

One of a pair of pendants showing the
“Dragon Master,” 100 BCE–100 CE.
Afghanistan; Tillya Tepe, Tomb 3. Gold,
turquoise, garnet, lapis lazuli, carnelian,
pearls. *National Museum of Afghanistan*.



What is represented here?

In each of this pair of pendants, a male figure is illustrated who wears a crown and garments whose stylistic sources are widespread. The crown may relate to West Asian or Persian models, while his garb appears to be nomadic, a thick robe associated with other Central Asian examples. An Indian-style circle or dot appears on his forehead. He is framed by two opposing dragon-like mythical creatures, with antlers resembling those of an ibex, wings, scales, and gaping open mouths. The central figure may represent a shaman or priestly figure.

What materials were used to create this work of art?

These pendants are relatively small, but extremely elaborate in their design and embellishment. The bodies of the central figure and dragon/antelope figures were created from gold sheet that was embossed and engraved. The three main pieces were then soldered together. The ibex horns are made from granulated gold shot soldered together. Various kinds of semiprecious stones are used to vividly embellish this piece, with comma-shaped turquoise serving to create scales and hooves or claws for the animal creatures, and garnets for their eyes. Other turquoise forms are inlaid in repeated decorative motifs in the lower part of the piece, and carnelian, lapis lazuli, and pearls are also used.

From heavy chains hang decorative elements and gold discs that may symbolize coins, prosperity, and wealth. The overall effect of the pendant was not only visually impressive and complex, but musical as well, as the various pieces moving together created tinkling sounds.