Figure of Buddha, carved ivory with traces of vermilion and gilt, China, Song-Yuan dynasties, 1200-1350

Physical description
Ivory head and torso of the Buddha, arms missing, draped with a cloth with incised decoration of swastikas and flowers enclosed by parallel bands around the waist and shoulders, leaving the breast bare. Traces of vermilion, gilding and black on the cloth, breast and head. The shoulders slotted for arms, the back of the head unevenly broken off.

Dimensions
Height: 25 cm

Museum number
A.203-1929

Object history note
The figure was exhibited by Spink & Son at the Exhibition of Chinese Art in Berlin, 1929 (see Catalogue, no. 667 with illustration).

Note by Craig Clunas 19th July 1984: This piece was excluded from the exhibition Chinese Ivories from the Shang to the Qing (BM/OCS 1984) by Derek Gillman, responsible for the selection of figure carvings, who judged it to be a modern piece on the grounds of its dissimilarity to the established late Ming Zhangzhou type ivory carving. Compare however the carving in similar style in the Freer Gallery (16.159), tested by radio-carbon dating to 320+/−90 years before the present. W.T. Chase, ‘Examination of art objects in the Freer Gallery laboratory’. Arts Orientalis IX, 1973. pp. 79-88, p. 81, pl. 6.

Opinion of Wu T’ung (Boston) 15/6/1989: Sculpted 3.0 qualities like Yuan. Natural handling of drapery folds, facial quality strong, not like sweet Ming. Floral decoration on robes like that on textiles excavated from a tomb at Huangshan, Fujian, Pei Jia, Hua Hang. 13th century Song-Yuan.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O86075/figure-of-buddha-unknown/