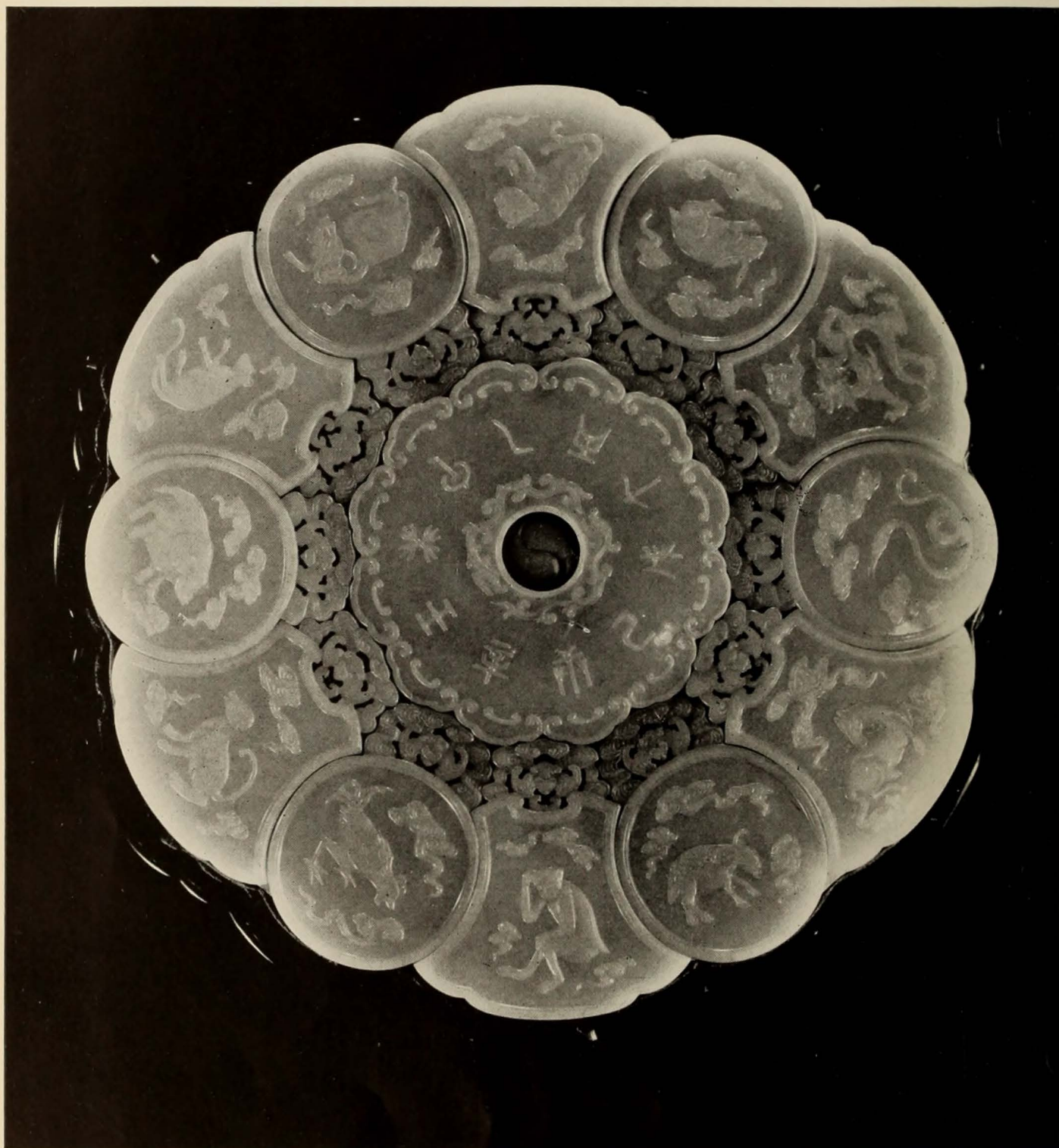
Jade and Amber

This white jade incense burner is a superb example of the open work carving that reached its height in Kien lung's time. Both the bowl and the cover were reduced to about the thickness of a piece of heavy cardboard before the intricate lacelike pattern was executed with hundreds of

The dragons on this jade cup are of the form which developed in China in the Ming dynasty. The perfection in carving, however, shows the piece to be of later date, probably early Kien lung

Of a wonderful rich orange is this piece of Burmese amber carved to resemble a huge peach, to which is added the "long life" symbol, showing that it is a "Peach of Immortality." Two bats, signifying happiness, flutter above

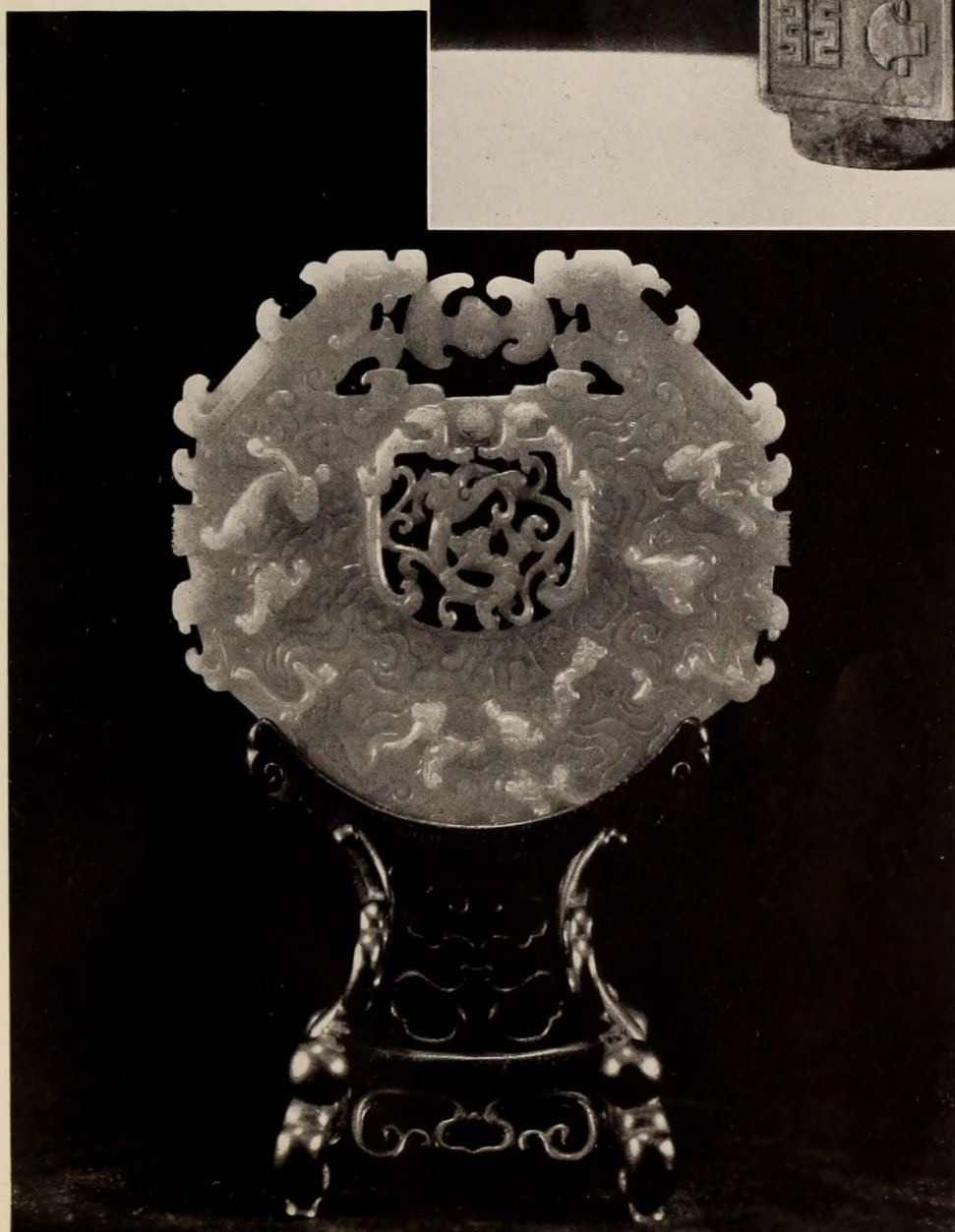
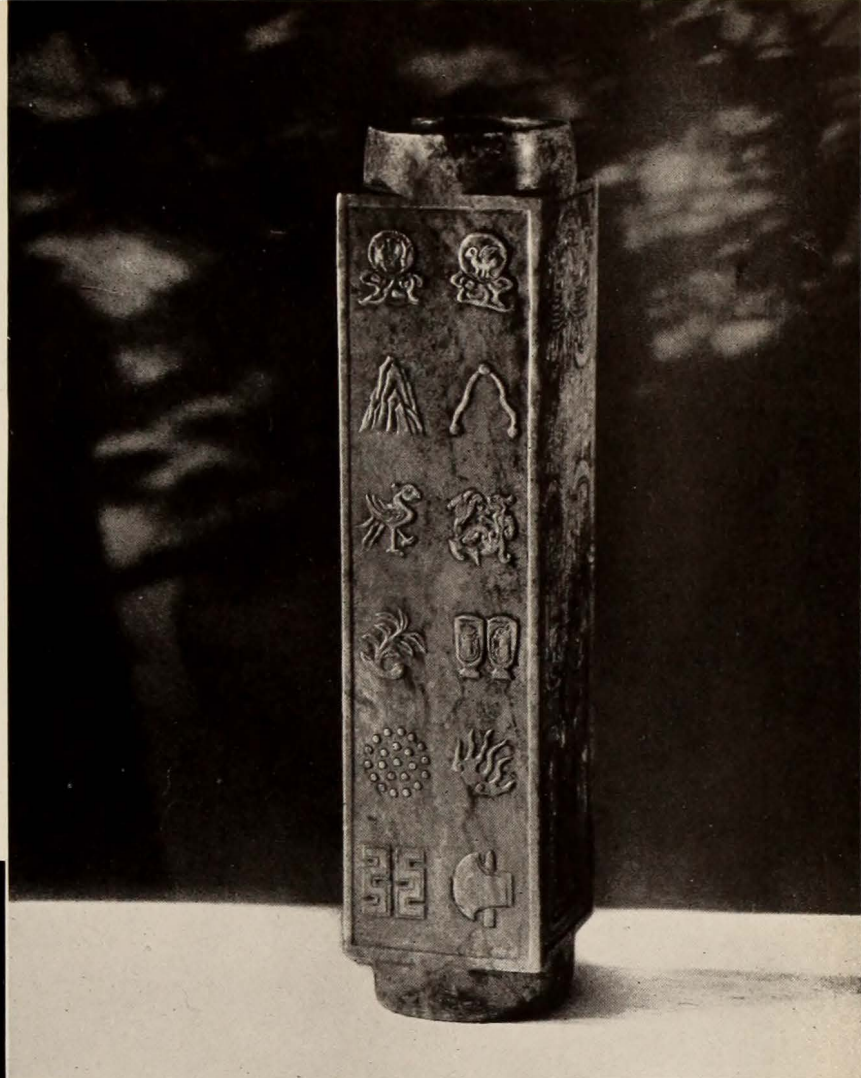




An Emperor's Birthday Gift

A masterpiece of modern carving in white jade was selected for this gift to a famous emperor—Kien lung. The central piece has a loose button decorated with the *yang yin* (universal life symbol). Surrounding the central piece are twelve pieces fitted together, each of which is carved with a representation of one of the twelve creatures which in China correspond to the signs of the zodiac as used by Westerners

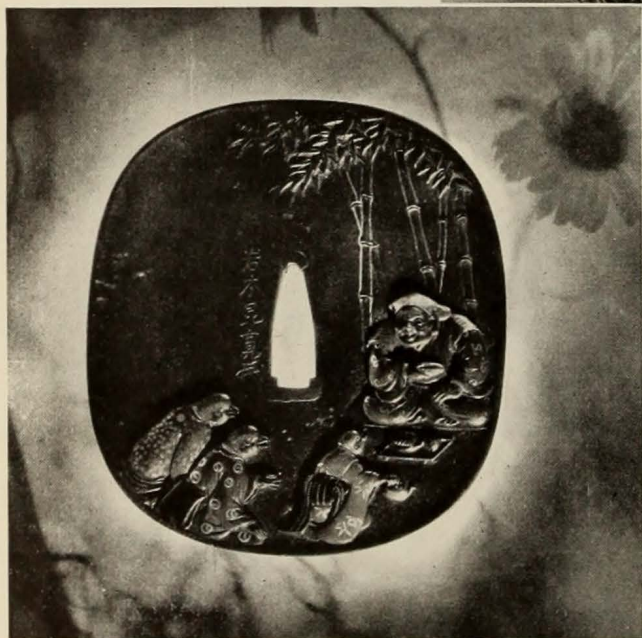
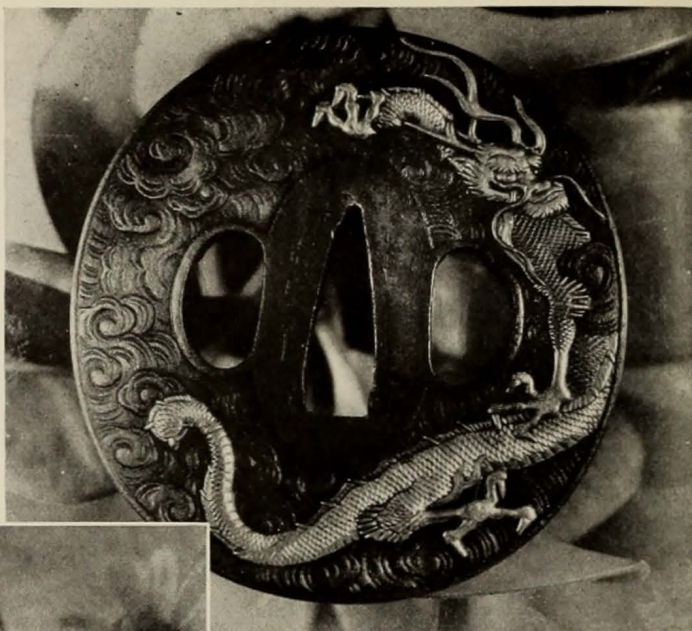
A very ancient jade image of the deity Earth carved with representations of the Twelve Ornaments. Reading from the top downward these are: The sun, the moon, the stars, mountains, dragon, pheasant, the cups, pond weed, fire, grain, the axe, and the symbol of distinction. The Twelve Ornaments are of great antiquity and signified authority and power



Highly conventionalized dragons as well as a bat meaning happiness mark this elaborately carved disk of white jade

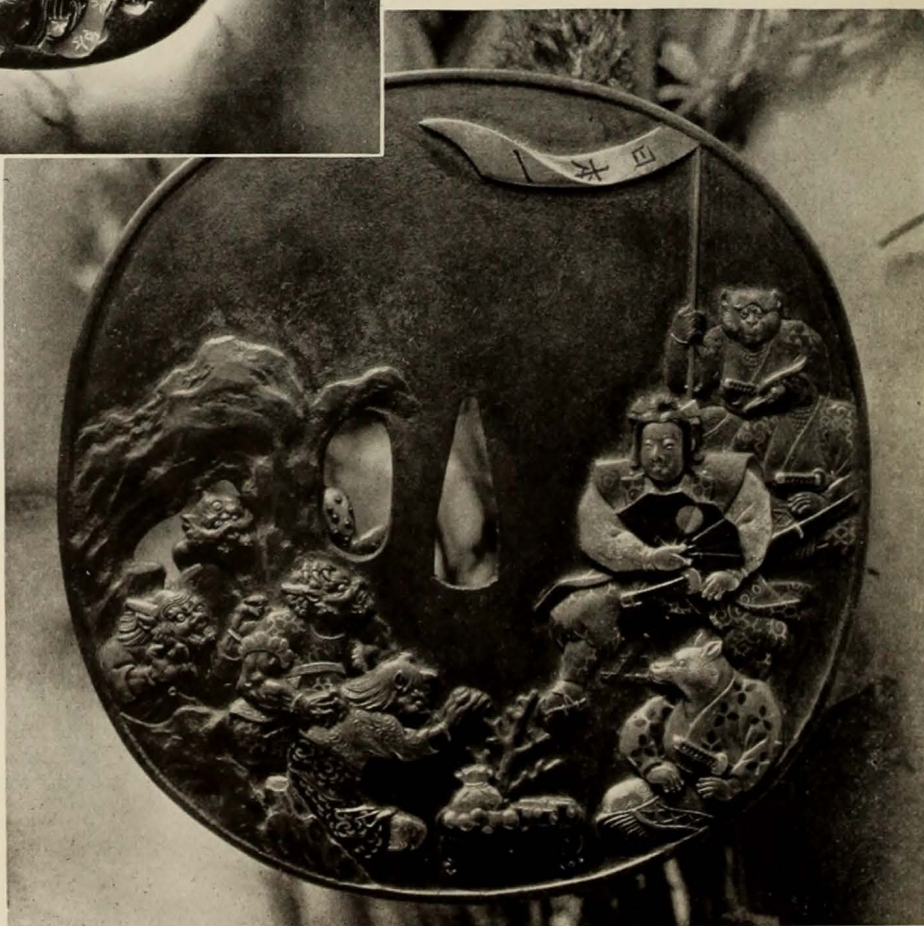
Sword Guards

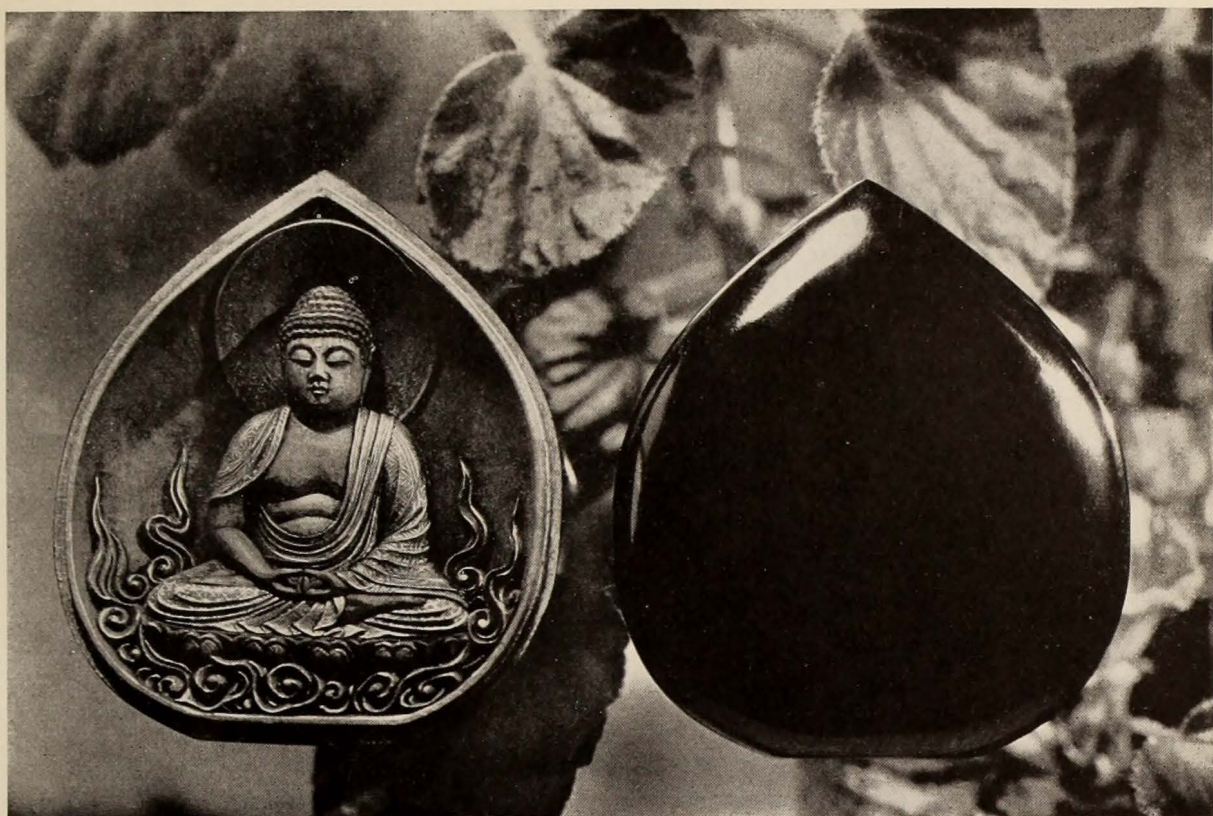
A magnificent gold dragon decorates this Japanese sword guard, and since this is a "dragon of the air" he is surrounded by conventional clouds



The subject pictured on this sword guard in bronze of various colors and in gold inlay is from the Japanese fairy tale of the sparrows who entertained their human friend in a manner singularly human, even for fairy-tale sparrows

The maker of this magnificent Japanese sword guard chose for his subject the fairy tale that recounts the adventures of Momotaro, who, with the aid of a dog, a monkey, and a pheasant, overcame the demons and took their treasure for ransom



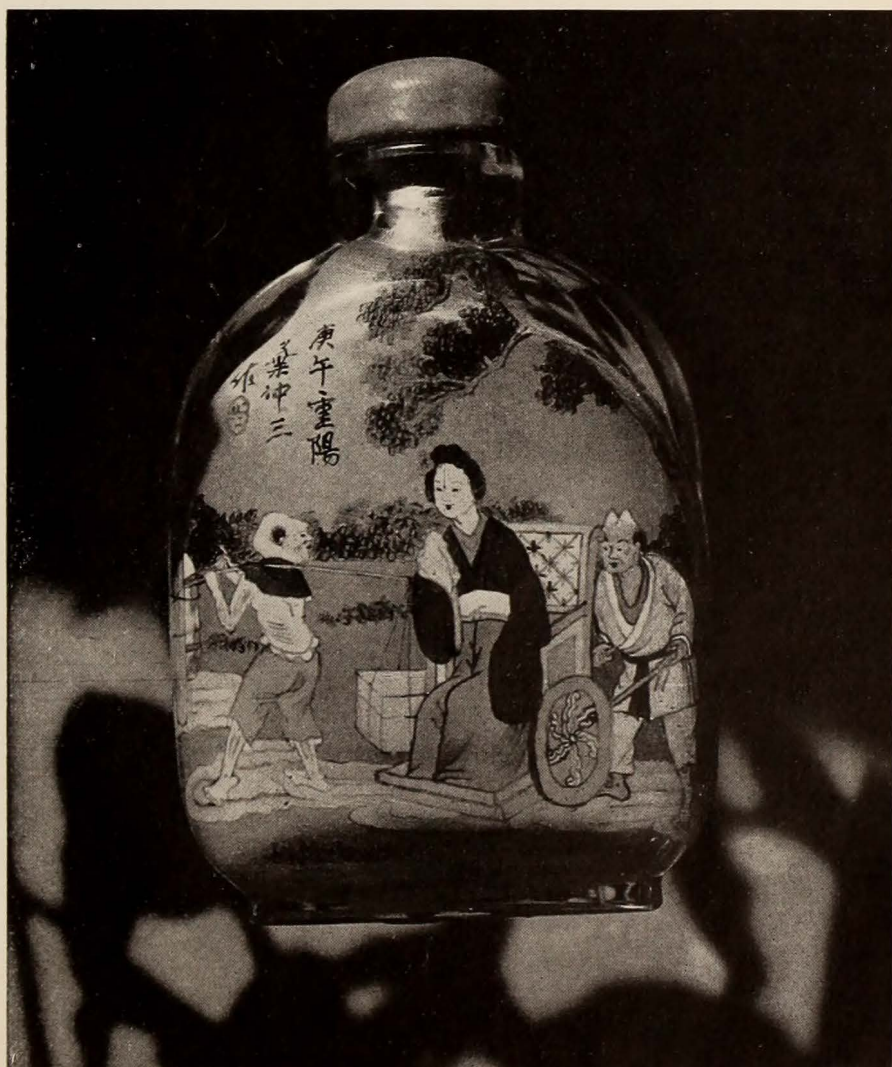


A Traveling Shrine

This lacquered box is in reality a traveling shrine. The wooden interior displays a figure of Amitabha, the Buddha of Enlightenment, beautifully carved and gilded

A Crystal Snuff Bottle

Among the almost miraculous feats of dexterity practiced by Chinese artists is that of painting the inside surface of a glass or rock crystal snuff bottle. This delightful little painting was executed by passing a very minute brush through the neck of the bottle and reversing the strokes, somewhat in the manner of a "looking-glass" painting



and groups illustrating folk lore and legend dear to the hearts of Japanese boys and girls.

Among the ivory figures of appealing beauty from the Drummond Collection, is the "K'wan Yin of the Fish" in which the goddess is poised with great freedom of action upon the back of a huge carp. The legend that inspired this masterpiece relates how a banished Japanese prince, who was forced to earn his living by fishing, on one occasion found in his net no fish but instead a small image of the Goddess of Mercy. This he threw back into the sea only to find it again when he next cast his net. So he kept the image and with his own hands fashioned a shrine for it on a hill overlooking the sea, where the Goddess of the Fish was continually worshiped.

Another charming figurine to which a story is attached, is Hsi Wang Mu, the Chinese Queen of the Fairies, whose legend, like many other Taoist myths, was brought into Japan from China. It is said that the palace of Wang Mu is in the Kuen-lun Mountains, where she guards the Tree of Immortal Peaches that grows beside the Lake of Gems, whose fruit ripens upon her birthday, every 3000 years. Here gather to the Feast of Peaches all the immortals to renew their immortality by eating the celestial fruit.

CARVING IN IVORY

A small but extremely intricate ivory carving shows the Dragon Boat laden with sages and immortals and freighted with the fabulous treasures of Takaramono, which include the hat of invisibility, the purse whose wealth never fails, not to mention many other remarkable things. Above flies the crane, the messenger of the gods guiding the vessel to the Western Paradise. With such wealth of detail are all of these ivory pieces wrought that such matters as necklaces and headdresses are rendered with the greatest fidelity. In fact, whole costumes might be copied to the last clasp and fold from these authentic sources. And such costumes! It would seem as though the

devine K'wan Yin, and Lan Ts' ai-Ho, the immortal flower girl, were especially created to grace costume balls and pageants.

SWORD GUARDS

Much as the Japanese carver in ivory loved to draw his subjects from the legends and myths of Japan, he was probably no match in this respect for his brother craftsman whose art consisted in fashioning sword guards from iron, bronze, and other alloys, some of which are not used outside of Japan. These were inlaid in gold and silver with great skill and artistry. A large and very handsome example from the Drummond Collection depicts an incident from the fairy tale of Monotaro, the boy who was found inside a peach, and who grew to be a sort of Japanese "Jack the Giant Killer." Accompanied by a dog, a monkey, and a pheasant, he invaded the island of the devils and, having overcome them in battle, returned to his astonished foster parents with all of their fabulous treasure.

Another beautifully inlaid sword guard illustrates the fairy tale of "The Tongue-cut Sparrow" who, after sumptuously entertaining his benefactors with food and *sake*, rewarded them for their charitable deeds with a basket filled with treasure. Needless to say the spirited designs which picture these folk tales are wrought by master artists whose names inscribed on little gold inlaid plates actually add to the attractiveness of their designs.

In order to describe in detail the hundreds of works of art that make up this extraordinary collection, one would almost require the magic aid of the gods and devils that are so generously portrayed among them. Nor, even then, could words picture these beautiful objects satisfactorily. Color, form, patina, subject matter—all require first-hand visual examination, before their beauty and their rarity can be made manifest.

They are, however, now on permanent display, and are ready, always, to offer their beauty to any who care to see.

