

HARVARD UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUMS ACQUIRE THE WALTER C. SEDGWICK COLLECTIONS OF JAPANESE BUDDHIST SCULPTURE AND EARLY CHINESE CERAMICS

Statue of Prince Shōtoku is Regarded as the Most Important Japanese Buddhist Sculpture in the United States; Collection of Chinese Ceramics is the Most Comprehensive of its Kind in the West



Prince Shōtoku at Age Two, c. 1292.
Japanese cypress wood with polychromy and rock-crystal-inlaid eyes, 67.9 x 24.8 cm. Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Promised gift of Walter C. Sedgwick in memory of Ellery Sedgwick Sr. and Ellery Sedgwick Jr.
Photo: © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

CAMBRIDGE, MA (October 13, 2006)—The Harvard University Art Museums today announced a major acquisition of Asian works of art through the generosity of Walter C. Sedgwick and the Walter C. Sedgwick Foundation. Three Japanese Buddhist sculptures and more than three hundred early Chinese ceramics, previously on loan to the Art Museums, will enter the permanent collection of the Arthur M. Sackler Museum’s Department of Asian Art. The works are exceptional in their beauty, historical significance, and cultural value, and will make a vital contribution to the Art Museums’ mission of teaching and research. These unique qualities and the objects’ early dates of creation make these works among the most important to enter Harvard’s Asian art collections, as well as some of the most significant to enter the general holdings of the Art Museums, in many decades.

“A number of experiences have led to my interest in enhancing the Harvard University Art Museums collection of Asian art through the gift of my collection,” said Walter C. Sedgwick. “Professor John Rosenfield, the noted art historian and a mentor during my undergraduate days at Harvard, had a great influence on me, as well as an enormous impact on the understanding of Asian art in the United States. Equally as rewarding has been my ongoing collaboration with the Harvard University Art Museums and curator Robert Mowry. Bob has been accessible,

continually interested and intellectually engaging, and he is the architect and a partner in the building of this collection.”

Sedgwick adds, “To me, art is meant not only for admiration but also to continuously teach scholars, students, and the public. What distinguishes a teaching museum is the focus on scholarship and the access to original works of art, unlike other museums that keep much of their collection in storage or in other ways inaccessible. I wanted this collection to be utilized to its fullest potential in a teaching museum where there is a community of scholars, supporters, objects, students, and art conservators, just as there is at Harvard. I hope that this collection will inspire additional scholarship in Asian art, just as I also hope that my gift will spark additional donor support, particularly of endowed curatorial positions. Endowments are essential to getting the best curators, like Bob Mowry. In turn, the curators are the connectors, the center of the wheel between collectors, students, objects, conservation, and the advancement of knowledge.”

The three Japanese Buddhist sculptures given by Walter C. Sedgwick represent one of the most significant such groupings outside of Japan. The preeminent work of the three, a magnificent statue of **Prince Shōtoku at Age Two**, portrays the legendary cultural figure Shōtoku Taishi (AD 574-622) as a toddler, when he was said to have joined his hands in prayer, chanted the Buddha’s name, and performed the miracle of manifesting a small Buddhist relic. Later, as an admired political leader, Prince Shōtoku went on to actively promote and foster the Buddhist faith in Japan. After his death, he was revered as a religious and cultural hero. Of the many three-dimensional representations of Prince Shōtoku—some as a child, some as a youth of sixteen, and others as a mature statesman—depictions of the prince as an enlightened child are by far the most popular. The Sedgwick statue is the earliest datable and most elegantly crafted of the hundreds of such sculptures in existence.

The Sedgwick Shōtoku figure is also unique in that it arrived in the United States in 1936 with all of its dedicatory items intact. The sculpture was created using the assembled wood-block method of construction, which creates a hollow interior where ritual items can be placed. Many Japanese sculptures have lost their original interior objects, but the Sedgwick Shōtoku was preserved with all of its more than seventy ritual items, including tiny Buddhist relics, miniature

devotional statues, a beautiful twill-weave silk bag, a number of Sanskrit paper charms, and printed and hand-written texts. One such text, an extremely rare Chinese woodblock-printed sutra datable to 1160, is now in the Library of Congress, the only original interior object not kept with the sculpture at Harvard. The latest dated item, a manuscript of 1292, suggests the date for the entire ensemble, including the sculpture itself. As such, the Sedgwick sculpture predates all others of Prince Shōtoku by at least a decade.

The Sedgwick gift also includes two important Heian-period (794-1185) Japanese Buddhist wooden sculptures. The earlier of the two is an exquisite mid-eleventh-century **Head of a Bodhisattva** that appears to have come from one of a series of celestial figures which served as frieze decorations adorning the upper walls of the Byōdō-in, a famous Buddhist temple near Kyoto. This head, from one of the temple's fifty small relief bodhisattva sculptures, is believed to be unique among Western museum collections. The second Heian-period image is a statue of **Zōchōten, Guardian King of the South**, originally from a set of four armor-clad deities that stood watch over a Buddhist temple. It was probably carved circa 1075 for a small private aristocratic altar.

“The Harvard University Art Museums have excellent holdings of Japanese woodblock prints and *surimono* (privately-commissioned, luxury-edition prints), just as we have great strength in Japanese lacquer, calligraphy, and certain types of painting. Until now, however, we've not had significant holdings in Japanese sculpture,” said Robert D. Mowry, Alan J. Dworsky Curator of Chinese Art and head of the Art Museums' department of Asian art. “Walter Sedgwick's generous gift will redress that need, bringing to the Art Museums three exceedingly important early Japanese Buddhist sculptures that are of—or at least approach—National Treasure quality. Countless generations of students and scholars will study them to great intellectual reward, just as countless generations of museum goers will delight in their sensitivity and freshness.”

Over the past decade, the Walter C. Sedgwick Foundation has assembled what is unquestionably the finest and most comprehensive collection of early Chinese ceramics in the West, and perhaps anywhere in the world. The Foundation has enabled the Art Museums to acquire the collection through a partial gift / partial purchase arrangement. Comprising more than three hundred works

that range in date from the Neolithic period (as early as 6000 BC) through the Tang dynasty (AD 618-907), the collection includes examples of all major ceramic types produced during that nearly seven thousand-year period. The Sedgwick Foundation collection illustrates better than any other the aesthetic, stylistic, and technical development of early Chinese ceramics and represents major turning points in terms of the medium's historical development.

Most Western museums and private collectors alike have focused on later Chinese ceramics—those from the Song (AD 960-1279) through the Qing (1644-1911) dynasties—not because those wares are more important, but simply because their striking decoration and colorful glazes have held immediate and enduring appeal. A number of Western museums have managed to acquire a few important early Chinese ceramics, but no museum outside of Asia has comprehensive holdings in that field. Even in Asia, there are few, if any, comprehensive early Chinese ceramic collections, with most museums specializing in the early wares of only one particular region or province. In that regard, the Sedgwick Foundation collection is unique, as it brings to the Harvard University Art Museums one of the world's few truly comprehensive collections of early Chinese ceramics—objects that are not only exceptional historical artifacts but beautiful and compelling works of art.

The Walter C. Sedgwick Foundation's collection provides a vital resource for the study of the evolution of ceramics in Asia and, by extension, the world. By the Tang dynasty, the achievements of Chinese potters set in place the aesthetic, stylistic, and technical foundations for all later Chinese ceramics. At that time, Chinese potters were the world's best, producing the most artistically refined and technically sophisticated wares ever seen. By focusing on China's early ceramic traditions, one can see how Chinese potters reached that level of artistic and technical attainment. The Sedgwick Foundation collection brings together a significant and coherent body of works that will permit those achievements to be studied by students and scholars for years to come.

“These are unquestionably the most important additions to our collection of Chinese art during my tenure here at the Harvard University Art Museums,” said Mowry. “Specialists in several different disciplines—including art history, archaeology, and scientific and technical analysis,

among others—are collaborating with our curators in the study of the Sedgwick Foundation collection of ceramics. Eventually, this scholarly collaboration will lead to the exhibition and publication of the collection, and what we anticipate will be a new methodology for the study of early ceramics from all cultures. We very much hope that, as the collection becomes better known through those efforts, more students and scholars will be encouraged to study and research these wonderful works of art.”

“The Sedgwick collections of early Chinese ceramics and Japanese Buddhist sculptures will play an exceptionally important, even transformative, role in the teaching of Asian art here at Harvard,” said Thomas W. Lentz, Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director of the Harvard University Art Museums. “The ability of students to study objects through direct observation is the foundation of our teaching mission. These ceramics and sculptures complement the remarkable Asian works in our Grenville L. Winthrop collection, as well as the significant objects amassed more recently by Bob Mowry, thus creating a link to our existing collections and providing an important resource for studying the evolution and history of Asian art. We are deeply grateful to Walter for strengthening our collections with these works.”

The Harvard University Art Museums

The Harvard University Art Museums are one of the world's leading arts institutions, with the Arthur M. Sackler, Busch-Reisinger, and Fogg Art Museums, the Straus Center for Conservation, the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, the HUAM Archives, and the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis, in Turkey.

The Harvard University Art Museums are distinguished by the range and depth of their collections, their groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of their staff. As an integral part of the Harvard community, the three art museums and four research centers serve as resources for all students, adding a special dimension to their areas of study. The public is welcome to experience the collections and exhibitions as well as to enjoy lectures, symposia, and other programs.

For more than a century, the Harvard University Art Museums have been the nation's premier training ground for museum professionals and scholars and are renowned for their role in the development of the discipline of art history in this country.

Location and Hours

The Fogg Art Museum and the Busch-Reisinger Museum are located at 32 Quincy Street, Cambridge. Adjacent to them is the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, located at 485 Broadway. Each museum is a short walk through Harvard Yard from the Harvard Square MBTA station.

Hours are Monday through Saturday, 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Sunday 1:00–5:00 p.m.; closed on national holidays.

Paid admission includes entrance to all three art museums, including study rooms, public tours, and gallery talks. General admission is \$9; \$7 for senior citizens; and \$6 for students. Admission is free for Harvard ID holders, Members of the Art Museums, Cambridge Public Library cardholders, and visitors under 18. Admission is free to all on Saturdays before noon. More detailed information is available at 617-495-9400 or on the Internet at www.artmuseums.harvard.edu.

The Harvard University Art Museums receive support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

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For more information on this exhibition or the Harvard University Art Museums, please contact:

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