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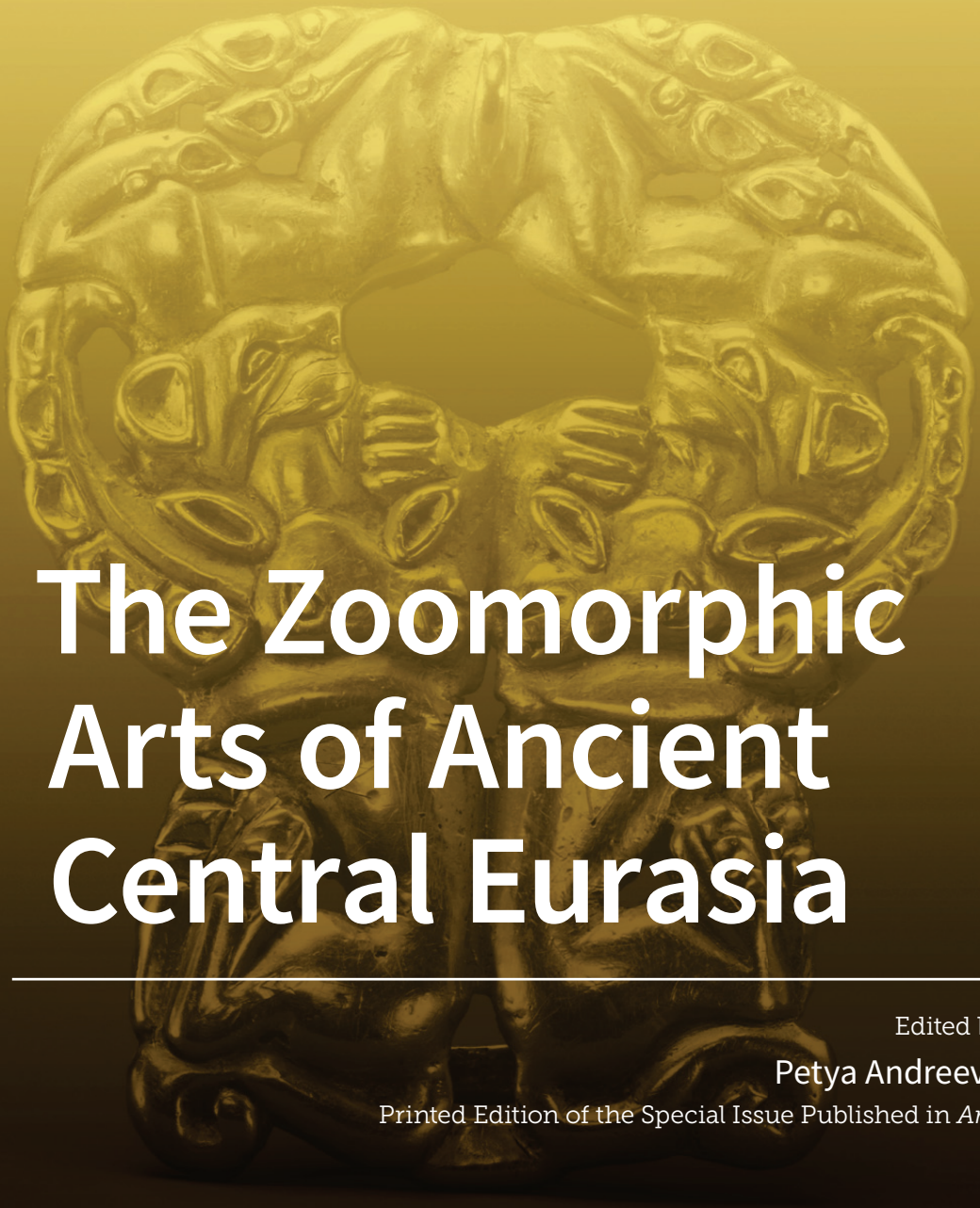

The Zoomorphic Arts of Ancient Central Eurasia

Edited by
Petya Andreeva

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Editor

Petya Andreeva

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About the Editor

Petya Andreeva

Dr. Petya Andreeva is an Assistant Professor of Asian Art History at Parsons School of Design of The New School in New York. She earned her Ph.D. in East Asian Languages and Civilizations from the University of Pennsylvania and her BA in East Asian Studies from Colby College. Andreeva's research focuses on the arts of nomadic societies, human–animal interactions in ancient China and Central Asia, and the cross-cultural exchange of objects, materials, and ideas along premodern trade networks. She has published on these topics in journals such as Early China, Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Fashion Theory, Orientations, Archaeological Research in Asia, Sino-Platonic Papers, and in several edited volumes. She is also the recipient of two international awards, including a UNESCO research grant.

Preface

Following the recent environmental turn in the humanities, a growing corpus of art historical and archaeological scholarship is responding to the need for post-humanist frameworks in studies of ancient societies. Such works place non-human agents in the limelight of their inquiries and, in so doing, shift their focus away from the human practitioner and challenge the presumed centrality of the human experience. This line of inquiry is especially pertinent to the study of early China and the adjacent Eurasian Steppe inhabited mainly by pastoral nomads. Despite their markedly different preferences for materials and modes of making, both early China and the Steppe exhibited a shared aesthetic penchant for zoomorphism. Indeed, idiosyncratic animal bodies tend to define the artistic practices of these cultural spheres in ways that one would not observe elsewhere in the ancient world. The following pages uncover the different strategies behind the construction and circulation of animal-inspired images, designs, and objects in ancient Central Eurasia (700 BCE–400 CE), defined here as the broad expanse stretching from the Mongolian-Manchurian grassland to Crimea. Authors engage with several themes, including the use of products and materials derived from animals, the entanglement between human artisans and their biota, animals as cultural capital and tokens of political clout, and, more broadly, the role of animals in one's creative process.

The volume has three primary aims. It ventures to find new perspectives on ancient cultural spheres that have for too long remained on the distant peripheries of the scholarly canon. It also aims to examine the visual parameters of the unique interactions between pastoralists and the fauna they depended on; can the psychology of mobility or exposure to different ecological conditions explain certain design proclivities? At the center of the following inquiries is also the relationship between sedentary and non-sedentary communities at porous frontiers and the ways in which animals might have shaped those interactions. How can animals help elucidate the relationship between China and what was then perceived by China (and other Eurasian empires) as the "Barbaric Other"? While primarily focused on nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples, some papers in this volume also consider zoomorphism as defined by the sedentary elites in early China and its neighboring zones, exploring the convergent, fluid, or changing notions of zoomorphism across cultural boundaries. The reader will encounter portable objects and murals from tombs, hoards, and museum collections across China, Mongolia, Siberia, and Kazakhstan. Adopting interdisciplinary methods and frameworks spanning Archaeology, Cultural Anthropology, Art History, and Museum Studies, the essays study the visual and material parameters of the zoomorphic imagination of ancient Central Eurasia.

One is likely to note this volume's frequent reliance on terms that deserve further clarification here. Many of the papers introduce or engage with the term "animal style". The term itself is a loose, blanket category applied to the zoomorphic arts of the Eurasian Steppe, and often associated with pastoral nomadic contexts. While there is still no clear definition of "animal style", the term can be understood to signal one of several features in ancient design or decoration. Animal-style objects may be adorned with images of zoomorphic junctures, that is, fusions of disparate anatomical parts forming a new (fantastic) species. One also speaks of "animal style" when one encounters a battle between a predator and prey, or a highly stylized interlace of animal contours. Most of the objects defined as belonging to the animal style category are portable metalworks, although as of more recently felt textiles, woodwork, and other materials are also incorporated. A greater methodological issue in the study of such objects (and Central Eurasian artefacts more broadly) is the tension between unprovenanced museum acquisitions and excavated materials. Many of the animal-style objects used

to define the term have come into private collections through the antiquities market. The most well-known yet unprovenanced animal-style treasures are to be found in the imperial collection of Peter the Great, or in early 20th-century Chinese museum collections; museums and galleries with smaller collections include the Penn Museum, the Eskenazi Museum of Indiana University, the Ariadne galleries, Barbier-Mueller Museum in Geneva, Ben Jannsen's Oriental Art in London, to name only a few. The so-called Ordos bronzes (named after the Ordos zone in north China where they were allegedly found) are especially abundant in such collections and even make an appearance at some of the world's largest museums including the MET and the British Museum. Much of this museum material has been dated or analyzed through stylistic comparisons and must now be considered against the growing number of excavated Central Eurasian sites. Many of the objects that have been unearthed in recent years in, for instance, Kazakhstan and Mongolia, were not factored in earlier studies and might indeed change our perceptions of "animal style" and zoomorphism in Central Eurasia. These and other methodological challenges are tackled by the book's authors who offer a glimpse into novel materials or propose novel ways to interpret zoomorphic art. Lastly, the reader might wonder how Chinese tombs and their animal images relate to occurrences in the rest of Central Eurasia. While a unique form of zoomorphism defined early Chinese design since at least the Shang dynasty, traditional Chinese notions of animality may have been later impacted by interactions with nomadic peoples to the north. In the following pages, readers are encouraged to observe both the homologous and analogous developments in Chinese and nomadic art through a bird's eye view of Central Eurasia.

Petya Andreeva
Editor

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Article

Deer or Horses with Antlers? Wooden Figures Adorning Herders in the Altai

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Abstract: Among the burials of horse herders who lived in the 4th–3rd centuries BCE Altai Mountains of South Siberia were some that contained small wooden figures of four-legged hoofed animals that represent horses, deer, or hybrid creatures. They decorated headgear buried with select commoners of the Pazyryk Culture. Although the people, material possessions, and horses of the elites were frequently ornamented with imagery often associated with the so-called Scytho-Siberian animal style, these figurines are generally more realistic and less stylized representations of natural creatures, either cervids or horses. There is, however, ambiguity in these representations; in some cases, figures that are horses have inset recesses on the tops of their heads, in addition to holes for ear inserts. This recalls the elaborate headdresses on some horses outfitted with large displays of antlers or horns made of wood, leather, and felt buried with the Pazyryk leaders. The implication of this ambiguity is explored here. Horses were "cultural capital and tokens of clout" (see Andreeva Introduction, this volume) in the Pazyryk Culture, as well as the base of the economy. Deer were foundational to older belief systems in Siberia. The commingling of horse, mountain goat/ibex, and deer features in Pazyryk Culture imagery has inspired this study.

Keywords: Pazyryk Culture; Animal Style; Eurasia; Scytho-Siberian; deer/horse imagery; Iron Age

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1. Background

In the fourth and third centuries BCE, a group of pastoral peoples now called the Pazyryk Culture lived and buried their dead in mounded tombs in the Gorny-Altai district of Siberia in the region where modern Russia, Mongolia, China, and Kazakhstan meet (Linduff and Rubinson 2022; Tishkin and Dashkovskii 2003, p. 144; Hiebert 1992) (Figure 1). Archaeological evidence indicates that horses were put to death very regularly there as part of funerary rituals. Every day, though, the Pazyryk peoples used these horses for meat, milk, hair, and skins, as well as for traction, but above all, for riding. Not only were horses the backbone of the mobile functioning and mounted defense of these communities but they also played a central role in displaying the centralizing power and authority of their trade in horses (Linduff and Rubinson 2022, pp. 39–45).

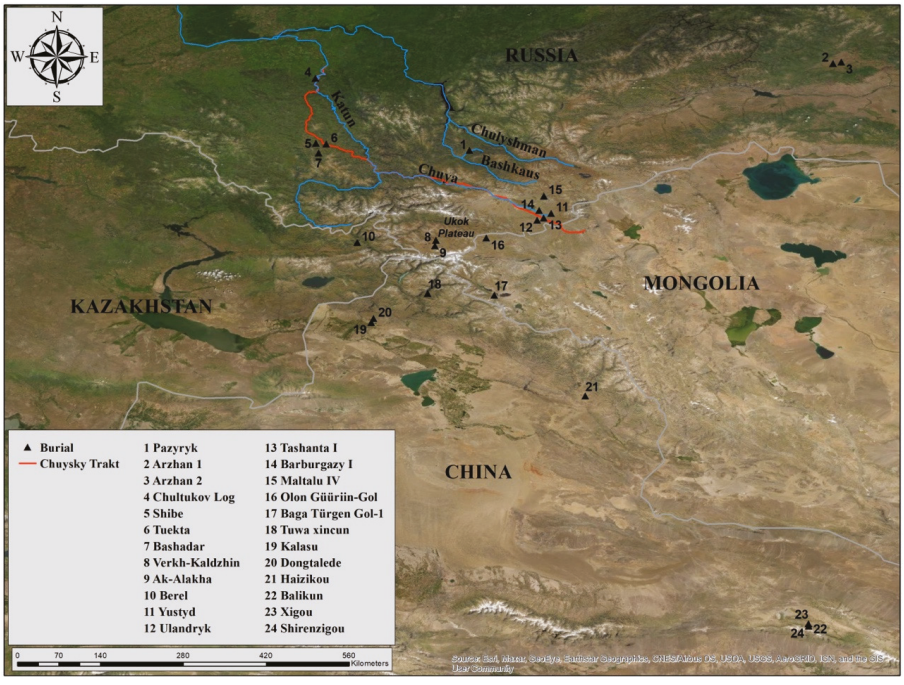


Figure 1. Map of Pazyryk Culture Sites. Map by Evan Matthew Mann.

Pazyryk funerary customs such as the ritual killing of horses were passed along to the Pazyryk area from Tuva where horses were sacrificed and buried at Arzhan I (9th century BCE) and Arzhan II (7th century. BCE) (Griaznov 1980; Grjaznov 1984; Čugunov et al. 2010). In addition, horse sacrifice is known in territories to the east of Pazyryk in western Mongolia and to the south in western China in Xinjiang, in newly recovered materials both contemporary and later than the Pazyryk Culture. For instance, at a site called Kalasu, where in burial M15, 13 horses were deposited and adorned with ornaments and harnesses including metal bits, gold inlay bronzes, and lacquer pieces decorated with golden foil in the style of Pazyryk.[1] In one case, a lacquered mask for a horse, but without antlers or horns, was recovered (Yu et al. 2020). Although the practice at Kalasu parallels that in Pazyryk and a related site in Kazakhstan at Berel (Francfort et al. 2006; Samashev 2006, 2011, 2012), the lacquered leather look-alikes and other ornaments found at Kalasu were clearly adapted to local Xinjiang technology and custom. These materials confirm the movement and adoption of certain practices, goods, and perhaps even people into and out of the Pazyryk zone between the ninth and second centuries BCE (Shulga and Shulga 2017; XJKGS 2015; Yu et al. 2020).

Horses were clearly an important component in the funerals of these Pazyryk Culture mobile pastoralists, but beyond the funerary rituals, the presence of both actual and sculptural horses was also conspicuous in daily life. Horses were a mark of status, identity, and their ability to adapt to and succeed in the enterprise of the horse trade under local environmental and historical conditions. Why should such a valuable resource be sacrificed and taken from practical use in a place where their livelihood depended on the availability of the animal to survive? Were they perhaps costly signals and/or signs of conspicuous consumption? Moreover, why should the little images of the horse/deer appear in only select graves?

In the absence of written documents and with only the excavated context as evidence to guide interpretation, we turn to the archeological context for clues to provide prelimi-

nary insight into the sacrifice of the animals, the "dressing up" of the horses as deer and mountain goats, and the production of small-scale images of deer/horse. Particularly relevant to this discussion is the observation that all social levels of the Pazyryk Culture community sacrificed some of this valuable resource. Distribution patterns in the funerary record show the socio-political and/or symbolic spiritual value in the sacrificial action and use of heraldic imagery. Particular notice will be made of the gender of the animals and human beings with whom they were buried and of the ubiquity of horses and deer in the mortal and posthumous lives of the interred. This analysis will offer clues about the behavior of sacrifices and the figurines, as well as the ambiguity in the imagery of both actual and sculpted deer/horses. Therefore, our discussion about how and where they were used and their relationship with the lives of their wearers leads to a functional interpretation.

After discerning the complexity and inconsistency found in the deer/horse images based on visual analysis, a functionalist framework positions these emblems and goods as embellishments to both the social and economic systems. In all, the use of the objects and their imagery point to an attempt to capture and maintain that which was most important for the livelihood of the community—family and group bonds, respect for the wild animal kingdom and for their domesticated herds, protection and bodily health of the deceased, and status within, and perhaps outside of, the local group. Maintaining their social order and ritual schedule required an ordered society that included the effort of many and several levels of responsibility and authority. All the pertinent material we introduce and systematically examine here takes into account both historiographic and renewed visual analysis as evidence of the rites and values placed on the dead in burial, but our analysis has not led to direct knowledge of the religious beliefs of the Pazrykians. That does not exclude the possibility that the objects and their décor represented spiritualized ideas, but deciphering or attaching precise meanings to the images is not our goal. We leave that debate to others.[2]

2. Archaeological Context

In the early to mid-20th century, Mikhail P. Griaznov (in 1929) and Sergei I. Rudenko (in 1947–1949) explored five large, mounded kurgans preserved in permafrost, and three smaller ones, at Pazyryk in the valley of the Ulagan River in the Russian Altai. Although the tombs had been robbed, mummies and skeletal remains together with many grave goods and sacrificed horses were found preserved there. Later in the 20th century, Vladimir D. Kubarev excavated cemeteries of much smaller mounded burials of non-elites of the same period, the Yustyd, Ulandryk, and Sailiugem burial complexes (Kubarev 1987, 1991, 1992). Nearby on the Ukok Plateau, Novosibirsk archaeologists Natalia Polosmak and Vyacheslav Molodin recovered intact mounded kurgans dating from the same period (Polosmak 1994, 2001; Polosmak and Molodin 2000). Other excavations have extended the known range of this culture group to mounded burials at Berel in Kazakhstan, first by Wilhelm Radloff in the 19th century (Jettmar 1967, pp. 188–89) and more recently by the Kazakh-French team led by Zainullah Samashev and Henri-Paul Francfort (Francfort et al. 2006; Samashev 2006, 2011, 2012). Evidence of the Pazyryk Culture expansion comes from western Mongolia at several sites in the Baian-Ölgii aimag, including surveys and excavation by a variety of international teams (Törbat et al. 2009; Turbat and Tseveendorj 2016). Both horse remains and/or small-sculpted images of horses accompanied the deceased in many of these burials. Trade and diplomatic networks tied the people buried at these sites together in antiquity, while those in western Mongolia and China suggest that a diaspora of Pazyrykians migrated out of their homeland under both political and climatic distress (Linduff and Rubinson 2022; Stark 2012). Whether the masking of horses and its Pazyrykian meaning in burial was put down intact in China is yet to be determined, although, clearly, the horse remained central to those communities as well.

The precursors to the Pazyryk peoples such as at Arzhan I in Tuva (Griaznov 1980; Grjaznov 1984) demonstrate the importance of horses in burial rituals and suggest that the presentation and exchange of horses were part of establishing, ratifying, and displaying

the bonds of corporate loyalty as early as the 9th century BCE (Linduff and Rubinson 2022, pp. 1–16). By the Pazyryk period (4th-3rd centuries BCE), the mounds covering the burials were smaller in scale; the largest, Pazyryk Kurgan 1, was 47 m in diameter. The numbers of horses were similar to or less than at Arzhan 2 in Tuva (ca. 7th c. BCE), which had 14 horses (Čugunov et al. 2010; Bourova 2004): Pazyryk Kurgan 2 and Kurgan 4 (14 horses); Pazyryk Kurgan 1 (10 horses) (Figure 2); Pazyryk Kurgan 5 (9 horses); and Pazyryk 2 (7 horses). Among the last of the Pazyryk mounded burials, Kurgan 6, with a smaller, 14–15 diameter mound, contained 3 horses. The largest of the burials at Berel, in today's Kazakhstan, also contained horses in numbers comparable to those at Pazyryk: Berel 1 (17 horses); Berel 10 (10 horses); and Berel 11 (13 horses). The largest burials at Pazyryk, Berel, and Ak-Alakha 1 (Burial 1, nine horses), therefore, contained approximately the same number of horses. The number of animals deposited in each tomb was, therefore, a deliberate and likely meaningful choice.

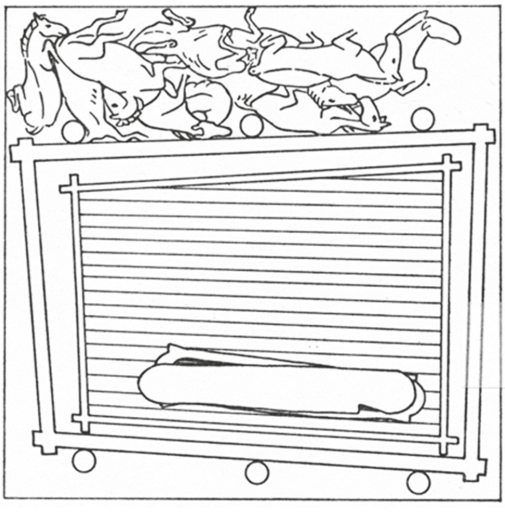


Figure 2. Plan of Kurgan 1 at Pazyryk (Adapted from Jettmar 1967: Figure 85).

So, too, was the placement and manner of display of animals and their sculpted representational models. At both Pazyryk and Berel, the horses and their tack displayed indications of distant and different ownership. The suites of horse decoration in Berel 11 point to different geographical areas where allies of the deceased resided according to Francfort (Francfort et al. 2006, pp. 122–23; Francfort and Lepetz 2010). Although the distinctive genomic changes reported by Librado and the assembled team suggest that domestication of the horse in Eurasia occurred through the mixing of lineages (Librado et al. 2016, 2017), and that mix is consistently discerned in those animals tested throughout the Pazyryk Culture sites such as at Berel, the Keyser-Tracqui team did not discern geographic affiliations for the animals themselves (Keyser-Traqui et al. 2005, p. 203).[3] Such distinctions may have been made in the manner in which the animals were presented. For example, at Pazyryk, the ears of horses were clipped with distinctive marks, which have been thought to represent different owners (Rudenko 1970, pp. 117–19). In contrast to the suggestions about horses being gifted at the time of death from multiple sources, as at Berel 11, Rudenko (1970, p. 119) suggested that all horses buried with the deceased were the deceased's own. Furthermore, Gala Argent (2010; 2016), through an analysis of the masks and other tack on the Pazyryk horses, does concur that the horses belonged to the deceased and that the ornamentation communicated the role(s) each horse played in the life of the person in the tomb. The riders and their horses could have been partners for many years since many

of the horses in these burials were not young (Rubinson 2012: fn 60; Lepetz et al. 2020). Whatever interpretation one holds, and from wherever the horses originated, the horses became or remained the property of the deceased ad infinitum.

The large burials at the Pazyryk uplands are assumed to be those of leaders with the greatest amount of accumulated wealth, and tombs high on the Ukok Plateau at Ak-Alakha, Verkh-Kal'dzhin, and Kuturguntas, as well as at Berel in the Bukhtarma River valley, were likely those of mid-level leaders/elites. More modestly appointed tombs of workers/herders/artisans/commoners excavated by Kubarev were also in upper steppe valleys. Although vertical patterns of migration characterize movements within sub-regions, and in lower valleys, breeding, foaling, and pasturing of animals could take place as would procurement of local products,[4] burials were located on the slopes above the surrounding valleys. The takeaway from all this evidence is that there was a concentrated and intense focus on horses and their role both in the lives and deaths of the entire population, not just the elite (Linduff et al. forthcoming).

3. Cogency of Horses in Pazyryk Culture

The well-proportioned horses found in elite burials at the Pazyryk site were approximately 1.4 m (13.8 hands) at shoulder height, and thus slightly taller than others in the region (Francfort and Lepetz 2010). They were gelded at Pazyryk, which would allow for their taller stature and greater tractability, but also would indicate that breeding animals were generally not sacrificed. Smaller herd horses were found in other tombs in the region (Rudenko 1970, p. 56) suggesting that they were working animals and members of the larger herds, while the taller ones were selected and prepared for parade.

Horses from Berel tested for DNA showed different mitochondrial kin bases (Orlando 2017; Keyser-Traqui et al. 2005), and biogeographic partitioning showed that they were consistently local eastern Eurasian types that are not necessarily from different locations, suggesting that they were likely a locally adapted landrace population such as the one that still remains in the region today (Argent personal communication 3/19/21; McGahern et al. 2006). Thus, local herds showed no disruption of natural regional herd structures and strongly suggest that tabun keeping was practiced as it is today in the valley. As a herd or resource-management system, tabun herding involved the least amount of human intervention, did not control breeding, and only required pastoralists to move horses to where food was at different times of the year (Argent 2010, p. 90ff).

Excavators agree that the Pazyryk horses were pastured in the low, well-watered fields of the Ursal and Karakol Valleys in the Ongudai district in central Altai and along the Chuya River valley well within the Pazyryk Culture territory (Argent 2010; Rudenko 1970, p. 57), moving to higher elevations seasonally (Samashev 2012, p. 40; Chlachula 2018, pp. 14–15). They suggest animal rearing, with a predominance of horses, was the main component of the economic life of the inhabitants there, and that was predetermined by the specifics of the local ecosystem (Samashev 2012, p. 40). Various communities in the Chyua and Ongudai Valleys must have supplied horses to their immediate neighbors, but also perhaps beyond where pastures were not so abundant, and the animals may not have been so elegant. This system was, therefore, a local endeavor that required no external intervention to maintain and allowed for the animals to be handled and managed locally as part of the base economy, including for trade. The location of the Pazyrykians, therefore, depended on and required the continuation of this natural breeding pattern built on trust in the local environment to provide for the self-sufficiency and well-being of the community.

At Pazyryk and Berel, the horses and their tack are thought to have displayed signs of different life roles and regional as well as local proprietors, including notched ears and fancy headgear (Rudenko 1970, pp. 117–19; Francfort et al. 2006; Argent 2010; Rubinson 2012, p. fn 60). In light of the number of horses found in the richer burials, the horse totals killed likely represent higher status or were a graphic display of the power over the network of affiliations that the deceased had controlled. It is clear that horses were

a sign of power, allegiance, and wealth among the leaders of these groups, but perhaps even beyond as a sign of their group alliances when coming into contact with outsiders for whatever reason including conflict.

Among those less well-embellished smaller burials, horses were also found sacrificed together with decorative tack (Figure 3, plan and 1–2). For example, among the kurgan burials at Yustyd excavated by Kubarev, 18 contained horses (43% of all excavated). A total of 32 horses were found, mostly only one or two in a grave, generally corresponding with the number of human individuals (one or two) who were buried with them. Exceptionally, there were, in one case, three horses, which Kubarev ascribes to the higher status of the individual buried with them (Kubarev 1991, p. 25). Considering the numbers of horses found in the richer burials of Pazyryk and Berel, it is likely that the number of horses killed for burial correlated to social status, whether those horses all belonged to the deceased and were killed so no one else could ride them (Argent 2010) or were a graphic display of the power of the network of affiliation that the deceased had controlled. It should be noted that horses were found in burials of both men and women at all social levels and with children in some burials excavated by Kubarev, as well as Pazyryk kurgan 6, where a woman and child were accompanied by three horses.

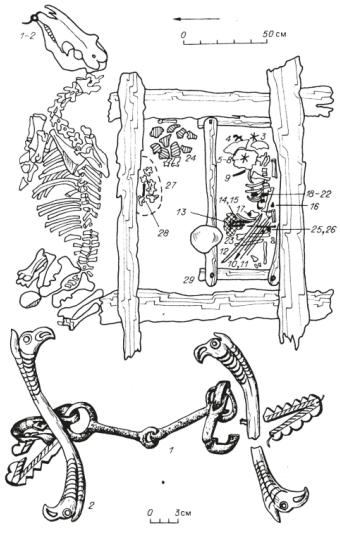


Figure 3. Plan of Kurgan 22, Yustyd XII and illustration of the bronze bit and wooden psalia of the horse bridle. Numbering is original with Kubarev and references the locations of materials he excavated. Adapted from (Kubarev 1991, Pl. L1).

Among those of lesser status in the Pazyryk community were the herders, likely craft-workers and traders, as well as the ready corps of mounted warriors should the need arise (Linduff and Rubinson 2022, pp. 26–101). Although weapons and occasional evidence of shields are found in these tombs (Hanks 2012, p. 101), little physical trauma is recorded.[5] In their tombs, prominence was given to the horse through sacrifice and the inclusion of small figurines of horses that were very likely mountings for headdresses. At the very least, those images also acted as a marker of lifestyle, reverence and respect for the animal, and a group emblem of belonging (Figure 3, [4–8]).

The burials of those of lesser status that Kubarev excavated contained men, women, and children. For example, of the 60 people buried in 40 kurgans at Ulandryk, 65% were women and children and only 35% were male. Their ratio in each burial and cemetery differed, as can be seen in the data from Ulandryk II, where of the 11 kurgans, only one contained a male; the others were women and children. In contrast, at the cemetery Ulandryk III, 86% of the deceased were male (six individuals) and the rest were women; there were no children (Kubarev 1987, p. 23). Among the elite and mid-level Pazyryk burials in the Chuya valley, only Kurgan 6 at Pazyryk contained a child, and there were more deceased males than females buried. In the Ulandryk cemeteries, 55% of the total kurgans excavated, that is, 23 kurgans, contained a total of 40 horses. Moreover, 83% of the kurgans containing horses contained either one or two animals, which generally corresponded to the number of people in the burial. Four kurgans (17%) contained three horses, which reflected the higher status of the individuals (Kubarev 1987, p. 16). The horses that have been studied in Pazyryk Culture burials are all males and mostly, if not all, gelded. The majority of the horses were older. Even in Mongolia where some killed were young, most were older than 16 years; of the 101 horses studied by Lepetz and his team from Mongolia and Berel, two-thirds were over 16 years old. The horses at Pazyryk itself and Berel were larger than the horses found in the Mongolian Pazyryk burials, which we might assume is also the case for Ulandryk and the other burials excavated by Kubarev (Lepetz et al. 2020; Kubarev 1987, p. 108).

4. Animal Imagery as Markers of Social Order

Certain aspects of the Pazyrykians' lives were emphasized in burial: The value of strength envisioned in wild animals; the power of force as repeatedly embodied in weapons; and the influential role of knowledge of the outside world marked in graves with items of exotic manufacture or design among the elites. Wild animals, not the domesticated sheep that were present as food offerings in tombs (Simpson and Pankova 2017, p. 184), ornamented and animated the humans and horses and likely documented a mystified role in the lives and deaths of these folk. Evidently, the animal kingdom was part of their livelihood and economy, and although the circumstances varied according to the settled or mobile portions of their lives, animals were essential.

Shared artifact types and emblems were apparent in most tombs[6], as was the choice of subjects for representation on ordinary and funerary materials. They consistently included single naturalistic images of recognizable wild animals and/or of interactions between two or more animals[7], and most of the recognizable fauna represented on the artifacts roamed this area long before human beings either hunted or tamed them. The animals represented are ones that could be hunted locally: Doe, kulan or wild asses, gazelle, stags, rams, mountain goats, argali (wild) sheep, and occasionally an impressively large fish, a freshwater sturgeon, such as the one tattooed on the right calf of the man in kurgan 2 at Pazyryk (Rudenko 1970: Figure 121) and depicted on felt saddle pendants in kurgan 1 (Rudenko 1970: Figure Pl. D). They also included animal predators: Bears, wolves, tigers, panthers, leopards, boar, and lynxes. There are no representations of kindly songbirds in this repertoire; rather, vultures and ferocious fowl including raptors used for falconry were favored as they are on the steppe today. Domesticates include horses and oxen, familiar working animals, although there are no representations of domestic sheep. When fantastic or composite beasts such as the dragon or griffin were depicted, they most often were borrowed from the settled peoples to their east and/or west (Linduff and Rubinson 2022, pp. 76–82) (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Saddle cover. Felt, leather, hair. Pazyryk, kurgan 1. (adapted from Rudenko 1953, Pl. 77).

5. Horses or Deer or Both?

The query here is stimulated by the presence of small wooden animals that adorned the headgear of men, women, and children buried at sites in the Russian Altai that belonged to the more ordinary individuals of the Pazyryk Culture (e.g., Figure 5, [4–8]). These wooden images, in the case of the horses, ranged in height from miniatures at 2.5–4 cm to larger ones at 7–8 cm, with the larger ones found on the headgear of adult males and females and the smaller ones associated with children (Kubarev 1987, p. 106). Although such images were found at all of the sites reported by Kubarev (1987, 1991, 1992), our discussion here will focus on the sites of Ulandryk, Tashanta, and Yustyd (e.g., Figures 5 and 6b) as reported in the 1987 and 1991 volumes, although supplemented by data from other sites; the wooden images, as well as the other ornaments, decorations, tools, and weapons in all the burials reported by Kubarev, are similar and consistent from one site to another (Figure 6).

It is likely that the ancestors of the creatures adorning the headgear of these more common folk lie in the type of decoration of the headgear of the elite individuals buried in Arzhan II, grave 5, a man and a woman whose burial was the impetus for the massive burial complex that dates to the 7th century BCE.[8] As reconstructed in detail from the undisturbed burial remains, the male wore a head covering of leather with hanging earflaps. It was topped with gold ornaments, including four flat images of horses with their legs tucked underneath, and ear, eye, mouth, and nostril, and a crescent shape at the neck in enamel together with a standing stag, also flat, although with a pair of antlers flowing from the head and with eyes, nostrils, mouth, and crescent at the neck in enamel on both sides, at the top of the headdress (Čugunov et al. 2010, p. 212, Figure 225, Pl. 1, Pl. 2 [1–3], Pl. 33 [1,5]). In the hypothetical reconstruction of the woman's headdress, a tall conical hat of red-colored leather (?) was decorated with gold ornaments that include two flat horses with tucked-under legs, with eyes, nostrils, and mouth engraved on both sides and a very tall pin with various animals engraved on the shaft topped by a standing three-dimensional stag with engraved decoration and a pair of flowing antlers (Čugunov

et al. 2010, pp. 213–14, Figure 226, Pl. 54 [1–2], Pl. 56, Pl. 73 [1–3], Pl. 74 [2]). In both cases, the stags and horses are clearly recognizable as such[9]. In the case of the elements of the male headdress, although the horses and stag share similar enameled cells for the eye, mouth, nostril, and crescent at the neck, as well as the treatment of legs and body shape, they are easily distinguished by the antlers on the stag and the manes on the horses, as well as the lengths of the tails, namely, short on the stag and long on the horses. Additionally, the stag's head is raised while the horse's snout is lowered. The variation of head position is also apparent on the pins of the female headdress, where the horses face down while the stags, and most other animals, have heads parallel to the ground or raised (Čugunov et al. 2010: Pls. 55–56).

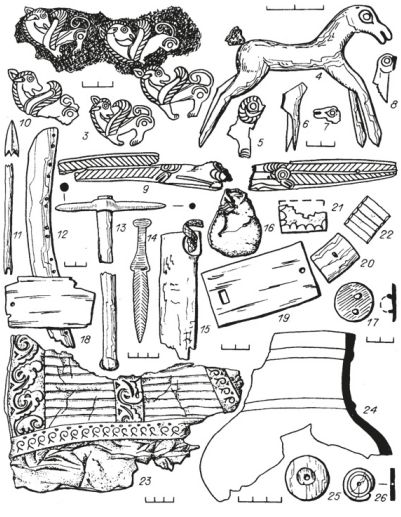
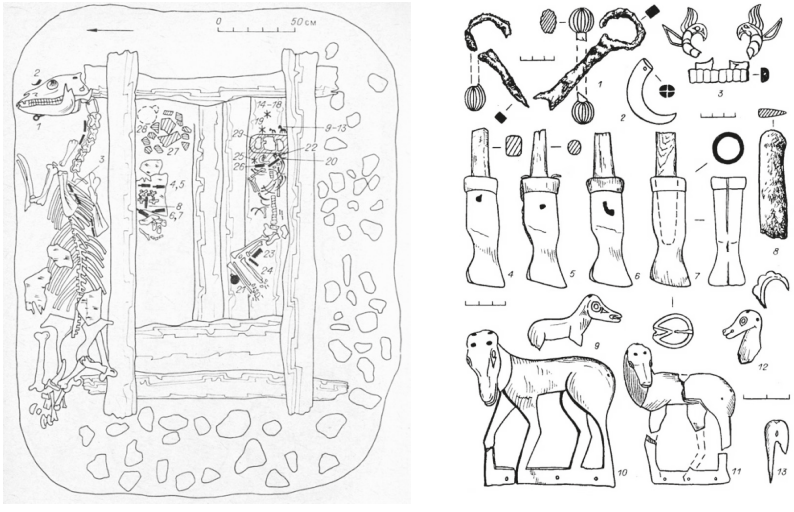


Figure 5. Contents of kurgan 22, Yustyd XII. (Adapted from Kubarev 1991, PL LI). Kubarev identifies 4 as a volumetric undefined animal figure with plug-in leather tail (he does not distinguish the animal as either deer or horse) and identifies 5–8 as remnants of figures of horses and deer, without specifying which is which. Plan of burial is Figure 3 above.

At the site of Pazyryk itself, there is a variety of headgear on the deceased. In kurgan 2, among the finds, Rudenko cites "part of a man's pointed felt cap" and a woman's headdress of colt's fur decorated with leather cut-outs of rhombs and cocks (Rudenko 1970, p. 317). Additionally found in that burial were wooden stags with leather antlers standing on fluted balls (Rudenko 1970: Pl. 137, G, H) and carved wood and leather compositions of griffins and deer (Rudenko 1970: Pl. 141, Pl. 142, D). The former is now recognized as hairpins, two of which are covered with gold foil, and the other pair, which might have been covered with tin foil (Simpson and Pankova 2017, pp. 117–18, Figure 102, Pl. 42). These stags, similar to those from Arzhan II, have heads parallel to the ground. As Simpson and Pankova note, following Kubarev, these Pazyryk pins recall those that are found in the "commoner graves" at Ulandryk and in the Sailiungem region.[10] They suggest that the total of four pins might have been worn all at once by the woman buried in Pazyryk Kurgan 2 since she was a member of the high elite, while those in the more everyday burials had single pins (Simpson and Pankova 2017, p. 118). It is a proposal worth considering in light of the headdress ornaments of the woman in burial 5 from Arzhan II. She had two long gold pins on her headdress, although only one of them was topped by a standing stag.



(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 6. (**a**) Ground plan, Yustyd XII, kurgan 19 (adapted from Kubarev 1991, PL XLIV). The deceased is identified as female because of the black stain remaining from her wig. Nos. 9–13 are wooden sculptures of horses and deer. (**b**) Contents of Kurgan 19, Yustyd XII. (According to Kubarev, 9 is three-dimensional fragment figure of a horse; 10 and 11 bas relief figures of deer with holes in heads for inserts; 12 fragment of the head of a horse with insert horns above; 13 fragment of the figure of a horse, only its hind legs). Adapted from Kubarev 1991: Pl. XLV.

The headdress of the male from Pazyryk kurgan 2 has recently been reconstructed and is composed of the three elaborate carved wood and leather pieces excavated by Rudenko, although he did not identify them as elements of a headdress (Rudenko 1970: Pl. 136 [G, J]; Pl. 139 [L]; Pl. 141). As reconstructed, the cap was crowned with a tall image of a griffin or eagle holding a stag head in its beak. Attached to the sides of the cap were images of a bird of prey attacking a stag with elaborate antlers (Simpson and Pankova 2017, pp. 112–13) (Figure 7, #1).

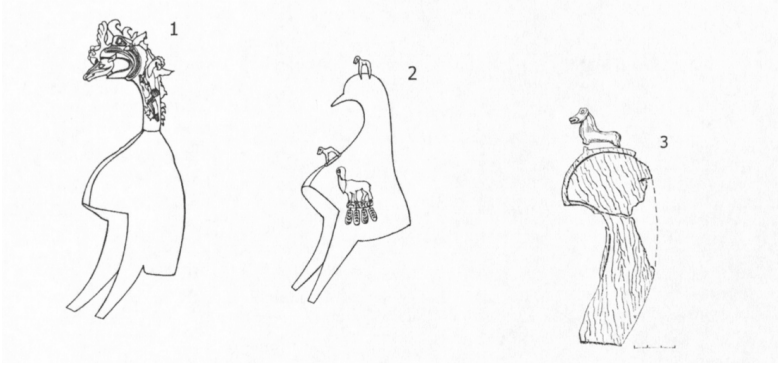


Figure 7. Reconstructed felt hats with wooden attachments: 1, Pazyryk K 2; 2, Verkh Kaldzhin-2, K3; 3. Wooden hat frame with attached animal Ulandryk II, K8 (adapted from Ochir-Goryaeva 2017: Figure 6).

Stepanova noted that on the Ukok Plateau and in Mongolia, excavations of lesser elite males exposed headdresses with related ornaments including eagles and fantastic hoofed animals, found at the sites of Ak-Alakha-1, kurgan 1, Verkh-Kal'dzhin 2, kurgan 3 (Figure 7 [2]), and Olon-Kurin-Gol 10, kurgan 1 (Simpson and Pankova 2017, p. 112 and see Polosmak 2001, pp. 155–60, 180 and Molodin et al. 2016: Figure 12 and Turbat and Tseveendorj 2016: Figures 9 and 10). What is notable in the Ukok Plateau cases is that all of the hooved creatures are shown reconstructed with ibex horns, a point to be addressed below. In contrast to the reconstructions of the male headdresses, the headdress reconstruction of the female from Kurgan 1, Ak-Alakha-3, also on the Ukok plateau, shows a deer figure with stag antlers[11] standing on a ball while the deer lower down on the headdress has its legs folded underneath its body and ibex horns (Stepanova in Simpson and Pankova 2017, p. 118; Polosmak 2001, pp. 143–51, especially reconstruction III).

Kubarev (1987, p. 111) states that what distinguishes the wooden headgear ornaments, both horse and deer, of the ordinary Pazyrykians from those of the top and mid-level elites is that they have the quality of folk art. It is indeed true that they are not modeled in as realistic a way as the stag pins from Pazyryk Kurgan 2 or with the kind of detail of the elements of the headdress of the male in that burial, and they are less detailed than the few more elaborate carved wooden pieces in these simpler burials, such as the ends of what might be a neck ornament in the form of snow leopards from Ulandryk I Kurgan 12 (Kubarev 1987, p. 164, Pl. XXVIII,10) and the diadem from Kurgan 1, Ulandryk IV that features a symmetrical composition of stags with flowing antlers followed by felines adorned with raptor heads (Kubarev 1987, p. 185, Pl. LXIX, 9). In fact, we might consider these and the few other elaborate pieces as gifts to the non-elites from those to whom they owed allegiance. Of course what we see preserved are the wooden pieces, with only occasionally one of the leather inserts, such as the tail of a horse, retrieved (Kubarev 1991: Pl. LI, 4) (Figure 5, [4]), as well as an ibex horn made of leather covered with gold foil from Ulandryk IV, kurgan 2 (Kubarev 1987: Pl. LXXIV [26]), where it is associated with the figure of a goat with what Kubarev (1987, p. 113) called "syncretic" characteristics of a horse. Another ibex horn, of gold foil, was found associated with a horse figurine from Yustyd XII, kurgan 23 (Kubarev 1991: Pl. LII [13,19]) and also one of leather (?) from Yustyd XII, kurgan 19 (Pl. XLV [12]), associated with a wooden horse head (Figure 6b [12]). Kubarev mentions holes for inserted horns, ears, tails, and phalluses and suggests that the fact that the hole for the tail and phallus was a single channel that allowed for a single leather insert had a spiritual significance. He notes that, in rare cases, the horse figurines had slots for wings on their backs.[12] The figures of horses and deer were apparently finished with coverings of gold leaf and touches of cinnabar coloring (Kubarev 1987, pp. 107–8).[13]

Crafting Horses and Deer

The little wooden horses (or deer) crafted for placement on the crest and sides of headgear found at the head of the deceased in many tombs, especially in the eastern Chuya Valley sites of Yustyd, the Sailiungem area, and Ulandryk (Kubarev 1991, 1992, and 1987, respectively), deserve special notice. There is some question about their attribution as horses or deer. For Kubarev, the primary distinction between horses and deer is that deer are distinguished by having open mouths surrounded by a convex rim and the convex eye is teardrop-shaped while the horses have round eyes (Kubarev 1987, p. 104 and see Kubarev 1991: Figure 24 [5,6]). In some cases, deer are also distinguished by what he terms an undercervical mane, which can be depicted in two different ways (Kubarev 1987: Figure 41; Pls. XXVII [9]; LVIII [4]; LXXVII [7], XCII [11]), a treatment that sits at the neck, which differs from the beard on the chin, on animals he identifies as sheep/goat (see Kubarev 1987: Figure 44).[14] Further, he describes all animals that are carved in bas-relief, often with heads carved separately and inserted at approximately right angles, as deer, while identifying animals carved in the round as horses (Kubarev 1991, p. 117) (Figures 5 and 6b). He also suggests that some deer at Ulandryk have narrow, elongated bodies that are derived from

the deer images that appear on deer stones, while the horses have short bodies with short stature since they are of a local "Mongolian" breed (Kubarev 1987, pp. 104, 108–9)[15].

In his attributions, Kubarev does not discuss the profiles of the snouts of the animals. In nature, deer have more narrow muzzles than horses, although animals with such narrow muzzles are often called horses in his calculations. For example, in Kurgan 19 at Yustyd XII, Kubarev identified two such wooden creatures with four holes in their heads as deer (Kubarev 1991: Pls. XLIV and XLV:10, 11), while he identified two others with narrow muzzles as horses, one with "plug-in horns" (Kubarev 1991: Pls. XLIV and XLV: 9, 12) (Figure 6). A few actual sacrificed horses in the larger tombs at Pazyryk were transformed from equine to cervid by masks (Figure 8).[16] That transformation suggests that the small wooden animals depicted were also transformed from equine to cervid, although Kubarev's choice of the word "horn" implies transformation from equine to *Capra*, both of which are implied by the archaeological evidence.[17] According to Esther Jacobson, these smaller examples would be meant to capture a conversion or a metamorphic process (Jacobson 1993; 2015, p. 301). In the cases at Yustyd, Ulandryk (Kubarev 1987, pp. 106–12; and, for example, Ulandryk II, Kurgan 5, Pls. XLI-XLII), and the Sailiungem area (for example Kurgan 18, Barburgazy I, Kubarev 1992: Pl. XXIII), a transformation may simply be indicated by attaching horns to figures that are horses or horse-like, as the example preserved from Yustyd exhibits (Figure 6).

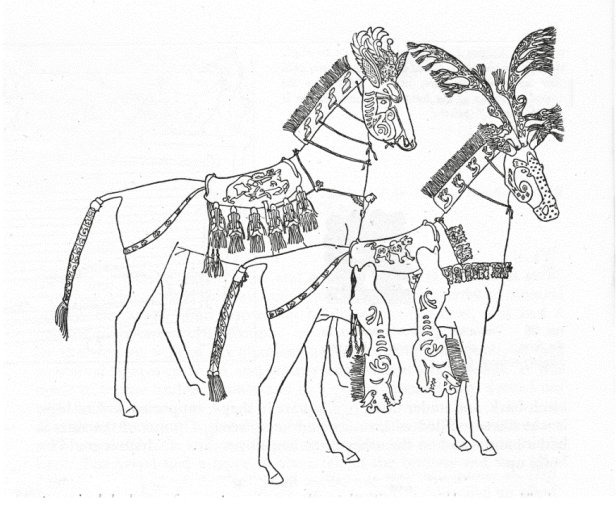


Figure 8. Reconstruction drawing of two lavishly decorated horses with felt saddle covers and masks and headgear of felt, leather, fur, dyed horsehair, and gold foil. Left is topped with a horned lion–griffon and right with stag antlers. Pazyryk, kurgan 1. Adapted from (Jettmar 1967: Figure 87).

Most human headgear found in burials in the region had attached images of animals including some that are not antlered such as the deer-like representation reconstructed with the horns of a mountain goat/ibex on the headdress of the woman in kurgan 1 at Ak-Alakha 3 (Polosmak 1998, p. 148; Polosmak 2001, p. 143).[18] Such representations of animals on top of the head of the deceased signal to Jacobson the creation of a vertical axis that was coextensive with the head or body of a human being and/or the head or body of a horse (Jacobson 1993, p. 57; Jacobson 2015, p. 290). This creates, for her, a spatial hierarchy that stands for and confirms the role of the horse as central to thinking among the Pazyrykians about the transition from death to an afterlife.[19]

The little deer/horse images are, of course, not ferocious animals that might have bestowed the aspect of brute power to the wearer, but could they have triggered the notion of

transformation as Jacobson suggests? As domesticates, horses were found nearly ubiquitously in those graves, and at the very least must have recalled both their essential function to their this-worldly role for the mounted warrior and herder and to the base economy as a trade animal. Apparently, though, they were also emblematic for community members who worked directly with the animals as the images are less frequently found in the elite and mid-elite tombs at Pazyryk, Berel, and Ak-Alakha where less direct involvement with the rearing and management of the horses took place and where they likely knew horses primarily as mounts. The prevalence of animal combat, on the other hand, represented on all sorts of items including clothing, saw imagery playing a different role—that of protection embodied in raw animal power displayed (Figure 4).

6. A Further Excursion into the Identification of Horns and Antlers

As noted above, the four hairpins from Pazyryk kurgan 2 are topped with wooden deer figures with flamboyant leather antlers. One pair is covered with gold foil and the others possibly with tin foil (Simpson and Pankova 2017, pp. 117–18). There are two horses buried with masks that have stag antlers at Pazyryk, one from Kurgan 1, dating toward the beginning of the sequence, and the other from Kurgan 5, at the end of the late Pazyryk phase. In the earlier example, the antlers are fitted directly on the covering of the horse head (Figure 8, right); in the other, the horse head is topped with a wooden sculpture of a stag neck and head with leather antlers (Ochir-Goryaeva 2020: Figure 2).[20] Esther Jacobson notes that the horse mask on horse 10 from Pazyryk Kurgan 1 is the only surviving example of a true transformation of the horse to stag, while it also conveys an attack by a feline on a stag also suggested by Gala Argent (Jacobson 2015, pp. 293–94; Argent 2010, pp. 157–74).

In the excavations at Ak-Alakha-3, Kurgan 1 was the burial of a woman whose remains were well preserved. Part of her headdress was a pin topped with a sculpture of a deer. The horns/antlers that adorned the head of the animal were apparently not preserved. In the initial publication, the animal is shown with the horns of a mountain goat/ibex (Polosmak 1998, p. 149, Figure 11), the same horns as on the recumbent deer below at the bottom of the headdress. In a subsequent publication, the pin was reconstructed with the antlers of a stag (Polosmak 2001: Reconstruction III, p. 143, Figure 98), while the recumbent deer retains the ibex horns.[21]

The general preference in reconstructions for ibex-type horns on the figures identified as both deer and horses can be seen in the headdresses of males preserved in excavations both on the Ukok plateau and in Pazyryk Culture burials in Mongolia (Figure 7). Although the wooden pieces and the felt caps were preserved from the males buried in Kurgan 1, Ak-Alakha-1 and Verkh-Kal'dzhin-2, kurgan 3 on the Ukok plateau and at Kurgan 1, Olon-Kuriin-Gol 10 in Mongolia, none of the elements that adorned the heads of the animals were preserved (Polosmak 2001, pp. 155–59, Pl. XIX, v, g; Molodin et al. 2016, pp. 79–87). All of the animal figures, whether identified as horses or deer, are reconstructed with the same ibex horns (Polosmak 2001: Reconstruction IV, p. 157; Molodin et al. 2016, p. 50, reconstruction by Dimitri Pozdniakov). This reconstruction choice was possibly driven by the ibex horns on the winged horses that adorned the headdress of the individual buried at Issyk Kurgan in Kazakhstan that Kubarev had cited as a parallel (Kubarev 1987, p. 109; Chang 2006, p. 54, Pl. 55). Not only was that example well known and prestigious, but Kubarev had noted that in rare cases, the horse figures at Ulandryk had slots in their backs for the insertion of wings, also seen on the Issyk example (Kubarev 1987, p. 108). Nevertheless, some remnants of antlers of gold have been retrieved from these commoner burials, for example, Kurgan 12, Ulandryk I, where a deer figure was found with golden antlers (Kubarev 1987, pls. XXVI and XXVII, 9) and Kurgan 23, Yustyd XII (Kubarev 1991, Pl. LII) in which kurgan fragments of golden antlers were found associated with a headdress (no. 21) in addition to a golden ibex horn associated with a horse figurine (nos. 19 and 13).

The ambiguity of distinction between the ibex horn and the antler existed within the Pazyryk culture before the burials that we have focused on here. Tuekta Kurgan 1 contained eight buried horses. It had been disturbed, and the elements of the horses' masks

were not found on the horses. Nevertheless, it seems that all eight horses had ibex horns on their masks, six of which closely mirrored in wood the appearance of curved horns with bumps on the horns semi-circular inserts, similar to the horns on some horses buried at Berel (Figure 9). Two sets at Tuekta were distinctive. One set of inserts had small wooden standing lion figures on the bumps. The other set had inserts on the bumps made of deer skin that appear to be antlers together with an ear (Ochir-Goryaeva 2020; Busova 2015; Rudenko 1960, Pls LXVIII-LXXII). So here, approximately a century before the appearance of the more easterly kurgan cemeteries of both the elites and commoners, stag antlers are placed on a horse mask, although in a more tangential situation than on the masks on the Pazyryk horses and are associated with the horse burials and not the headdress ornament of the deceased individual. It is tantalizing to consider the possibility that reflected in this horse headdress is early contact between the elites of the earlier phase of the Pazyryk Culture and the inhabitants of the eastern regions where good pastures may have begun to appear, which brought the Pazyrykians to choose their new territory, knowing that the horses would be well-fed and the Chinese market was within reach.

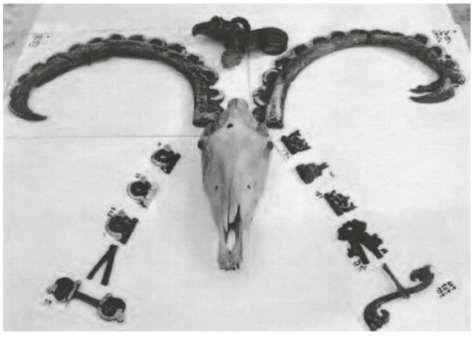


Figure 9. Horse mask. Wood, leather, gold foil. Berel, Kurgan 11, Kazakhstan (Adapted from Francfort 2008, p. 35).

7. Spiritual Life and the Role of Horses/Deer

Since burial rites are ceremonial and most often solemn, we consider all the material as well as their placement in tombs as evidence of highly charged rites and values bestowed upon the dead. In most cases within the Pazyryk Culture, for instance, the heads of the deceased were laid toward the east and the feet to the west where the sun sets. We also know that the burials at Pazyryk took place from late spring to autumn when the ground was not frozen and that the bodies of the high elites were embalmed and their skulls were trepanned. Mummification also took place at Berel. Preparation of the body was carefully conducted and the body was preserved since death was not seasonal as burials were, but beyond the practical aspect, the process must have been part of thinking about sending off the dead to the next life. This practice and the accumulated grave goods transmitted messages about preserving the external forms of life (the skeleton and flesh) surrounded by what seemingly were highly valued embodiments of the life lived. These burials marked a lifetime grounded in the Altai, but do they also document musing over how to recognize and reach the hereafter?

The presence of metal vessels filled with rocks that were placed near clusters of six rods bound with strips of birch bark, and in at least two incidences, covered with large hangings of felt or leather (Rudenko 1970, p. 78), tell of a practice related by Herodotus (Herodotus, A, bk. iv, 73–75). In Kurgan 2, each vessel contained a small number of seeds of hemp (*Cannibus sativa* L of the variety *C. rideralus* Janisch) of a sort that was also found in leather flasks attached to one of the rods. Although this practice of heating stones in a cauldron also containing hemp seeds under a covering was viewed by Herodotus as a practice of ablution since, according to him, the Black Sea Scythians never bathed, Rudenko pro-

posed that these smoking sets provided for purification rituals as well as for enjoyment in ordinary life. The hallucinogens were likely inhaled by both men and women since two sets of apparatus for smoking were found in Pazyryk Kurgan 2 of a man and a woman along with seeds of hemp and hart's clover (*donnic*) and at least the stems were found in the other burials (Rudenko 1970, p. 285, Pl. 62). This apparatus appears only at Pazyryk so was likely a practice restricted to the upper elite, at least as associated with death. Actions and materials that presented individuals, or in the case of Pazyryk animals such as the elaborately adorned horses, as different from ordinary mortals, were performed to impress onlookers, but largely to suggest the otherworldliness of the actor (often a priest). This was most often achieved through dress, behavior, and secret ritual and is frequently associated with shamanistic practice (Yatsenko 2017, pp. 233–42; Hasanov 2017, pp. 228–42; Gheorghiu et al. 2017; Cunliffe 2019, pp. 273–74).[22] The practice of breathing the vapors of hallucinogenic hemp, the playing of stringed musical instruments such as the harp found in Kurgan 2, and one-sided drums known from Kurgans 2, 3, and 5 document a relatively high level of music making at Pazyryk (Rudenko 1970, pp. 277–78; Cunliffe 2019, pp. 227, 273) and are also reminiscent of shamanistic practices (Rubinson 2002, p. 71). At the very least, the imagery and spectacle can be seen as apotropaic and having powers to ward off evil (Rubinson 2012, p. 88).[23]

The deliberate prominence given to the preservation of hair and nails in the tombs in Pazyryk Kurgan 2, and in the tomb of the Ice Princess at Ak-Alakha 3 (Kurgan 1, burial 2), for instance, is evidence of animism according to Rudenko (1970, p. 287). Since both hair and nails, he states, continue to grow after death and do not decompose or diminish, they must be attributed to a display of the powerful life element[24]. Along with the sacrifice of horses, mirrors, torques, and earrings, headgear and elaborate wigs and hair dressings with zoomorphic golden appliques as afforded females at Khankarinsky Dol in the northwestern Altai contemporary with Pazyryk (Dashkovskij and Usova 2011, p. 83) and at Ak-Alakha 3, Kurgan 1, burial 2 (Polosmak 2001; Polosmak and Barkova 2005) were indicators of a person's status and were added for the afterlife. The collection and specialized treatment of hair in death rituals must, at the very least, be imagined to follow a belief in the mystery and continuity of life into the next world.

All such amenities surrounded the body of the "Ice Princess." Polosmak believes that the suffering of the princess, from cancer and ostomyletus and finally a fall from her horse, would have required treatment with herbs such as hemp. She imagines that the altered consciousness that such treatment provided would have allowed the Princess to have been perceived as in contact with the spirits, and therefore, a spirit leader (Liesowska 2014). Ritual leaders must have existed if even to manage ceremonial activity. If that were the role of the leadership buried at Pazyryk, it is difficult to determine with the present evidence.

The possibility that the objects and their décor represented spiritualized ideas is suggested by many who are interested in the "Animal Style" (Jettmar 1967, pp. 89–120; 131–2; 137; Bunker et al. 1970, pp. 61–63; Jacobson 1993, 2015; Stümpel 2021; Andreeva 2021, among many others). For example, Jettmar argued that burial displays such as vessels, scoops, knives, and vases and including the remains of food found at Pazyryk Kurgan 2 suggested that feasting was part of the religious celebration (Jettmar 1967, p. 95). He goes on to conclude that funerals commended accomplishment among the elite and that tombs represented gradated symbols of prestige such as the deposition of varying numbers of horses sacrificed with the dead as we have suggested above with the benefit of excavated material from commoner tombs not known to Jettmar. He thought of them as symbols of rank attained through acts of courage in battle (Jettmar 1967, p. 131) and argued that, overall, the burial displays, including hemp-burning apparatus found in Kurgan 2 at Pazyryk, were indicators of religious ceremonies where communication with the beyond was encouraged and accomplished. Such displays made clear to him that life both before and after death was governed by rank and perhaps privileged access to another level of consciousness (Jettmar 1967, p. 137).

With regard to the animal representations per se, Jettmar thought of them as representing lower-ranking supernatural powers believed to confer blessings as seen in the "lavish tattooing of the man in Kurgan II at Pazyryk" (Jettmar 1967, p. 138) and acknowledges that even though the burials were ritualized, deciphering meanings of the images beyond their functioning as markers is nearly impossible. He does suggest that the analysis of change in the visual form of animals to a more stylized ("unimaginative") representation, however, can be read as an indicator of change in ritual use and a later date (Jettmar 1967, p. 139). This sort of reasoning about the form and meaning of visual features has continued, especially in the research of Esther Jacobson, which largely focused on stag and horse imagery (1995; 2015).

8. Finally, the Stag, the Mountain Goat, and the Horse

Perhaps the most speculated-on issue in relation to a possible belief system associated with the Pazyryk group and other pastoral peoples is their preference for "animal style" décor. Prevalent is the notion that animals in the art of the pastoralists represent a kind of totemism or mythological representation of bearers of qualities such as ferocity or sensitivity, although Rudenko argued strenuously that that was not the case (Rudenko 1970, p. 287ff). Instead, he suggests that these animals, both wild and domesticates, were intimates of the societies who bore them and had a decorative and/or protective function and thus they appear as tattoos.

Central to Esther Jacobson's interpretation is the formal visual analysis of the image of the deer as it appeared in the iconography of the earlier occupants of South Siberia (1995). By examining these formal features as indicative of symbolic structures, she has developed interpretative theories regarding early "nomadic" cosmology. The reconstruction of meanings embedded in the deer image, she argues, carried her investigation back to rock carvings, paintings, and monolithic stelae of South Siberia and northern Central Asia, from the Neolithic period through the early Iron Age. The succession of images dominating that artistic tradition is considered against the background of cultures that evolved from hunting and fishing to a dependency on livestock (2015) and that would include the Pazyryk peoples. She traces the path from the images on earlier rock art in Mongolia through a close comparison of stag imagery on the male and female headdresses from Arzhan II, burial 5 to the ornamentation of horses and humans in death at all levels of the Pazyryk Culture (Jacobson 2015, pp. 270–302). This trajectory underscores the cultural roots in Siberia of at least some of the participants of this easterly expression of the Pazyryk Culture. Bryan Hanks (2010, pp. 180–81). underscores the development of this imagery with the growth of mounted warfare in the first millennium BCE.

Jacobson goes on to suggest that there was a symbolizing order among the burial practices and visual imagery dedicated to animals that foregrounded predation, transformation, and axial order (Jacobson 1993, p. 57ff). She cites the mask-wearing of the horses and the creation of composite animal imagery as evidence of belief in the transformation or metamorphosis from this world to the spirit world and axial placement of horses and trappings and symmetrical or mirror-image spatial order as confirmation of the centrality of animals, especially the horse, in their lives. She notes that the predation is not complete since the animals do not die, and that suggests to her that transformation or continuity is sought after, and not finality. She claims that the role of axiality, and at the center of that, the Deer Goddess, could be thought of in a similar fashion—that is, balance, stability, and continuity were paramount and behind this symbolism. In this sense, her thinking includes the little wooden horse/deer finials at the apex of caps found in graves of all subgroups and locations across the region discussed above.

In all, however, the objects, imagery, and treatments of the body point to an attempt to capture and maintain that which was most important for the livelihood of the community—family and group bonds, respect for the wild animal kingdom and their herds, protection and bodily health of the deceased, and status within and perhaps outside of the local group. Displaying those notions must have guided the selection of images and signaled

their worth in order to maintain, validate, and project their bonds in the present and into the future. In that sense, the other world was clearly invoked throughout the burial displays and preparation of the necessary accouterments for funerary and burial rituals that occupied a huge amount of the effort and focus of attention of the residents of the Chuya Valley. Maintaining their social order and ritual schedule required an ordered society that included the efforts of many and several levels of responsibility and authority, including men, women, and children (Linduff and Rubinson 2022, pp. 98–100).

The fact that the animals decorating the headdresses of the commoners and some mid-level individuals of the Pazyryk Culture, in contrast to those preserved on the elites of burial 5 at Arzhan II, are often ambiguous in interpretation, sometimes expressly deer, sometimes horses, sometimes neither, and sometimes with horns of mountain goats or antlers of stags, even if formally a horse shape. This raises the question of the roles of both wild and domestic creatures in the lives of the Pazyrykians. We know that the raising and trading of horses formed the basis of their economic livelihood and distinguished them from their distant neighbors and/or trade partners, and that wild animals such as deer and mountain goats were hunted and their by-products were incorporated into clothing and other material creations that enhanced and were maintained during their daily lives. Is it possible that since both the wild and domestic animals were so critical to their existence that in the conceptual minds of the artists who created the images, they were interchangeable? Or that combining the mountain goat (ibex) horns, which were also found on horses at Berel at the western extent of the Pazyryk Culture, and the antlers of the stag that has roots in Siberia and are unique to the imagery in the eastern expression of the Pazyryk Culture (with the one exception at Tuekta) with the animal that they raised, lived with, traded, and took with them to the grave expressed an encyclopedic world view of a culture that thrived for a short time but left a vivid impression for the afterlife and to this day through their rich material remains?

We have endeavored to understand this ambiguity in presentation despite the challenges of working within a non-literature culture exclusively through available mortuary remains. This project thus required extracting our suggested conclusions from the fragmentary materials preserved. We used the visual evidence together with what can be determined about the economy and lifeways of the Pazyryk peoples to suggest that the visual ambiguity of the small wooden animals that decorated the headdresses of some of the common folk was more meaningful directly to their lives than the earlier more realistic representations. This ambiguity was expressed in a more literal way through the headdresses of the buried horses and the representations of the same on some bodies of the deceased elites, making it clear that these co-joined creatures were real to the Pazyryk Culture peoples.

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Notes

1 Examples from Xinjiang, Kalasu, are yet to be published. They are lacquered leather.

2 There is a vast bibliography in many languages on the "symbolic meaning" of animal imagery in Pazyrykian and Siberian societies in antiquity. For a summary of that bibliography see: Petya Andreeva 2021; Jacobson 1993, 2015; Polosmak 2001; Gheorghiu et al. 2017, for example.

3 Horses from Berel tested for DNA showed different mitochondrial kin bases (Orlando 2017; McGahern et al. 2006), and biogeographic partitioning showed that they were consistently local eastern Eurasian types, almost certainly an isolated landrace population such as the one that still remains in the region today (Argent personal communication 3/19/21; McGahern et al. 2006).

As the Keyser-Traqui team concluded: "Sequence polymorphism of the mitochondrial DNA D-loop was used to determine the genetic diversity of horses recovered from a Scythian princely tomb dating from the beginning of the 3rd century BC. Eight haplotypes were found among the 13 ancient horse samples tested. Phylogenetical analysis showed that these ancient horse sequences, along with two Yakut ones, were distributed throughout the tree defined by modern horses' sequences and are closely related to them. No clear geographical affiliation of the specimens studied was thus determined." (Keyser-Traqui et al. 2005, p. 203).

4 Larch timbers for the construction of tomb chambers, for instance, were not available in the alpine steppe where the upland burials were placed, making the vertical transmission of products/materials necessary (Shahgedanova et al. 2002, pp. 325–26).

5 Rudenko records a blow to the head of the male in kurgan 2 at Pazyryk (Rudenko 1970: Pl. 44A) and Jordana et al. (2009) report on violence in the eastern Mongolian Altai.

6 Stümpel (2021) recently examined the iconography of the horse gear and noted some distinctive patterns of occurrence.

7 The following section is excerpted from (Linduff and Rubinson 2022, pp. 76–101).

8 The site report is (Čugunov et al. 2010). See recently (Simpson and Pankova 2017, pp. 80–81).

9 The images of ibex share the same realism (Čugunov et al. 2010: Pls. 62, 78).

10 (Simpson and Pankova 2017, p. 118). Their endnote (no. 66) is not precise, but it is correct that objects that are clearly pins are not found among the published finds from Yustyd, the third of these "commoner" sites.

11 As discussed below, the antlers on the deer pin had been reconstructed in earlier publications as ibex horns (e.g., Polosmak 1998: 149, Figure 11).

12 One of the anonymous reviewers noted that ibexes have beards and queried if the figures with ibex horns were in fact ibex. Kubarev noted all of the places where the wooden figures had holes for inserted elements and none were under the chin of the animals.

13 Several bits of gold foil ornaments are illustrated from the site of Yustyd XII, kurgan 23 (Kubarev 1991, Pl. LII, nos 16–18, 20–24) Kubarev says the gold foil ibex horn, no 19, is associated with one of the wooden horse figurines, illustrated as no. 13. However, the plan in PL LII shows the gold foil bits at the skull of the southernmost skeleton, near the position of a wooden deer figurine (no. 11). The wooden figurines described as a deer head (no. 10) and three-dimensional figures of horses (nos. 12–14) are in the region of the skulls of the other skeletons.

14 A similar distinction can be seen on two objects from the Oxus Treasure (Takht-i Kuwad, Bactria), a gilded silver vase handle in the form of an ibex (BM 123911) and a gold deer attachment (BM 12313). The ibex has a beard hanging down as a separate element between the head and body; the deer has a striated band around the head (Ghirshman 1964: Figure 302). Perhaps the treatment of some of the deer figurines with striated bands on the necks was inspired by this Achaemenid period Central Asian convention.

15 We thank one of the anonymous reviewers for querying why the animals are not ibex since, as discussed below, many of the animals are reconstructed with ibex horns. The reviewer notes that ibexes have beards, which are not represented on any creatures found in the Pazyryk Culture representations. Indeed, some of the creatures from Ulandryk have what might be beards or, more likely, neck ruffs. Kubarev identifies them as sheep and indeed they appear to more closely resemble argali than ibexes, although argali-type horns are not preserved. In fact, one of the creatures was found together with an ibex horn (Kubarev 1987: 112–114, Figure 44, Pl. LXIX (2, 3, 4, 5), Pl. LXXIV (26, 27, 28, 29). However, argali is clearly represented as incised decoration on some of the sculpted deer and horses (e.g., Kubarev 1987, Pl. XIV [9]; Kubarev 1991: Pl. XLVII [8] and P. LI [5]) (See Figure 5 above for the latter). There are a pair of argali that decorated a torque from Barburgazy I, kurgan 18 (Kubarev 1992: Pl. XXIII [8, 9]). In these latter cases, the creatures have curved argali horns close to the head.The ambiguity of the imagery of the animals and the species identification of them that is apparent among the Pazyryk Culture materials is seen not only in Kubarev's categories and the reconstructions discussed but also among modern researchers, such as the identification of small wooden heads from Kuturguntas as ibex when they are clearly argali (Polosmak 1996, pp. 99–101).

16 This equid-to-horned-animal transformation through masks of the horses deposited in the burials was not unique at Pazyryk. It occurred earlier in the Pazyryk Culture at Tuekta and Bashadar, as well as at the earlier and contemporary kurgans at the site of Berel (Busova 2015; Ochir-Goryaeva 2020). Most of the earlier masks displayed mountain-goat-like horns; one distinctive exception from Tuekta will be discussed further below.

17 Both transformations are also visible in the tattoos of the male buried in Kurgan 2 at Pazyryk, where masked horses have elaborate horns and antlers, embellished with birds' heads (Rudenko 1970: Figures 53 and 54).

18 Among the remains of the common folk, there are only a few published preserved wooden or leather examples of such a horn, such as one from kurgan 19, Yustyd XII (Kubarev 1991, p. 117, Pl. XLV, 12), associated with a wooden horse head (Kubarev 1991: Pl. XLIV, 12; see Figure 6), another from Ulandryk V, kurgan 2 associated with a wooden animal head (Kubarev 1987, p. 193, Pl. LXXXII, 6), and the leather example from Ulandryk IV, kurgan 2 discussed in note 9 above, where the horn is associated with a goat figurine. Kubarev uses these horns as the standard example of what must have been inserted in the heads of the animals with holes for insertion of horns, as well as comparing some Ulandryk examples with the pair of winged horses with ibex (mountain goat) horns from the headdress of the individual buried at Issyk (Kubarev 1987, p. 109). Subsequent authors follow

Kubarev and thus, even though examples are not preserved elsewhere, they are what are illustrated in most reconstructions. Whether this is correct in all cases is an open question.

[19] See fn. 2.

[20] The caption in Ochir-Goryaeva (2020) incorrectly identifies Figure 2,1. This horse mask is from Pazyryk kurgan 1 (Rudenko 1953, PL. LXXI, 1; Rudenko 1970: Pl 119). The other identification is correct, Pazyryk kurgan 5 (Rudenko 1953, Pl. LXXII, 3,4; Rudenko 1970, Pl. 121 C).

[21] Apparently, neither horns nor antlers were retrieved during the excavation. In the publication, none are shown except as part of reconstructions.

[22] A review of Indo-Iranian shamanism and Pazyryk Culture shamans and shamanic aids such as hallucinogens and musical instruments found in kurgans 2 and 5, and an extensive Russian bibliography on the subject can be found in (Yatsenko 2017, pp. 243–62) and more broadly in (Hasanov 2017, pp. 228–42).

[23] From Ak-Alakha 3, Kurgan 2, Polosmak excavated miniature bronze bell-shaped pendants and says that they are "tagar" beads (Polosmak and Barkova 2005: Figure 2.39). Many such items are known from across Siberia to China attached to pole tops as rattles or jingles that act as an accompaniment to shamanistic practices or other rituals (Cunliffe 2019, p. 274).

[24] Hair and nails do not actually grow after death, although they appear to do so due to the dehydration of the body. (https://uamshealth.com/medical-myths/do-a-persons-hair-and-fingernails-continue-to-grow-after-death/ accessed on 11 January 2023).

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"Animal-Style Art," and Special Finds at Iron Age Settlements in Southeastern Kazakhstan: Chronology, Trade, and Networks during the Iron Age

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Abstract: Two Iron Age settlements, Tuzusai and Taldy Bulak 2 (ca. 500 BC to 1 CE), located in southeastern Kazakhstan on the Talgar alluvial fan north of the Tian Shan range, have yielded a small collection of bone, antler/horn, bronze, and stone artifacts with an affinity to the nomadic art of the first millennium BC. Both settlements date within the period of late Saka culture. Two pieces have decorative ornamentations with zoomorphic imagery: a small carved fragment with carved images of a wing and an ear and a perforated bone disk with the carving of three birds' heads. The other artifacts include objects associated with Saka weaponry or nomadic economy, such as two horn psalias (cheek pieces) and a bronze amulet. A carnelian bead will also be described as an imported object. These special finds were found on the occupation floors of mud brick houses and in the pit houses of settlements, not in grave or burial contexts. The objects were placed in a stratigraphic sequence in the settlement sites. The method for placing these objects within the chronological framework of "animal-style art" is through comparisons with similar objects found throughout Eurasia—a method used in Soviet and post-Soviet archaeology. The results show that the functional and stylistic elements of the six objects indicate that the Talgar settlements were part of a larger world-system of trade and communication along the early Silk Route(s).

Keywords: zoomorphic art; Saka nomadic tradition; horse and weaponry gear; etched carnelian beads; Iron Age agropastoral settlements; world-systems analysis

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1. Introduction

The discussion of zoomorphic art is usually confined to objects or artifacts where animals are depicted. In this essay, we consider the chronological placement of zoomorphic art and artifacts that may signify the presence of long-distance trade and networks at two Iron Age settlements in the Talgar region of southeastern Kazakhstan at the edge of the northern Tian Shan Range (Chang 2018). Tuzusai (ca. 400 BC to 1 CE) and Taldy Bulak 2 (ca. 740 BC to 40 BC) were excavated between 1994 and 2018 by the Kazakh American Archaeological Expedition (KAAE). These two settlement sites have six to eight stratigraphic layers, architectural features such as trash and storage pits, pit houses and mudbrick rectangular houses, fireplaces, and midden deposits. In addition to the architectural features, there is faunal evidence of the herding of sheep, goats, cattle, and horses, as well as the remains of dogs, donkeys, camels, and a small number of wild animals. The Iron Age inhabitants also raised crops, such as wheat, barley, and the two forms of millet. The dual agropastoral economy of the Talgar settlement sites is important, showing that the nomadic confederacies of the Semirech'ye Region of southeastern Kazakhstan lived in sedentary and semi-sedentary villages and hamlets (Chang 2018). The finds described here were all found in occupational contexts, such as house floors, ditches, and post-holes. The finds,

especially the two objects with zoomorphic images (a bone plaque and a bone disk), are definite but meager evidence of the presence of animal-style artifacts. For this time period, objects fashioned of gold and silver are usually found in the elite graves of aristocratic members of the Saka society. At the Talgar excavations, we discovered a small collection of bone, horn, and stone artifacts, which were labelled as special finds. We discuss in detail five of these special finds: (1) an unfinished etched white bead (similar to etched carnelian beads); (2) a fragment of a bone plate or plaque with carved images of a wing of the Scytho-Siberian style; (3) a bone disk depicting three carved birds' heads: (4) two cheek pieces fashioned from horn, known as psalia; and (5) a small bronze wheel. In addition, we provide a summary of the chronological placement of these artifacts in terms of both stratigraphic position at the two settlements and comparative analogies to similar objects found across the Eurasian steppe. The presence of "animal-style" artifacts at the Iron Age settlement of Tuzusai demonstrates that zoomorphic imagery was part of the inventory of the ordinary Saka people living in sedentary or semi-sedentary agropastoral settlements, thus tying them to the same aesthetic traditions found at aristocratic elite burials. This collection of special finds also indicates that the Talgar Iron Age settlements were part of long-distance trade networks tying Central Asia to South Asia, the Pamirs, Northwest China, and Siberia. Yet the Iron Age farmer-herders of Talgar appear to be at the periphery of a larger Iron Age world-system during the first millennium BC (Beaujard 2010).

1.1. Theoretical Arguments

We test the hypothesis that evidence for zoomorphic art found at semi-sedentary Iron Age settlements of the Talgar region fits into a larger narrative about the long-distance trade and religious, political, and ideological ties within the Iron Age nomadic confederacies and early states. The term "animal-style art", or zoomorphic art, was coined by Rostovzeff (Rostovzeff 1967) and describes an historical art style consisting of the depiction of fantastical beasts, predator–prey scenes, and zoomorphic carvings that are often embossed in precious metals such as gold, silver and bronze and frequently found in burial kurgans throughout Eurasia. How did the semi-sedentary agropastoral communities of Talgar align themselves with the aristocratic traditions of nomadic elites? In order to answer this question, we review the archaeological context of these special finds and their possible stylistic and/or economic ties to animal-style art found in other areas of Eurasia. For the most part, art historians and archaeologists examining the zoomorphic art style of the Iron Age have only indirectly been addressing art style as another aspect of commodity trading routes or as evidence for the existence of an Iron Age world-system centered in East Asia (Beaujard 2010, p. 8; Frank and Thompson 2005). A detailed discussion of the Iron Age world-system suggests that the spread of an art tradition is an important aspect of the spheres of interaction between China, Mongolia, the Near East, and South Asia. The Eurasian Iron Age world-systems were based on core–periphery economic ties. Places such as China and the Central Asian desert oases of the Kingdoms of Bactria served as the political and economic centers, while outlying places such as the nomadic confederacies of the Scythians, Saka, Wusun, and others (Beaujard 2010, pp. 9–10) were part of the periphery or semi-periphery of agricultural kingdoms, states, and empires. Animal-style art also reflects the globalizing influence of the Eurasian world-system. One reason for why an aesthetic system of depicting animals across the Eurasian steppe has been overlooked as a data source for world-systems analysis (WSA) is that the original studies were art historical in content. First, a stylistic art tradition that features beasts, fighting scenes, and fantastical combinations of griffins and dragons lends itself to religious and ideological interpretations. Second, the mythical transformations of beasts, an art style found in the first millennia BC, is often traced to earlier belief systems, such as shamanism or Mesopotamian religion. The animal-style art of the Eurasian steppe has similar elements to those found in Assyrian imagery: deer, horses, trees, and humans often in fighting or hunting scenes (Albenda 2008). Third, the gold plaques, jewelry, and iron weapons found in the tumuli of elite individuals in nomadic kurgan burials from Eastern Europe to Mongolia and China in the

first millennium BC speak directly to steppe hierarchy clan leaders, warriors, and shamans, not ordinary folk. Portable art, such as the buckles, plaques, and jewelry found in the elite burials at Berel and Eleke Sazy in the Altai region of Kazakhstan, has resulted in detailed studies of source materials, such as gold and other precious metals, and detailed analyses of craftsmanship (Amir and Martinon-Torres 2021). Yet, little is known about the foundation of nomadic society during the Iron Age. Did the common people also engage in the production, crafting, and trading of 'animal-style' art? By assessing these objects through chronological and geographic comparisons to other such objects found in burial contexts across Eurasia, we may be able to describe aspects of the Eurasian world-system during the Iron Age. We then also establish an analytical method for placing our collection of special finds at Talgar in a larger pan-regional framework of trade and outside influence. These networks or pathways establish spheres of interaction between core and periphery areas, as well as economic pathways along the early Silk Route(s).

Nikolai Kradin (2015) employs world-systems analysis (WSA) to discuss in detail the relations that nomadic groups such as the Hsiung-nu, Mongols, and others had with the outside world. We build upon Khazanov's (1994) thesis about the Eurasian nomadic polities requiring relations with the outside world, not merely for trade in commodities such as grain and silk or as predatory empires, but for maintaining the dynamic force of innovation and resilience within their own societies. Therefore, it seems logical that nomadic polities were at the forefront of adopting outside influences and transforming them into a new synthesis. Zoomorphic art could be particularly symbolic of both the idiosyncratic and syncretic visual vocabularies of the steppe (Andreeva 2018). The Talgar settlements are Iron Age hamlets or villages that were year-round settlements. The architecture at the settlements is simple. The artifact inventories of handmade household ceramics (bowls, jars, plates, cooking vessels, and storage vessels), copper, iron, and bronze fragments, and bone tools (scrapers, awls, and a rare find of an arrowpoint) suggest that these were the occupation places of common folk such as farmers and herders, not the elite buried in the nearby kurgans (Chang 2018). Thus, how did the Talgar folk of the first millennia BC obtain objects with zoomorphic imagery or exotic items such as etched stone beads or bronze wheels? Here, we must develop our own time–space systematics, that is, to place our finds in a geographical location and in a chronological sequence.

1.2. Study Area

The Talgar alluvial fan is found to the north of the Zailiisky Alatau group of the western Tian Shan Range. The Talgar River originates in the upper regions of Peak Talgar (ca. 5000 m asl) and is fed by seasonal glacial melt and rainfall (see Figure 1, locator map).

As the river opens onto the alluvial deposits, there is a fan of stream channels branching north toward the desert steppe. This alluvial fan, along with at least 14 fans along the base of the Zailiisky Alatau range, forms a band of rich arable steppe land on the south side of the Ili River Basin. Tuzusai, a large Iron Age settlement dating from 590 BC to 75 CE (the entire range of calibrated radiometric dates), is about 8 to 10 hectares in size. Taldy Bulak 2 is smaller in size (less than 2 hectares) and has radiometric dates indicating activity from 775 BC to 40 BC (see Figure 2, Google Maps image of the Talgar fan). Both settlements have six to eight occupation horizons, and a description of the finds is presented in Table 1.

Figure 1. Map of Kazakhstan. Talgar is 25 km east of Almaty.

Figure 2. Google Maps image showing the Talgar fan and the location of the two settlements: Tuzusai and Taldy Bulak 2.

Table 1. List of special finds, context and feature association, and measurements.

Artifact	Description	Site Excavation, Context	Provenience	Measurement
Etched stone bead	Small tubular bead with geometric etching, drilled on both ends, drill hole was not completed	Tuzusai 2008 excavations, house 4, floor level 4, phase 1	Quadrat DZ-3, level 13, 290 cm below datum (1.3 m below surface)	1.9 cm in length, 0.7 cm in width
"Animal-style" bone plate/plaque fragment	Long bone fragment carved on outer convex side with wing and ear image	Tuzusai 2011 excavations Pit house 2B, upper occupational floor, phase 2	Quadrat N-2, level 7, 210 cm below datum (50 cm below surface)	3.8 cm × 2.9 cm × 0.83 cm
Two horn cheek pieces with drilled holes (psalias, or horse bridle pieces)	Antler/horn pieces with drilled holes, first piece has two holes, second piece has two holes, traces of two additional holes at base are most likely decorative elements	Tuzusai 2013 excavations Post-hole (Context 56) House 6, phase 1	Quadrat V-15, level 15, 290 cm below datum (1.3 m below surface)	One is 10 cm in length, the other is 11.5 cm in length
Bone disk with three birds' heads with beaks	Bone disk has a center hole surrounded by carved birds' heads, each head has one eye and a long curved beak	Tuzusai 2010 excavations Outside edge of pit house 6 on the southern edge, phase 1	Quadrat E-9, level 13, 283 cm below datum (1.2 m below surface)	3.7 cm in diameter, max. thickness 0.5 cm. Center hole is 0.8 cm in diameter
Bronze wheel	Circular disk with eight perforations, five holes not completely finished	Taldy Bulak 2 2005 excavations Ditch (feature 18), stratum 8, early occupation phase	Quadrat V-3, stratum 8, 207 cm below datum (60 cm below surface)	2.4 cm in diameter, 0.4 cm in thickness, center hole is 0.24 cm in diameter

In Figure 2, we show the locations of the two settlements where the special finds discussed in this article were obtained. Each settlement is an Iron Age agropastoral settlement. Tuzusai is about 7 km from the modern town of Talgar, and Taldy Bulak is about 5 km from Talgar.

1.3. The Finds

Each quadrat is a 2 m × 2 m unit. The two sites were dug at arbitrary levels that were converted to natural strata. For Tuzusai, the stratigraphic designations of stratum 1–3 belong to phase 1 (400–200 BC), and stratum 4–6 is designated as phase 2 (100 BC–1 CE). For Taldy Bulak 2, the earliest phase (400–350 BC) corresponds to phase 1 at Tuzusai (400–200 BC) (Chang 2018, p. 34).

2. Results

In this section, each of the five objects described here are compared to similar objects/items found at known archaeological sites, usually from burial or grave inventories. The descriptions include comparisons to a wide range of similar objects and their chronological placement. We draw historical and archaeological interpretations from the results of our comparative analyses.

2.1. Etched Stone Bead (Bleached Carnelian Bead) (Figure 3)

This stone bead has a center hole drilled at each end, but the drill hole was never completed. The white stone material has been described as bleached carnelian, usually traced to its original production site in the Indus Valley (Beck 1930; Kenoyer 2017; Zhao 2014). Recently, Brunet (2009) suggested that there were separate centers of carnelian production in Armenia and the United Arab Emirates as far back as the Bronze Age. Zhao (2014, p. 177) found carnelian beads in Xinjiang with geometric designs and dots that he labels as type B, quite similar to this bead. Specific examples were found from grave M69 at Lijiasan Cemetery, Jiangechuan.

Figure 3. Etched stone bead from Tuzusai.

We have decided to exercise caution when interpreting the etched white stone that resembles the Indus Valley carnelian beads. If the occupants of Talgar or their craftsmen did produce a copy, it still suggests that the Talgar IA people had some contact with Indus Valley trade items (see Figure 4). Additionally, the fact that etched beads also appear in Northwest China and date to the first millennium BC allows us to posit that a network existed from the Indus Valley to the Pamirs and further east to Semirech'ye (Talgar region) and then Xinjiang (see Figure 4). It is also important to note that the Soviet literature shows that Soviet archaeologists recorded carnelian beads in Central Tian Shan and in the Pamirs, with beads dating from about the 5th century to 2nd century BC (Bernshtam 1952). This

corresponds to phase 1 at Tuzusai. Therefore, the chronological contexts of the comparative materials found in kurgan burials and settlements (Daraut-Kurgan settlement), at the Saka burial in the Pamirs (Bernshtam 1952), and at the Xinjiang cemetery (Litvinsky 1972; Zhao 2014) are indicative of a network spanning from the Indian subcontinent through the Pamirs, across central and northern Tian Shan, and into Xinjiang.

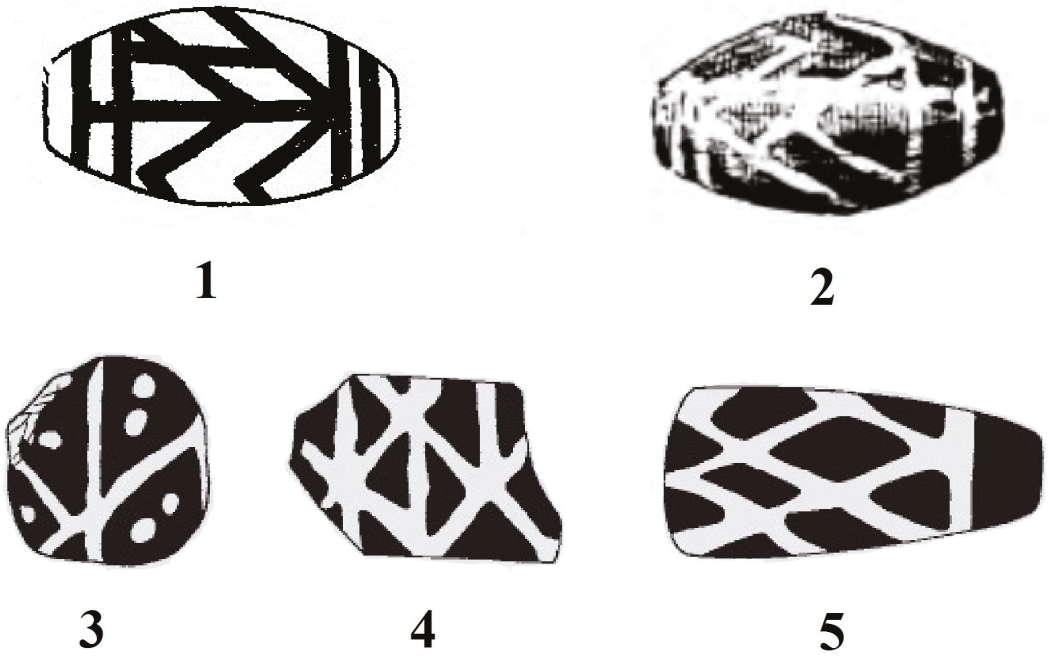

Figure 4. 1—Zharty-Gumbaz I burial ground, Pamir; 2—Daraut-Kurgan settlement, Alai; 3–5—Khotan area, Xinjiang (1—after B. A. Litvinsky (1972); 2—after A. N. Bernshtam (1952); 3 and 4—after Deyun Zhao (2014)).

We leave the question as to whether the Talgar etched stone bead is a copy or a real carnelian bead to future material analysis of the stone and the etching process.

2.2. Animal-Style Bone Plaque Fragment (Figure 5)

This plaque is a fragment of a long bone with an engraved image of a wing. It appears to have the outline of an ear on the right side and the wings of a bird on the left side. Therefore, it is a mythical creature (Andreeva 2018) (see Figure 5). The Issyk Golden Warrior kurgan excavated in 1969 is only 25 km from Tuzusai, where this bone plaque was found.

Volute-shaped ornamental motifs resembling the wings of a mythical creature are clearly visible on the plaque. However, due to the fact that the plaque is not intact, the image of this creature is not entirely clear. Examples of similar wing decorations found throughout the Eurasian steppe are presented in Figure 6.

Figure 5. Animal-style bone plaque from Tuzusai.

However, the motif of the wing is quite well known in the art of the Tien Shan Saka. Based on this iconography, M. K. Seitkaliev (2014) came to the conclusion that Saka art emerged from Achaemenid art; therefore, almost all samples here date back to no earlier than the end of the 6th century BC. This can be clearly seen on a plaque from the Saka burial ground in Zhetytobe near the city of Taraz dated to between the 5th and 4th centuries BC. Moreover, the wing from the plaque at Tuzusai resembles the wings of the mythical creatures on bracelets and other items from the Oxus treasure (Seitkaliev 2014) (Figure 6(8)). Thus, there is little doubt about their ancient Iranian origin.

Almost all comparisons of winged imagery from the Tien Shan region suggest these designs as being representative of a mythical winged creature. The bone plaque fragment that depicts a mythical winged creature from the Tuura-Suu burial ground in Issyk-Kul (Figure 6(1)) is the most similar example. This bone plaque dates from between the 5th and 3rd centuries BC (Mokrinin and Garushenko 1975, p. 78, Figure 29). Additionally, a number of images from the famous Issyk mound dating back to the 4th century BC have similar wing iconography (Akishev 1978, Table 25, 1; Table 62). In addition, images of the mythical wing are found on plaques made of gold foil from the Saka burial grounds in the Ketmen-Tyube Valley in western Tien Shan, which date to between the 5th and 3rd centuries BC (Figure 6(5)).

A number of similar wing interpretations are recorded in the iconography of fantastic creatures found in the Siberian collection of Peter I (Figure 6(8,9)). All of them date to between the 6th and 3rd centuries BC and bear the influence of Achaemenid art (Rudenko 1962, pp. 17–18, Table, XI, 1,2; Table XVII). At the same time, the origin of some of these items can be directly related to Iran or the Central Asian satrapies of the Achaemenid period. However, the motif of the wing is quite widely represented in the depictions of mythical creatures in Pazyryk art, where it was also borrowed from ancient Persian art (Rudenko 1970).

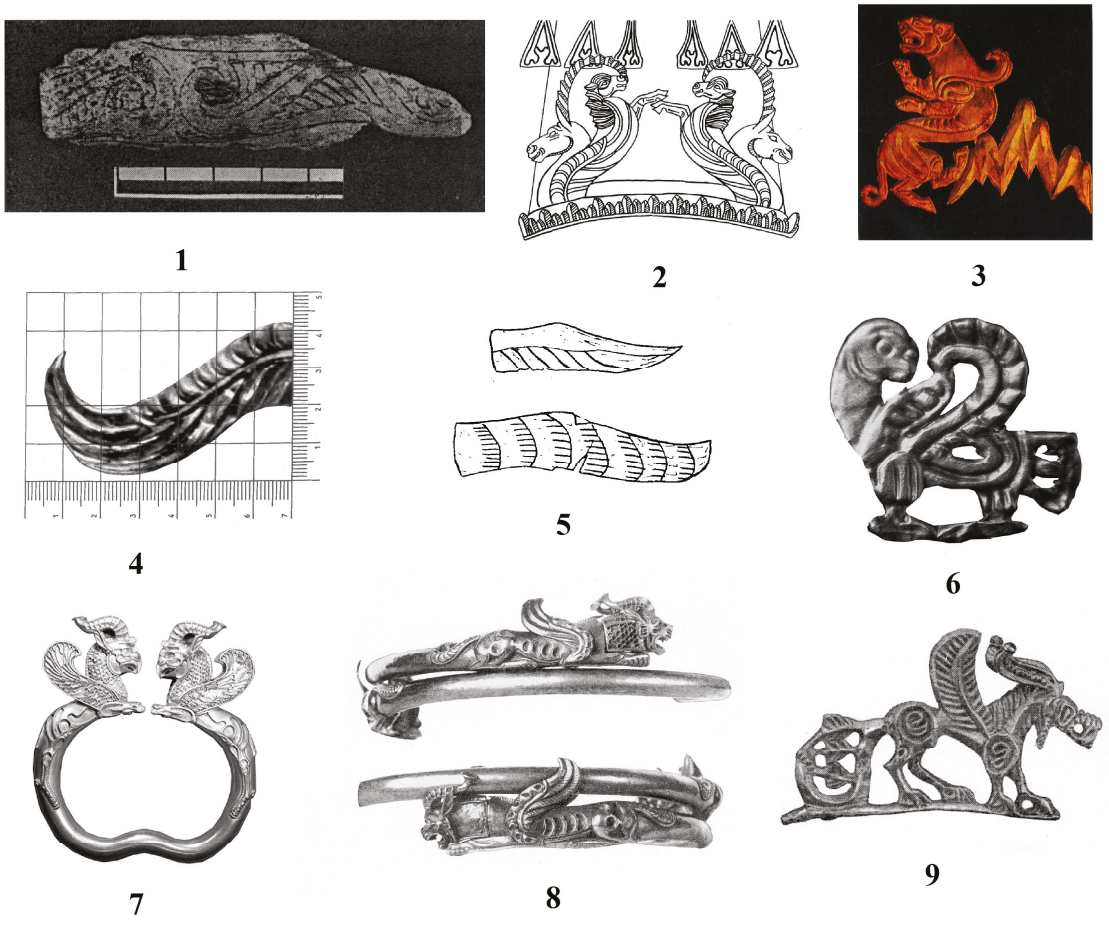

Figure 6. 1—Tuura-Suu burial ground, Issyk-Kul; 2–4—Issyk barrow; 5—Jal-Aryk burial ground, Ketmen-Tyube Valley, western Tien Shan; 6—Zhetytobe burial ground, southern Kazakhstan; 7—Oxus treasure; 8–9—Siberian collection of Peter the Great (1—after Mokrinin and Garushenko 1975; 2–4—after K. A. (Akishev 1978); 5—after K. I. Tashbaeva (2011); 6–7—after M. K. Seitkaliev (2014); 8–9—after S. I. Rudenko (1962)).

The ear motif has some similarity to the small elongated ears with internal parallel lines that are found on a carved bone spoon with motifs of griffins from the 6th to 5th centuries BC (MA AA0 74/75) (eds. Chang and Guroff 2006, p. 104). These ear motifs are comparable to those found on Sarmatian objects. In our search for parallel imagery, we note that horses, donkeys, and deer often have elongated ears, while panthers and other felines have round-shaped ears.

Thus, despite the fact that the plaque from Tuzusai is a fragment, it reflects a common motif for the art of the Saka.

2.3. Horn Cheek Pieces (Psalias) (Figure 7)

These two *psalias*, or horn cheek pieces, were found in situ lying side by side in the 2013 Tuzusai excavations right next to a post-hole from house 6.

Figure 7. Horn cheek pieces from Tuzusai.

Horn cheek pieces are considered the most archaic form of cheek pieces. Most cheek pieces, or *psalias*, are fashioned from iron or bronze (Besetayev and Kariyev 2016). Similar cheek pieces were found in Central Asia in the burial grounds of Uygarak and Tagisken in the Aral Sea region, as well at the settlements of Chust and Dalverzin in the Ferghana Valley (Shulga 2015, pp. 29–30, 40–43, 88–90, 178, Figure 15.9a; Figure 55.9). However, unlike the cheek pieces frPom Tuzusai, they have three holes. Thus, these cheek pieces are older than the Tuzusai cheek pieces.

This type of horse bridle item, as a rule, dates from between the 8th and early 6th centuries BC. In fact, later horn cheek pieces are completely unknown in ancient Central Asia. Therefore, it is noteworthy that the horn cheek pieces from Tuzusai, which appear archaic, have two holes instead of three. The evolution of the horse bridle on the Eurasian steppe undergoes a transition from the earlier three-hole cheek pieces to the later two-hole ones (Besetayev and Kariyev 2016, pp. 74–75; Bokovenko 1979). This change takes place the middle of the 6th century BC. Therefore, the cheek pieces from Tuzusai are a reflection of these stylistic differences and may actually date to between the second half of the 6th and the first half of the 5th centuries BC. Bone cheek pieces that are similar in appearance have been found from the Pazyryk culture of the Gorny Altai, with pieces dating to the pre-Bashdar period (between the second half of the 6th and the first half of the 5th centuries BC). Similar cheek pieces have been found in the Kamenskaya and Bystryanskaya cultures of the forest-steppe Altai during the same time period.

Thus, the horn cheek pieces from Tuzusai belong to between the second half of the 6th and the first half of the 5th centuries BC.

2.4. Bone Disk with Three Birds' Heads with Beaks (Figure 8)

This artifact was found at Tuzusai in 2010. It was found on the outside edge of pit house 6 in the southernmost baulk wall of the Tuzusai excavation unit. The bone disk was probably used as a decorative piece for weaponry. The birds' heads are indeed schematic and not entirely obvious, except for the fact that the field archaeologists noted in field notes

that each head had a small perforation in the larger part of the shape that appeared to be the eye of each bird.

Figure 8. Bone disk with carved bird heads, each with an eye dot in the rounded part.

This bone disk is similar in appearance to other objects made of metal and without decoration that were found in burials of the Tian Shan Saka. For example, in mound 25 at the Bes Shatyr burial ground, a similar iron disk was found, which apparently was associated with a quiver case with arrows (Akishev and Kushaev 1963, Figure 25) (see Figure 9(2)).

The chronological placement of the Tuzusai disk can be determined from the carved patterns on the front side of the disk (these appear as figures in the form of a bird or griffin in profile). Similar bird or griffin images have been found elsewhere in the Tian Shan region. For example, a similar image was found on a ritual stone table from Semirech'ye dating to between the 5th and 3rd centuries BC (Bernshtam 1952, p. 107, Table XL) (see Figure 9(3)). Similar motifs have also been employed as independent decorative elements, such as those found on the gold foil plaques discovered at the Tenelik Barrow dated to between the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC by K.A. Akishev and A.K. Akishev (Akishev and Akishev 1983, p. 157) (see Figure 9(2)).

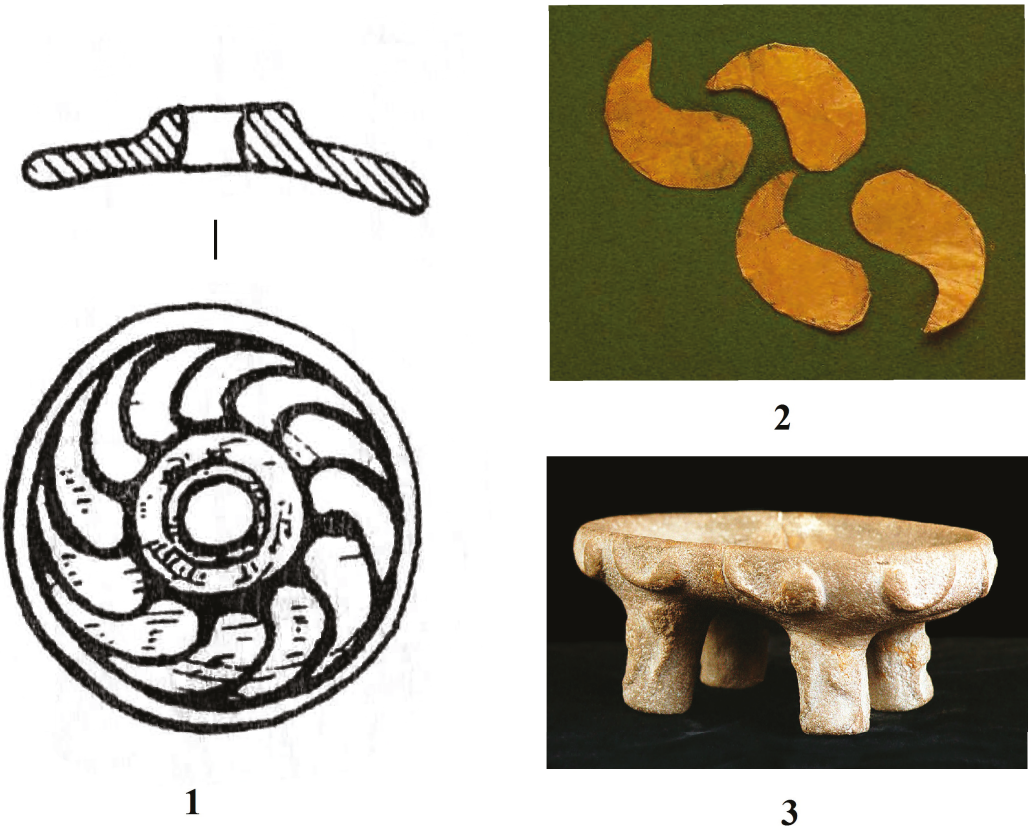

Figure 9. 1—Suglug-Khem burial ground, Tuva; 2—Tenlik barrow, southeastern Kazakhstan (Semirech'ie); 3—Chu Valley (1—after V. A. Semenov (2003); 2—after Akishev and Akishev (1983); 3—after A. N. Bernshtam (1952)).

Beyond the Tian Shan region, similar decorative objects have been found. A bone disk with carved images of the heads of birds of prey or that of a griffin was discovered at the Suglug-Khem burial ground in Tuva. However, these motifs were placed on the front surface of the disk in greater numbers (Semenov 2003). This particular disk, based on its position in the burial, was associated with the fittings of a combat belt or with the straps of a quiver with arrows. The Suglug-Khem find is dated to between the 4th and 2nd centuries BC.

Therefore, the Tuzusai bone disk, according to these comparisons, probably dates to the between 4th and 2nd centuries BC.

In summary, we suggest that this ornamental piece was part of a belt, a quiver, or other dress element. It could have been associated with warriors or with bow and arrow equipment typical of Saka culture between the 5th and 2nd centuries BC. Comparative material from Pazyryk culture, as well as material from Tuva and the nearby Bes Shatyr kurgans, also suggests that this ornamental bone disk expresses similar aesthetic imagery to that of the greater Scytho–Saka–Siberian complex (Siberia, Tuva, and the northern Tian Shan region). Thus, we consider the larger question concerning why pan-regional aesthetic traditions such as zoomorphic imagery and ornamentation on belts and fastenings were widespread throughout the nomadic world of the first millennia. Was this simply a factor

of an artistic horizon, or was it more specifically related to the broad economic and political interactions of steppe culture and tradition in this important period?

2.5. Bronze Wheel (Figure 9)

The bronze wheel was discovered in the bottom of a large ditch found at Taldy Bulak 2, an Iron Age settlement about 5.5 km to the southeast of the Tuzusai settlement. This bronze wheel was unfinished; of the eight perforations surrounding the central hole, only three were completely perforated.

Figure 10 shows the bronze wheel found at Taldy Bulak in the bottom of an ancient ditch. This bronze wheel has rays or spokes radiating from the center hole. Such a find is extraordinary for the Tian Shan region. Until this discovery at Taldy Bulak 2, these artifact types were identified as chance finds, often with varied explanations for their purpose and chronological placement. The discovery of this artifact at the Taldy Bulak 2 settlement clarifies some of the questions surrounding the cultural affiliation and chronological placement of bronze wheels.

Figure 10. Bronze wheel from Taldy Bulak 2.

Figure 11 shows comparable bronze wheels from other regions of the Eurasian steppe. From the Saka territory of the Tian Shan, a similar wheel was discovered in the Ketmen-Tyube Valley in western Tian Shan (Figure 11(1)). This find has been dated to between the 5th and 3rd centuries BC (Tashbaeva 2011, p. 73, Figure 70, 3).

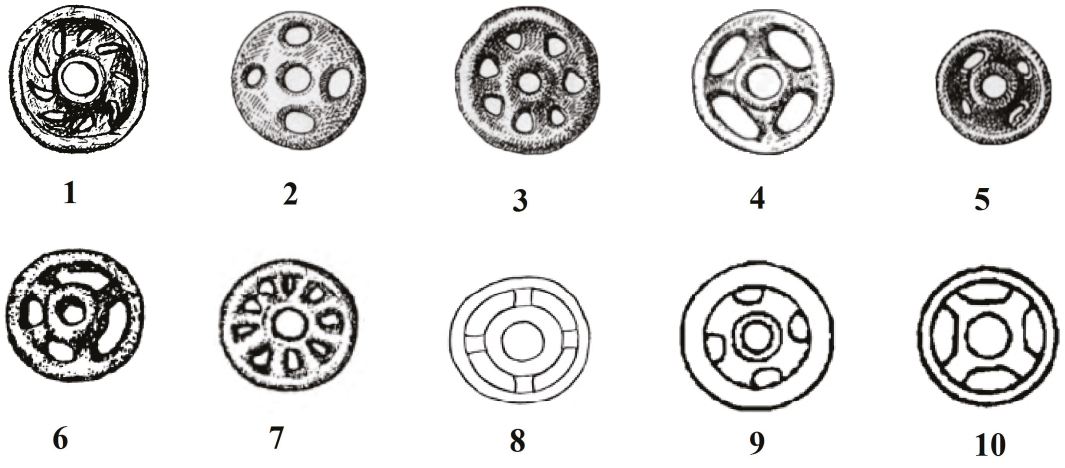

Figure 11. Bronze wheel. 1—Jal-Aryk burial ground, Ketmen-Tyube Valley, western Tien Shan; 2–5—Sauromat culture, South Urals; 6–7—Kamenskaya culture, forest-steppe Altai; 8–10—northern Xinxiang (1—after K. I. Tashbaeva (2011); 2–5—after K. F. Smirnov (1964); 6—after V. A. Mogilnikov (1997); 7—Umansky et al. (2005); Figure 10(8–10)—after P. I. Shulga (2010)).

Bronze wheels with a radial pattern are quite well known in other cultural areas of the early Iron Age in the Eurasian steppe zone. Such finds have been identified in the Sauromatian culture of the southern Urals (Figure 11(2–5)). KF. Smirnov (1964, p. 64) dated these finds to between the 6th and 4th centuries BC and classified them as solar amulets. He suggested that they were associated with quivers from that time period and were used to protect their owners (Smirnov 1964, p. 64, Figure 71(Smirnov)).

In addition to these bronze wheels, wheels such as the Taldy Bulak wheel were also discovered from the Kamenskaya culture of the forest-steppe Altai [Figure 11(6)]. Mogilnikov (1997, p. 87, Figure 35a (Mogilnikov)) also identified them as amulets. It is noteworthy that, in one example (Figure 11(7)), a bronze wheel was found on a stone altar at a burial site (Umansky et al. 2005, p. 26, Figure 52(Umansky et al.)). The bronze wheel found inside the stone altar is presented in Figure 12. This also corroborates interpretations suggesting the sacred nature of these objects. For Kamenskaya culture, these bronze wheels date to between the 5th and 3rd centuries BC.

It is also important to focus on the bronze wheels found in funerary monuments in the northern part of Xinjiang [Figure 11(8–10)]. These artifacts date to the 6th century BC. It is also worth noting that P. I. Shulga believes that these artifacts are spindle whorls (Shulga 2010, Figure 81(Shulga)) (Figure 11(8–10)); however, this seems far-fetched since the bronze wheels are light in weight and small in size for spindle whorls. Yet, the possible use of such artifacts for spinning fine fabrics such as silk should not be ruled out.

This bronze wheel was found at the bottom of a long narrow ditch separating the storage areas from the two pit houses at the settlement of Taldy Bulak 2 and dates back to the earliest cultural levels. Its stratigraphic position corresponds roughly to the time periods suggested for the bronze wheels found elsewhere. The bronze wheel could have possible connections to solar imagery and may have been associated with the protection of warriors. Other bronze wheels have been found along with quivers or as part of ritual practices (e.g., on a stone altar) (Umansky et al. 2005).

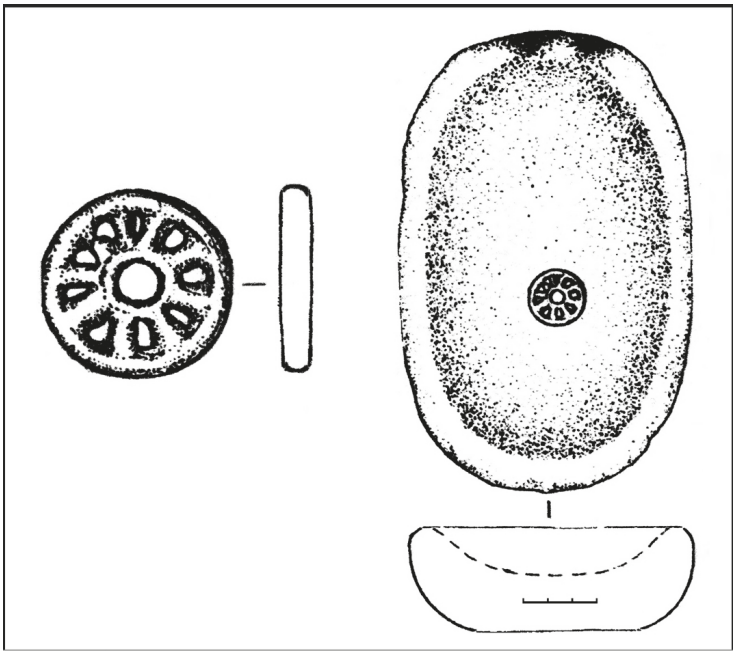

Figure 12. A bronze wheel found inside a stone altar (Umansky et al. 2005; pp. 8–10—after P.I. Shulga 2010).

3. Discussion

In summary, these six items found on the occupational surfaces of pit houses, houses, or in a ditch at the Tuzusai and Taldy Bulak settlements of Talgar are part of a pan-regional nomadic culture that was not restricted to grave or burial contexts. In our opinion, this indicates that "animal-style objects" and such visual imagery were also part of the lives of ordinary folk, not just the aristocratic elite. Additionally, the presence of a copy of a carnelian bead, potentially an original bead, is indicative of long-distance trade and interactions between South Asia, Central Asia, and the steppe regions of Eurasia. We consider the Talgar settlements of the middle to late Saka period to be part of these commodity trade routes. From a methodological standpoint, the careful work conducted by S. Ivanov involving the use of comparative analogies to establish similarities between our special finds and the broader corpus of Scytho–Saka–Siberian material of the first millennia shows an exceptional congruence between radiometric dating from our stratigraphic sequences and the method of comparative analogy often employed by Soviet and post-Soviet archaeologists. This is indeed heartening news for art historians who also work with chronological collections of objects, visual imagery, and artistic style horizons through comparisons across the Eurasian region (Andreeva 2018).

This style not only represented a repertoire of shared iconography, but was also functional. The style was associated with commodity production, trade practices, and socio-economic functions for the nomadic Saka living in the Talgar region. The Saka, who practiced both agriculture and animal herding and were sedentary or semi-sedentary, engaged in a broader cultural tradition that included zoomorphic imagery, horse riding (the *psalia*), and an attention to items associated with costume decoration and warrior cults. Additionally, we argue that zoomorphic "animal-style" artistic traditions can be used to discuss the interaction spheres between core states and periphery areas (Beaujard 2010). There is no doubt that Talgar was a periphery area on the edge of the northern Tian Shan mountains, which, though near to the Issyk cemetery, was distant from the centers of the

Achaemenid Empire, the Greco–Bactrian Kingdoms, and later the Chinese Chou and Han dynasties. Talgar was an integral part of the nomadic Saka cultural tradition. In the future, we hope to explore these spheres of interaction between core states and outlying peripheral nomadic confederacies and states.

4. Materials and Methods

Chronological Sequences

All these artifacts, except the animal-style bone plaque, fall within a middle to late Saka context (500–200 BC). The bone plaque was found in Tuzusai at stratum 3—a transitional occupational level between the upper and lower levels. Here, we consider chronological placement through stratigraphy and site depositional factors such as pit fill, edges, or outside of house features. The chronological placement of the objects is then examined in relation to artifact finds from other regions to provide a separate line of evidence for the chronological dating of the objects. These chronological arrangements can be found in Table 2. None of these artifacts, in and of themselves, have been radiometrically dated, nor have the occupational surfaces where they were situated been dated, except through stratigraphic associations. Despite this, our ability to place these objects within the larger context of archaeological excavations conducted at two Iron Age sites makes this information extremely valuable for others desiring to draw comparisons with our material.

Table 2. Archaeological context, phase dating, and chronological placement according to comparative analogies in the Tian Shan region and regions with close proximity.

Artifact from Talgar	Archaeological Context	Approximate Dates According to Phase Designations (Chang 2018, p. 34)	Chronological Placement: Similar Artifacts Found in the Tian Shan Region
Etched stone bead	Tuzusai 2008 House 4, phase 1	400–300 BC	Figure 4, No. 3—Zharty-Gumbaz burial ground: 500–200 BC No. 2—Daraut-Kurgan settlement, Alai: 300–100 BC
Bone plaque with wing decoration	Tuzusai 2011 Pit house 2 B, upper floor level	400–300 BC 100–1 BC	Figure 6. No. 1—Tuura-Suu burial ground: 500–200 BC No. 2—Isyyk burial: 400–300 BC No. 5—Jal-Aryk burial ground, Ketmen-Tyube Valley, western Tian Shan: 500–200 BC
Two horn cheek pieces	Tuzusai 2013 House 6, post-hole	400–300 BC	Pazyryk culture, pre-Bashdar period: 550–450 BC
Bone disk	Tuzusai 2010 Pit house 6	400–300 BC	Plate 3 No. 2—Tenlik barrow, southeastern Kazakhstan: 300–100 BC No. 3—Chu Valley 500–200 BC
Bronze wheel	Taldy Bulak 2 2005 Ditch, early occupation	400–350 BC	Plate 4 No. 1—Jal-Aryk burial ground, Ketmen-Tyube Valley, western Tian Shan: 500–200 BC No. 8–10—northern Xingiang: 600–500 BC

Table 2 shows the phase designation for each Talgar artifact find according to its stratigraphic placement at the settlements and the chronological placement of similar objects found in the Tian Shan region or those found in close proximity. The phase designations are based on radiometric dating of the archaeological materials found at Tuzusai and Taldy Bulak 2 (Chang 2018, p. 34). Archaeological finds are often found in mixed deposits; therefore, these phase designations may not always correspond to the materials found in burial grounds from the Tian Shan region. Table 2 shows that most of the Saka finds date to the classic to late Saka period, with the exception of the horn cheek pieces that appear to date back to as early as the second half of the 6th century BC. Field archaeologists have often believed that there are earlier deposits at Tuzusai, but such deposits have yet to be dated radiometrically. Additionally, there appears to be one further anomaly, that of the bone plaque with a wing decoration. This bone plaque was found in stratum 3, which is a possible transitional layer between phase 1 and phase 2 at Tuzusai; however, all similar objects found in the Tian Shan region are associated with the earlier period between 500 BC and 300 BC.

Typology and chronological placements are often fraught with inconsistencies, though both the artifact comparisons and relative dating of archaeological contexts (stratigraphy) show a consistent time frame for the Talgar settlements (occupation periods between the classic to late Saka period). This is also a time period when the influence of zoomorphic art, such as that expressed in the bone plaque with a wing decoration and the bone disk with possible birds' heads, was discovered at occupational levels at Tuzusai. These significant examples of zoomorphic art are also direct evidence of the importance of this form of art aesthetic for objects found in settlements, as well as those found at burial sites and mortuary monuments. From these two artifacts, we conclude that Eurasian zoomorphic art is part of both burial and settlement inventories in Saka culture. As pointed out earlier, the horn cheek pieces have no direct comparative examples from the Tian Shan area but are very similar to finds from the distant region of the Pazyryk culture of the Gorny Altai. In a recent paper, Ivanov (2022) traced the direct relationship between the Pazyryk and Kamenskaya cultures and the Saka of the Tian Shan region to the period between 400 and 200 BC. This analysis was based on physical anthropological materials and aDNA samples from burials. According to Ivanov (2022), there have been deep genetic and cultural ties between the Saka and Kamenskaya cultures in the western flanks of the Altai region. It is likely that such connections existed between the pre-Bashdar Pazyrk (in the 6th century BC) and Semirech'ye (the northern Tian Shan). The Tuzusai horn cheek pieces may in fact represent this earlier connection between Pazyryk culture and the Tian Shan Saka.

In Soviet and post-Soviet methodology, objects from graves, kurgans, and other contexts are often placed in chronological frameworks based on descriptive traits (Trigger 2006; Paberzyte and Costopoulos 2009) and dated according to the typological and descriptive characteristics of objects such as metal arrowheads, bridle parts, zoomorphic plaques, and other artifacts. This method of seeking comparisons to other artifacts requires researchers to have vast knowledge and access to descriptions of material items from the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, which are mainly found in Russian language publications. Here, we have retained the original bibliographic references of the Russian language sources so other researchers can more easily trace this source material. In the References section, the Russian publications have been transliterated and translated into English. We have used the method of descriptive analogy to examine the six objects found at the Talgar settlements.

5. Conclusions

The zoomorphic imagery found on the bone disk and the bone plaque from the Tuzusai settlement is indicative of the quotidian nature of an aesthetic style often presumed to be associated with elite burials. Additionally, the congruence of comparative analogies with other finds that range from the classic Scytho–Saka–Siberian period to its later phase is of considerable importance. By the 5th century BC, animal-style art reached its zenith, and had also penetrated into peripheral locations such as the Talgar settlements. A pan-regional

art horizon such as this suggests that there was a visual repertoire, perhaps tied to shamanic or other cultic beliefs, that held the imagination of both settled and nomadic peoples of the first millennia BC. From an economic and sociopolitical viewpoint, we can also see that these widespread influences were part of commodity trade and defined the impact of steppe polities in the globalized world-economy of the Eurasian Iron Age. In future research, we hope that these six special finds will be part of a literature that ties costume elements, weaponry, and dwelling areas to an aesthetic tradition, as well as to the networks and pathways of nomadic politics and trade.

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Animal Imagery in Eastern Han Tomb Reliefs from Shanbei 陕北

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Abstract: Wild and fantastical animals climb, fly, scamper, and prance across pictorial stone carvings decorating Eastern Han tomb doors in northern Shaanxi. Alongside dragons and other mythical animals, bears felicitously dance, tigers grin opening their mouths to roar, and other wild animals frolic in swirling cloudscapes. While the same animals can be found in Eastern Han tomb reliefs and mortuary art in other regions, their frequency, emphasis on plasticity and movement, and combination with the *yunqi* 雲氣 motif are unique to the region. Originating in a hybrid style of art that was created during the Mid-Western Han Dynasty (206 BCE–9 CE), their significance was dependent not so much on any individual creature but on their display as an assemblage of shared forms, behaviors, and habitats. This paper explores how Eastern Han patrons and artists in Shanbei reinvigorated such imagery. It argues that on tomb doors through the region, these same wild and fantastical animals have become a key element of compositions meant to pacify the potentially dangerous realms that awaited the deceased in their postmortem ascension to Heaven (*tian* 天).

Keywords: Han mortuary art; Eastern Han tomb reliefs; animals in mortuary art

1. Introduction

Wild and fantastical animals climb, fly, scamper, and prance across pictorial stone carvings (*huaxiang shi* 畫像石) decorating Eastern Han tomb doors in Shanbei (northern Shaanxi; see map Figure 1). Alongside dragons and other mythical animals, bears felicitously dance, tigers grin as they open their mouths to roar, and camels, deer, mountain goats, foxes, boar, and other wild animals appear in swirling cloudscapes. Anatomically distinct and naturally rendered, at the same time, these animals twist and turn in linear movements that are unrelated to the real action of bodies in space (Shih 1960a, p. 187). While these animals can be found in Eastern Han tomb reliefs and mortuary art in other regions, their frequency, emphasis on plasticity and movement, and combination with a swirling Han decorative motif, meant to suggest clouds and/or *qi* 氣 (pneuma/spirit), is unique to the region.

These animal forms originated in a hybrid style of art created during the Mid-Western Han dynasty (206 BCE–9 CE) that merged Central Asian, Steppe, and Warring States (ca. 475 BCE–221 BCE) traditions and whose significance was dependent not so much on any individual creature, but on their display as an assemblage of shared forms, behaviors, and habitats.[1] Living in the borderlands between the Han and Xiongu Empires, Eastern Han patrons and artists in Shanbei reinvigorated such imagery in their tombs where wild and fantastical animals took pride in place. As a group, these animals served as an important component of a pictorial program designed to aid the deceased in their posthumous journey and transformation to the immortal.[2] In what follows, I will first provide an overview of the characteristics of Eastern Han tombs and tomb reliefs from Shanbei and the Western Han imagery from which the depictions of wild and fantastical fauna in Shanbei are derived. Then, I will show the ways in which these animals were a key component of compositions that were meant to pacify the potentially dangerous realms that awaited the deceased on their ascent to Heaven (*tian* 天).

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Figure 1. Major locations where Eastern Han tombs with stone reliefs have been found in Shaanxi (After Wallace 2011b, Figure 1).

2. Eastern Han Tombs in Shanbei

In the late first and early second centuries CE, civil and military officials, wealthy merchants, and landowners living in the north of the modern province of Shaanxi commissioned tombs decorated with stone carved reliefs.[3] Today this mountainous area is called Shanbei and lies at the edge of the Ordos Basin and the Loess Plateau (Figure 1). From what little is known of individual patrons, most were stationed there, or their families had at some time here, removed from the interior of the Han Empire, and were a minority among other groups living in the area that served as a buffer zone between the Han and Xiongnu Empires. Tomb relief production in Shanbei spanned from roughly the 90s until 140 when the Han government lost control of the region.

Eastern Han tombs decorated with stone reliefs in Shanbei are either single or double-chambered, with a small corridor (*yongdao* 甬道) between the tomb door and the adjacent tomb chamber. The simple single-chambered tombs are small with barrel-vaulted ceilings (*quan ding* 券頂), while double-chambered tombs have two rooms aligned on a central axis. The first room typically has a domed ceiling (*qionglong ding* 穹窿頂), while the rear is barrel-vaulted. The largest double-chambered tombs also have one or two barrel-vaulted side chambers attached to the left and/or right sides of the front room (Wang 2001, pp. 220–21) (Figure 2).

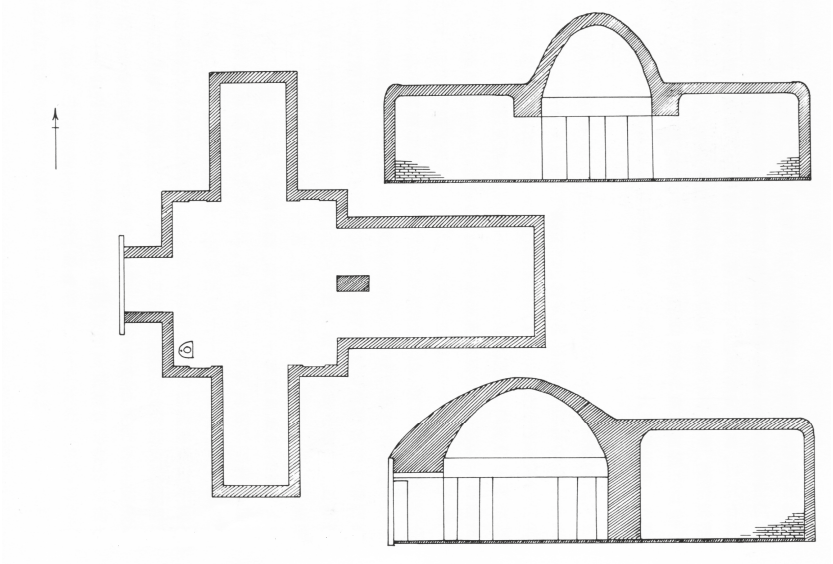

Figure 2. Plan of a multi-chambered tomb excavated at Yanjiacha 延家岔, Suide 綏德, and Shaanxi. The central chamber has a domed ceiling while the other chambers have barrel-vaulted ceilings. Carved reliefs decorate the tomb doorway, and the areas around the entranceway to the two side and rear chambers (After Dai and Li 1983, Figure 1).

One unique aspect of tomb construction in the region is that stones with pictorial carvings were only used to construct the doorways and entranceways between some of the inner chambers, while the rest of the tomb was made of bricks. A standard tomb doorway was composed of five stone slabs: one lintel and two side and door panels (Figure 3). Typically, a lintel and two side panels framed the entranceways in the interior of multi-chambered tombs. Reliefs were modularly constructed, with stone carvers developing a set repertoire of motifs, which through the use of stencils and other means, were replicated and recombined in different tombs (Barbieri-Low 2007, pp. 91–92; Li 2019, pp. 77–79; Ruitenbeek 2008, pp. 152–53).[4]

A range of animals populates the reliefs carved by these artisans. In scenes that depict daily life, cattle, pigs, sheep, horses, dogs, camels, elephants, and trained raptors are helpers and/or sources of food for the deceased in representations of agriculture, animal husbandry, hunting, and chariot and horse processions.[5] Most of these animals fall within the general category of the six domesticated animals *liu chu* 六畜 (horse, ox, sheep, chicken, pig, and dog) mentioned in pre-Han and Han texts (Sterckx 2006) and are commonly depicted in Eastern Han tomb reliefs and molded bricks. Depictions of animal husbandry and representations of camels and trained falcons are more regionally specific, probably reflecting the local ecology and traditions. Even more common and distinctive to the region are an assembly of wild and fantastical animals: deer, bear, camels, foxes, mountain goats, owls, tigers, wild boar, *tianma* 天馬 (winged horses), dragons, *qilin* 麒麟 (a one-horned creature), and assorted hybrids.[6] These animals appear regularly in small and large groups in multiple compositions on the side panels and lintels decorating the doorways to tombs throughout the region.

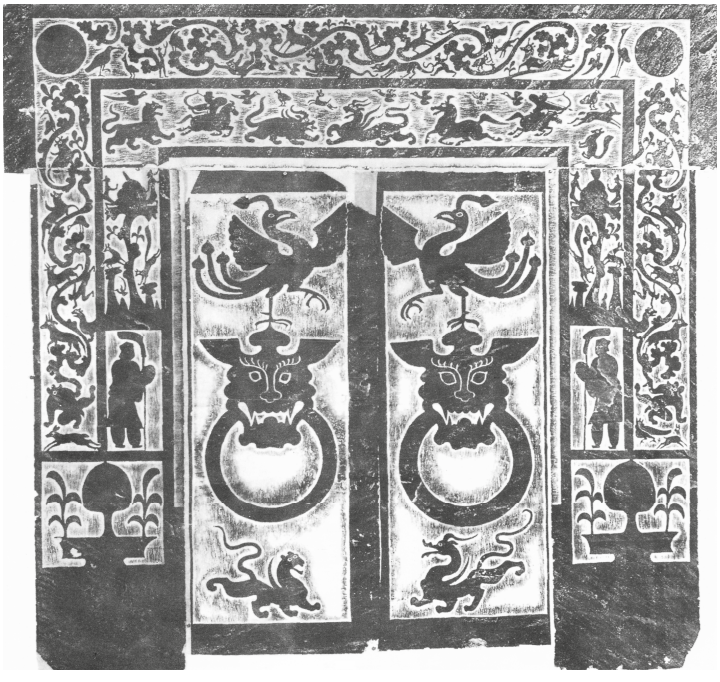

Figure 3. Rubbing of a tomb doorway, Hejiagou 賀家溝, Qingjian 清澗, Shaanxi. Eastern Han dynasty (After Li et al. 1995, p. 216).

The panels decorating a tomb door from Qingjian 清澗, Shaanxi, are representative of the pictorial design on many of the entrances to Eastern Han tombs in the region. On the lintel and the outer portion of about two-thirds of the side panels, and forming a frame for the rest of the decoration, bears, cranes, *qilin*, foxes, and tigers frolic among and/or their bodies are merged with an undulating line with cloud-like projections: a version of the *yunqi* 云氣 motif, popular in Han art (Munakata 1991, pp. 20–21). These lines trail upwards on either side of the door frame and stretch across its lintel, on either side of which are round circles representing the sun and moon. These animals are also joined by avian–human hybrids called *xian* (immortals). In Shanbei, the undulating line in which animals climb and are entwined may have craggy mountain-like appendages or, as in this particular example, have extensions reminiscent of depictions of *lingzhi* 靈芝: an immortality-granting fungus that is also depicted in the region and is common in Han art (Powers 1983, pp. 287–88).

Across the lower portion of the lintel, a winged hybrid, dragon, *tianma* 天馬 (lit. "heavenly horse; a mythical winged horse), and *qilin* are framed by two mounted archers; one turns his back in his saddle to take aim at a tiger while the other faces forward toward a bird, deer, and fox. On the right-side panel, Xiwangmu 西王母 (the Queen Mother of the West), a deity who presides over an immortal paradise, sits atop a pedestal-shaped mountain. The organic lines and form of the pedestal's support are also suggestive of *lingzhi*. On the left side of the panel, atop a similarly shaped mountain, two immortals sit on either side of a mounded, unidentifiable object.[7] *Lingzhi* sprouts from the sides of the winding pedestal, and a fox and deer frolic on either side of the two smaller mountains. Below the carvings, two-door guardians/officials stand facing the door, and below them are depictions of mountain-shaped incense burners (*boshanlu* 博山爐), with *lingzhi* growing out of their basins. Finally, on the door panels themselves, two *zhuque* 朱雀 (vermillion birds) perch on *pushou* 鋪獸: a type of monster mask often depicted on real knockers, below which a winged tiger and dragon stand facing one another.[8]

3. Western Han Precedents: Depictions of a Harmonious Imperium

The wild and fantastical animals that appear on this door and in other tomb reliefs from Shanbei originated in a style of art that emerged during the Western Han, which was a mixture of Central Asian, Steppe, and regional Warring States period traditions (Kost 2017; Miller 2018; Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens 1994, 2008; Rawson 1989; Rawson 1983, pp. 37–45; Rawson 2006; Psarras 2019). Within this new visual idiom, real and fantastical animals are depicted in motion, often with a high degree of naturalism, while at the same time blurring the boundaries between the known and the imaginary. Concurrently animals also became symbols of human qualities, exotic places, or signs of divine approval or disapproval. Based on the idea of the power of the Han emperor and bureaucracy to order both the animal and human worlds, objects depicting wild and fantastical animals brought into three-dimensional form a utopian vision of many cultures and creatures living in harmony under the Han Empire. Through the use of seriation, distinctive popular designs echoing this general theme were created in the imperial workshops spread out across the empire, inspiring copies made by local workshops (Miller 2018).

The depiction of animals on two surviving types of objects created during this period—*bini* 俾倪chariot fittings and mountain-shaped censers—provide strong visual precedents for the animals depicted in Eastern Han tombs from Shanbei. *Bini* were large decorative fittings that reinforced permanent joints on ceremonial chariots, which were buried with members of the imperial family or others of high rank. On a *bini* excavated in Sanpanshan 三盤山, Hebei, from the tomb of a king of the Zhongshan state (ca. 90 BCE), real and fantastical animals playfully tumble in a fabulous landscape of swirling clouds: a motif which developed out of patterns on lacquers and textiles from the state of Chu 楚 (704–223 BCE). They are joined by foreign people, including figures riding on an elephant, a mounted archer, and a man riding a camel (Figure 4). In the four registers, deer, rabbits, foxes, and mountain goats climb, perch on, or leap from an undulating line, or the line's craggy mountain-like extensions bears rest or strike various poses, and tigers appear singularly in scenes of combat, or as the mounted archer's prey. Fantastical creatures include a large dragon and phoenix, a *tianma*, a *bixie* 辟邪 (a winged hybrid), and early depictions of *xian*. The motif of the mounted archer, the profusion of tigers, and the figures on the camel and elephant all reference and/or are adapted from visual cultures to the north, south, and west of the Han Empire (Wu 1984; Rawson 1983; Benningson 2005, p. 347). By the time this chariot ornament was cast, the decorative pattern of wild and fantastical animals and the *yunqi* cloud motif was quickly becoming ubiquitous across media (for lacquer objects, see Powers 1983, pp. 286–88).[9]

Additionally, appearing in the mid-Western Han are mountain-shaped censers (*boshanlu*), which transform the *yunqi* and animal motif into three-dimensional forms (Munakata 1991, p. 29) (Figure 5).[10] These bowl-shaped vessels have conical tops with holes that allow for the release of smoke. Typically, the peaks that make up the top of the censer have several clearly demarcated secondary hills with "space cells" in which humans and animals are depicted. A mountain censer that provides a good sense of animal imagery emerging from the imperial workshops comes from the tomb of Lady Dou Wan 竇綰 (ca. 113 BCE), who was a consort of Prince Liu Sheng 劉勝 and a member of the Han imperial family. Sitting in the midst of a round basin, a smiling, half-clad figure sits on a hybrid animal while holding the censer aloft. Four large animals prance across the belly of the censer: a dragon, camel, bird, and tiger; their bodies are intertwined in swirling lines.[11] Within the space cells above are scenes of animal combat, animal–human combat, and a man leading a cart; a lone tiger and bear can be found in the craggy folds of the mountain.[12] As in the case of the decoration on the *bini*, the style of the depiction, as well as the motifs of the camel, animal combat, and the man leading a cart, are derived from the visual culture of groups living along the northwestern frontier of the Han Empire (Rawson 2006, pp. 80–81).[13]

Figure 4. Artist's rendering of a panel from an inlaid bronze chariot ornament from Sanpanshan, Hebei. Western Han dynasty, ca. 90 BCE (After Zhonghua renmin gonghe guo chutu wenwu zhanlan zhanpin xuanji 1973, p. 85).

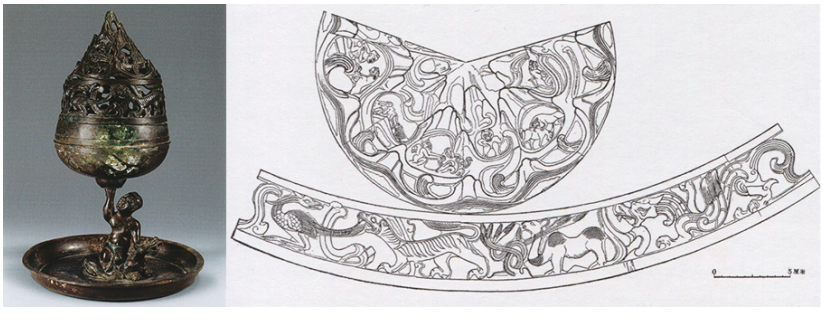

Figure 5. Bronze *boshanlu* from the tomb of Lady Dou Wan (ca. 113 BCE) (After Zhongguo shehui kexue kaogu yanjiusuo 1978, Figure 17).

A comparison of the imagery on the Sanpanshan *bini* to an Eastern Han tomb lintel from Mizhi 米脂, Shaanxi, demonstrates how wild and fantastical the animals in Eastern Han tomb reliefs are from Shanbei, possessing analogous animal forms, behaviors, and environments. On the lintel, a tiger, dragon, deer, foxes, owl, crane, and other birds and animals inhabit a swirling cloudscape. They are joined by a *xian* and a rabbit pounding the elixir of immortality: an addition to the earlier repertoire of animals on the *bini* connected to the Han immortality cult. The tops of the two side panels depict a raven and a frog in circles, animals that were said to live in the sun and moon, respectively, and imply that the action is taking place in Heaven. The form of the animals on the lintel, similar to those on the *bini*, suggests plasticity and movement, with the animals intertwining or mimicking the *yunqi* motif. In addition, many have the same friendly demeanor that Miller (2018, p. 92) has noted regarding Western Han bear mat weight sculptures, which she describes as "soft,

almost smiling, even as they growl at their audiences." In Shanbei, tigers possess a similar quality and are depicted wagging their tails and smiling as they roar (Figures 3 and 6).

Figure 6. Top: Immortal frolicking with animals in an undulating landscape/cloudscape. Mizhi, Shaanxi. Eastern Han dynasty (After *Zhonguo huaxiang shi quanji* vol. 5, Figure 63). Bottom: Line drawing of the top two registers on the Sanpanshan *bini*.

Based on reliefs with some surviving pigments, stone carvings from Shanbei also demonstrate a shared interest in polychromatic surface decoration and ornamental patterns with their Western Han predecessors (Miller 2018, 2022).[14] Some of this is suggested by the stripes on the body of the tiger on the lintel from Mizhi: details which were further accentuated with paint in other reliefs in the region. This interest in surface decoration and ornament is also seen in reliefs that depict the *yunqi* and animal motif as the background for larger figures—as can be seen on the west wall in the Yanjiacha tomb (Figure 7; this is the same tomb whose plan appears in Figure 2).

Figure 7. Side panels on the west wall of the Yanjiacha tomb (After Dai and Li 1983, Figure 2.3).

4. Harmonious Postmortem Realms

As Dramer (2002) has demonstrated in a study of tombs from Henan and Shandong, Eastern Han carved doorways functioned as key elements for organizing and regulating mortuary rituals and social initiations between the living and the dead. While this is most likely also the case in Shanbei, the imagery on the doorways on which these wild and fantastical animals appear suggests a strong emphasis on the journey and postmortem transformation of the deceased. The truncated nature of the pictorial program of tombs in Shanbei blurs our understanding of the deceased's final destination but suggests that the tomb could have been viewed as a place of transcendence, a way station, or Heaven itself, with the tomb door functioning as a passageway through which the deceased could freely enter/exit (Tseng 2011, pp. 225–32; Hu 2006, pp. 102–3).

In this understanding, the motif of wild and fantastical animals, with or without *yunqi*, performs two basic functions depending on their placement around the door or passageway. The overall composition on the outer portion of the side panels suggests ascendance as if the deceased is floating upward on currents of swirling *qi*. Here, wild and fantastical animals could potentially serve as guides, or they may indicate the harmonious nature and secure safe passage during the deceased's journey (Figure 3, Figure 4, and Figure 6). The *lingzhi*-shape of the *yunqi* motif in some tombs further suggests the deceased's ascension and transformation in the paradise of Xiwangmu or Heaven.[15]

In the inner portion of the panels framing the door, wild and fantastical animals are also key components in representations of the world of immortals/and or Xiwangmu and her consort Dongwanggong 東王公 (King Father of the East), who is depicted sitting on top of pedestal-like mountains (see the side panels in Figure 3).[16] Here, we find birds, bears, deer, foxes, owls, *qilin*, *tianma*, and tigers cavorting on or hovering around their central peaks. On some door panels, a dragon also emerges from below, encircling the central pedestal/mountain peak, which similar to the vertical composition of *yunqi* on the same side panels, also suggests ascension. Rather than snarling and threatening predators and hybrid monsters, wild and fantastical animals in both compositions are symbolic of the transformation of the unknown, and of potentially hazardous postmortem worlds, into harmonious spaces free of danger.[17]

At the same time, the animal and *yunqi* patterns continue on many lintels, which include images of the sun and moon, transferring this felicitous imagery into the heavens (Figures 3 and 6).[18] On some tomb doors in the lower portion of the lintel, wild and fantastical animals also appear either parading/prancing with *xian* or as part of hunting scenes. For example, the lower part of the lintel of the tomb of Wang Deyuan 王得元 (d. 101), excavated in Suide, depicts a winged dragon/tiger hybrid, *bixie*, *qilin*, phoenix, and various birds parading left with a *xian* holding *lingzhi* at the front of the procession. Stalks of *lingzhi* separate the animals, and the scene ends with a rabbit pounding on the elixir of immortality (see Zhongguo huaxiang shi quanji 2000, vol. 5: Figure 74). Although elements of this imagery, such as the way *lingzhi* is depicted, are unique to the region, the basic motif of auspicious animals and immortals is common in other Eastern Han tomb reliefs as well.

What is more unique to the region is the popularity of hunting scenes on the lower portion of lintels and the frequency with which they include or are combined with fantastical animals, suggesting a potential conflation of the significance of hunting imagery and depictions of these animals in otherworldly scenes in Shanbei. We can see this in the doorway in Figure 3, where two mounted archers take aim at a tiger, fox, and bird, flanking several mythical animals, including a *tianma*, dragon, and *qilin*. On this relief, the wild and fantastical animals could be read as two separate categories—prey and auspicious imagery—but other reliefs in Shanbei blur such a simple dichotomy. For example, on a lintel from a tomb in Mizhi, the deceased couple appears in a pavilion in the center of the composition. Their wings, the turtle and raven on either side of the pavilion (symbolizing the sun and moon), and two immortality motifs—a fox and a hare pounding the elixir of immortality—are signs of the deceased's transcendence in Heaven. On either side of the pavilion, two hunters turn backward in their saddle and take aim at a deer and a horned,

long-tailed ungulate; a third archer appears on foot on the lower left shooting up toward the ungulate. Both of the mounted archers have bear-like ears and do not appear to be human; the one on the right rides a two-horned dragon–tiger hybrid (Figure 8). While more ubiquitous scenes may be included to represent a pastime that the deceased can enjoy in the afterlife, compositions such as this one suggest that hunting scenes take on additional meanings and functions in the ascension of the deceased and may have been included as a supplementary safeguard against the dangers that awaited the deceased in the afterlife (Wallace 2010).

Figure 8. Tomb door lintel from Dangjiagou 黨家溝 Mizhi, Shaanxi (After Wallace 2011b, Figure 8a).

5. Conclusions

Wild and fantastical animals populate the carved lintels and side panels of Eastern Han tomb doors in Shanbei as important transition zones between the world of the living and the dead and potential portals through which the deceased could pass to and from the tomb. Often climbing and/or merging with the *yunqi* motif, the treatment of the animals' bodies, interest in their movement, and the felicitous world in which they are important components are based on a hybrid artform that emerged in the mid-Western Han as an expression of an expanding and harmonious empire. Although elements of their depiction were originally derived from Central Asian and Steppe art, by this time, these animal forms would have been "domesticated" and played an important role in the ascension and transformation of the deceased, insuring their safe passage into the beyond. The preference for such imagery in these tombs may roughly be based on two circumstances: a nostalgia for the Han imperial past (Wallace 2018) and a familiarity with non-Chinese visual traditions due to their geographical location. At times these "Others"—the various groups of unfamiliar peoples amidst which the Han colonists lived—may have been conflated with the dangers awaiting the deceased (Wallace 2011b). The choice to adopt earlier animal forms and compositions insured that even these potentially dangerous challengers were subsumed into the harmonious worlds awaiting the deceased.

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Notes

[1] That is not to say that the animals that were part of this group did not have specific associations during the Han dynasty. For studies of individual animals see Bush (2016) (*qilin*, *bixie*, and other hybrids), Furniss (2005) (owls), Hayashi (1992) (deer), Kinoshita (2005) (bear), Hu (2018) (elephants), Olsen (1988) (camels), Till (1980) (winged hybirds), Xie (2011) (qilin), and Wang (2020) (camels and elephants). For a study of images of the mounted archer and *xian*, which appear alongside these animals and provide further meaning to the group, see Wallace (2011a, 2018).

[2] For a review of a number of motifs on these doors and their relationship to the ascensions of the deceased see Hu (2006).

[3] For more on the regional characteristics of these tombs, the history of the region, and previous scholarship see Wallace (2010). For a study of Eastern Han tomb reliefs around Lishi 離石, Shanxi, where the government moved after the loss of control of the Shanbei region see Ruitenbeek (2008).

[4] Another unique regional characteristic of these reliefs is that many of the details were added later using colored pigments, which means that many of them have been lost to time. (Xin and Jiang 2000, pp. 13–14; Barbieri-Low 2007, p. 88). In addition, rubbings, the most common way in which Eastern Han tomb reliefs are reproduced in modern publications, fail to translate the intricacies of the designs. For examples of stone reliefs with that still have some of the pigments preserved (see Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiu suo and Yulin shi wenwu guanli weiyuan hui bangong shi 2001 and Yulin shi wenwu baohu yanjiusuo and Yulin shi wenwu kaogu kantan gongzuo dui 2009).

[5] Some animals are more helpful than others. For depictions of several spunky domesticated animals, including a horse kicking a man in the stomach, see *Zhongguo Han huaxiang shi quanji* 5: Figure 120. Some animals in reliefs from Shanbei also appear in both categories we would label wild and domesticated. These include camels, raptors, and rabbits. The last appear as prey in hunting scenes, but also frequently as animal helpers in the court of Xiwangmu and sometimes pulling immortal chariots through the sky; see *Zhongguo Han huaxiang shi quanji* 5: fig, 203. For a discussion of elephants in Eastern Han tomb reliefs see Hu (2018). For a discussion of falconry see Wallace (2012).

[6] Many hybrids in Han mortuary art have horns, perhaps because horns implied the capacity to drive away demons (Rawson 2000, p. 159).

[7] For regional variations on the depiction of Xiwangmu during the Han dynasty see Lullo (2005); for a discussion of the characteristics of the depiction of Xiwangmu in tombs in Eastern Han tombs in Shanbei and Shanxi see Ruitenbeek (2008, pp. 153–55).

[8] Door panels are the most formulaic aspect of the pictorial program decorating tomb doorways in Shanbei, and aspects of their imagery is also similar to door panels in other regions. One of the regional characteristics of the door panels from Shanbei is that the winged tiger or dragon seen on the doors from Qingjian is replaced by a one-horned rhinoceros-like creature, which was most likely a regional variation of zhenmushou 镇墓兽 or tomb-guardian creature (Fong 1991, pp. 88–89). On some doorways, additional auspicious birds, animals, and *xian* fill the empty spaces between the larger motifs (for an example, see Shih 1960b, Figure 20). The repeated formulation of the phoenix, tiger, and dragon, which are associated with the south, east, and west, respectively, probably was meant to properly orient the tomb within the cosmos. However, the dark warrior, which by this time was usually represented as a turtle intertwined with a snake and associated with the north, does not appear on door panels in the region and only sometimes is included in the decoration on the side panels (for examples see *Zhongguo Handai huaxiang shi quanji*, vol. 5, pp. 1, 10). For more on *pushou* see Hu (2006, pp. 95–96).

[9] The animals, people, and magical creatures that populate this chariot fitting have been interpreted as auspicious omens of Heaven's favor (Wu 1984), representations of hunting parks eulogized in Han poetry (Rawson 1983, pp. 40–42), and auspicious imagery meant to drive away evil spirits (Munakata 1991, pp. 22–24). Benningson (2005) has interpreted the chariot fitting itself as an *axis-mundi* connecting a round heaven (the chariot parasol) to a square earth (chariot box) meant to facilitate the journey of the deceased.

[10] The term *boshanlu* does not appear in texts until the Six Dynasties period (220–589). For a comprehensive study of mountains censers see Erickson (1992); see also Kirkova (2018) for a review and critique of scholarship on *boshanlu*. Rather than having a religious significance as many scholars have claimed, she demonstrates in late Han and early Six Dynasties poetry, *boshanlu* are connected to feasting, erotic love, abandoned women, and the thwarted ambitions of virtuous officials. Rawson (2006) has argued that the shape of hill censors was adopted and adapted from Achaemenid prototypes.

[11] These animals may represent the four cardinal directions, with the camel indicating the north, which in later imagery is represented as the Dark Warrior: a tortoise intertwined with a snake (Tseng 2017).

[12] Ceramic imitations of vessels like Lady Dou Wan's soon appeared in tombs throughout the Han Empire as *mingqi* 名器 (spirit articles; See Wu (2011, pp. 87–99) for an extended discussion) specifically produced for burial, some of which were functional and others not, At the same time, analogous imagery also spread to other types of *mingqi*, including *hu* 壺vessels and hill jars (*zun* 尊) (Sun-Bailey 1988).

[13] *Boshanlu* are often discussed in connection with the development of Han immortality cults: their form is linked to ideas of mountains as *axis mundi*, and more specifically, to the visualization of the mountain-islands of the immortals in the East China Sea and/or Mount Kunlun, the dwelling place of Xiwangmu. The smoke emitted through the holes of the top of the censer is seen as life-giving *qi* 氣 (spirit/pneuma), and the burning of incense as a way to entice immortals to descend and/or an aid in Daoist ecstatic practices. Kirkova (2018) has called these associations, pointing out the earliest mention of *boshanlu* connects them to the imperial family, not immortal worlds, and that *boshanlu* were imbued with multiple meanings in the context of elite life.

[14] For examples of reliefs with surviving pigments from Shenmu see Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiu suo and Yulin shi wenwu guanli weiyuan hui bangong shi (2001) and from Mizhi, see Yulin shi wenwu baohu yanjiusuo and Yulin shi wenwu kaogu kantan gongzuo dui (2009).

[15] This depiction is heavily indebted to Western Han pictorial conventions where movement across time and space is indicated by swirling clouds and figures that move through the composition, for example on Lady Dai's black lacquer coffin in Mawangdui 馬王堆 Tomb 3 (ca. 168 BCE) or in the *bini* discussed above (Powers 2005, 2006, pp. 233–41; Wang 2009).

[16] These representations are based on the Han belief that immortals inhabited mountainous realms, which included floating immortal islands in the East China Sea, or Mount Kunlun, the abode of Xiwangmu.

[17] The most evocative literary source that suggests the dangers that the deceased may encounter in the afterlife is the third century BCE poem, "Zhao hun 招魂 (Summoning the Soul)" For a full translation see Hawkes (1985). An inscription from an Eastern Han tomb in Shanbei voices similar sentiments: Ah, the enlightened does not follow, oh, the refined has died an early death, he has left the white sun and descended, his honorable name was cut short and not extended. His spirit floats among animals, roaming to the east and west. I am fearful his soul will be confused, I sing for him to return and be restored. Do not go about recklessly, still something poisonous may befall his spirit, and he may encounter misfortune . . . (trans. Based on the text provided in Zhang 2005, pp. 62–63; for an additional discussion see Hu 2006, pp. 102–3).

[18] For depictions of the sun and moon in Han art see Tseng (2011, pp. 277–97).

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The Saka 'Animal Style' in Context: Material, Technology, Form and Use

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Abstract: The Iron Age Saka population of the eastern Eurasian Steppe is considered one of the earliest of the Scythian groups to emerge at the beginning of the 1st millennium BCE, consequently producing some of the earliest expressions of 'animal style' art. Recent excavations of burial mounds (kurgans) in the East Kazakhstan region have provided invaluable data on the depositional contexts of such objects. This paper combines contextual archaeological data and visual analysis with data on the chemical composition and technological production (through X-ray fluorescence and optical microscopy) of some of the gold artefacts from the Eleke Sazy funerary complex in East Kazakhstan. It is demonstrated that the positioning of wearable ornaments within undisturbed archaeological contexts can give vital information about their form and function, while evidence of production techniques and use-wear indicate the time investment and status the objects may have held. It is concluded that the Saka engaged in a complex process of design and execution of their art, depicting many different elements of the natural world. Further research is needed into understanding Saka lifeways and belief systems in relation to large-scale processes of climate change, land use, time, and society from securely dated and well-documented funerary and domestic archaeological contexts.

Keywords: Saka; Scythian; animal style; archaeological science; Iron Age; hare

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1. Introduction

The Iron Age Saka population of eastern Eurasia is considered the earliest of the Scythian groups to emerge in the 1st millennium BCE, as well as being the most substantial part of the Eastern group of the pan-Scythian family, occupying almost the entire territory of modern Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, northern Afghanistan, north-west China and northern Mongolia, and substantial parts of western and eastern Siberia (Davis-Kimball et al. 1995; Gnecchi-Ruscone et al. 2021). Among the earliest securely dated Iron Age Eurasian pastoralist sites of the whole region are the burial mounds (kurgans) located on the territory of western Siberia and East Kazakhstan, including Arzhan-1 and 2, and Baigetobe (Panyushkina et al. 2016; Chugunov et al. 2017; Zaitseva et al. 2004, 2005, 2007). These sites provide excellent examples of contextualised archaeological finds of Saka art, including numerous gold objects, in contrast to many of the collections of the last 200 years, which were instead looted or displaced from their original resting places with minimal or no provenance information (Rudenko 1962; Curtis 2004). It is highly probable that these two regions gave an initial spark of emergence and development of the whole Saka-Scythian world that expanded and flourished for almost a millennium (Samashev 2021b). In this paper we focus on a few Early Iron Age Saka gold objects recently discovered at the funerary complex of Eleke Sazy in the East Kazakhstan region, excavated under the direction of Zainolla Samashev and Abdesh Toleubayev (Toleubayev et al. 2021; Samashev 2021b; Samashev et al. 2018, 2019; Toleubayev et al. 2020), and exhibited at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge as part of the 'Gold of The Great Steppe' exhibition (September 2021–January 2022), on loan from the East Kazakhstan Regional Museum of Local History,

Ust'Kamenogorsk, Kazakhstan. We explore the contribution that archaeological context and a deeper look at technologies of production can bring to our understanding the symbolic and ecological life of the Saka of East Kazakhstan through their 'animal style' art, its origins, production, and distribution.

The Eurasian Steppe during the Iron Age (c. 900–c. 200 BCE) is associated with a peak of transhumant pastoralism, signified by the presence of different confederations of nomadic tribes, such as Scythians, Sakas, Sarmatians, Sauramatians, Massagetae, Issedons, Tagar, and Slab Grave cultures and others (Brosseder 2011; Davis-Kimball et al. 1995; De Barros Damgaard et al. 2018; Herodotus 1987; Smirnoff 1966; Smirnov 1964, 1984; Beisenov 2015; Artamonov 1973). The geographic spread of nomadic cultures in that period was expansive, spanning from the Black Sea region to Central Asia and Siberia. Usually, the pan-Scythian cultures are divided into two main groups: (1) the classical Scythians, who occupied the Northern part of the Black Sea regions and are known due to the reports of Herodotus (Western group); and (2) the Saka, Sarmatians, Massagetae and other nomadic cultures who inhabited the vast remainder of the steppe region (Eastern group). Despite the enormous spatial spread of these groups, they shared a general uniformity of their material culture (as materialised in the famous 'animal style' art, horse harnesses, and weaponry) and genetic pool, which confirm their extremely high mobility and interaction (Davis-Kimball et al. 1995; Korolkova 2000; Unterländer et al. 2017; Gnecchi-Ruscone et al. 2021). Although sharing some key cultural, social, artistic, and economic traits, the pan-Scythian peoples were not fully homogenous in their artistic or economic activities. While transhumant pastoralism rose to be the dominant subsistence strategy of the steppe zone during the Iron Age, recent research is demonstrating the complexity of land use by Iron Age populations, further cementing the view that the Saka had deep and wide-ranging connections to each other, and utilised the full geographical variety of the lands in which they lived (Chang et al. 2003; Samashev 2021b; Spengler et al. 2013; Toleubayev 2018; Ventresca Miller et al. 2020; Spengler et al. 2021). This new research is beginning to redress the imbalance in the archaeological record since the majority of our information about the Saka still comes from the study of their funerary monuments, as indeed will the material discussed in this paper.

2. Background and Context

Identification and absolute dating of the earliest Saka sites is a challenging task since attempts at radiocarbon dating at the earlier end of the Saka period give a wide time span of c. 800–400 BCE due to the presence of a large plateau on the radiocarbon calibration curve, known as the Hallstatt plateau (van der Plicht et al. 2004) This problem cannot be tackled by adjusting the precision of the measurements, and it complicates analyses and refinement of the chronology of the development of the Early Eurasian Steppe Iron Age cultures and sites. One of the most reliable methods to overcome the Hallstatt plateau problem is by combining radiocarbon dating with dendrochronological analyses (counting of tree-rings) using timbers found in burial chambers and using the ^{14}C tree-ring wiggle-matching method (Zaitseva et al. 2005, 2007). However, not all Iron Age Eurasian steppe region burials were constructed of wood, and in some of the burials, the wood preservation was poor or even degraded completely and is under increasing threat from climate change melting protective permafrost (Han 2008). Consequently, only a few burials are eligible for accurate dating using the wiggle matching method, giving relatively precise dates of the Saka burials located on the territory of Kazakhstan and Western Siberia, such as Arzhan 1 and 2, Shilikty kurgan (Baigetobe), Berel, Pazyryk and others as shown in Table 1 (Panyushkina et al. 2016; Toleubayev 2018; Chugunov et al. 2017; Zaitseva et al. 2005, 2007).

Table 1. Dates of the Saka kurgans (Beisenov et al. 2017; Chugunov et al. 2017; Gnecchi-Ruscone et al. 2021; Panyushkina et al. 2016; Zaitseva et al. 2005, 2007).

Year BCE	Name of Saka Kurgan Complex, Kurgan *(Date)*	
	wiggle-matching (^{14}C+dendrochronology)	conventional ^{14}C
800	Arzhan-1 *(~794 (−7/+6))*	Eleke Sazy, Bes Shatyr (k.6), Taldy-2 (2,4,5 and 8), Akbeit-1, Aksu-Ayuly-4, Karashoky, Berel (k. 18 and 36) *(800–400 BCE, Hallstatt plateau)*
750		
700	Shilikty, Baigetobe *(~730–690 BCE)*	
650	Arzhan-2 *(~659 BCE, ~671–609)*	
600		
550	Bes Shatyr, Kurgan 3 *(~550 BCE)*	
500		
450		
400		
350	Berel, kurgan 1 *(~363 BCE)*	Issyk kurgan *(400–200 BCE)*
300	Pazyryk 1, 2 *(~300 BCE)*	
	Berel, kurgan 11 *(~297 BCE)*	
250		
200		
150		
	located in Western Siberia	
	located in Kazakhstan	

Saka sites that are not eligible for wiggle matching dating may be attributed to certain Iron Age periods, including the Early Saka period (c. 800–500 BCE), based on other features, such as the form of construction of the kurgan or stylistic features of the burial assemblage (Samashev 2021b; Tairov 2006) (Figure 1). While these attributions should be considered with caution due to the difficulties encountered in absolute dating, such attributions and classifications are in many cases justified and are considered acceptable taking into account the extensive excavation experience and research on the Iron Age archaeological sites of the region by local archaeologists (Chugunov 2020b). Consequently, research and interpretation of the Early Iron Age artefacts, even when properly excavated, is objectively complicated and restricted. Interpretation of museum collections that are attributed to Iron Age pastoralist cultures, but completely lacking in archaeological context or provenance, becomes even more problematic.

The emergence of military horse riding 'elite' took place at the beginning of the Final Bronze Age (FBA) period, if not earlier in the territory of Central and East Kazakhstan and Tuva (Chugunov 2015). The emergence of the FBA elite stratum was connected to controlling copper and tin ores mining and large-scale production of bronze, as well as ensuring the safe transportation of metals to other regions of Eurasia together with the import of foreign 'exotic' goods back to controlled territories. Therefore, the FBA population was engaged in active interactions with neighbouring and more distant cultures and played an important role in the trade and exchange of different goods (Chugunov 2015; Beisenov and Bazarbayeva 2013; Berdenov 1998, 2008; Margulan 1998, 2001). During the FBA period massive stone burial constructions, Begazy-Dandybai cultures mausoleums, started to appear in these territories, showing the presence of social stratification of the FBA societies (Margulan 1998). A fundamental shift from a sedentary/semi-sedentary economy to a dominance of mobile stock-breeding pastoralism during the Final Bronze Age further fuelled this process. Huge Saka elite kurgans, full of precious objects, including numerous

gold artefacts, were constructed together with a great number of small assemblage-free kurgans (Beisenov 2015; Toleubayev 2018; Chang 2018; Khabdullina 1994).

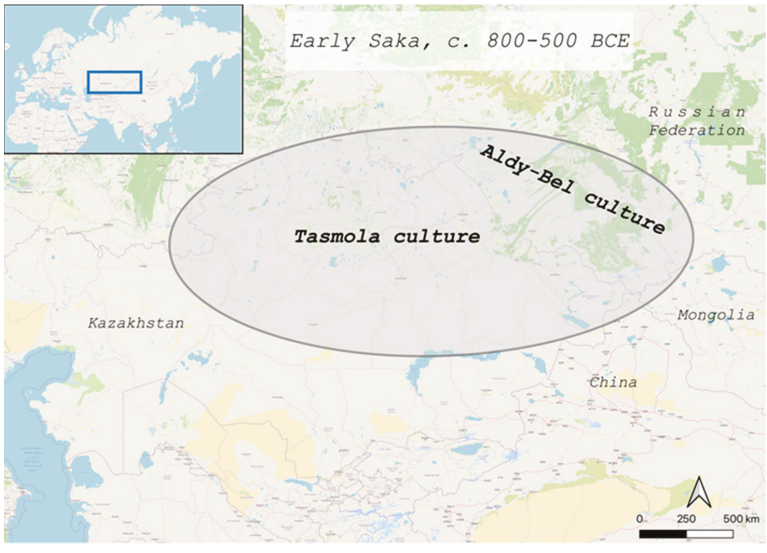

Figure 1. Early Iron Age Saka cultures as identified through archaeological material (c.800-500 BCE). Source: (Beisenov et al. 2017; Beisenov 2015; Chugunov 2015; Tairov 2006; Khabdullina 1994). Map data from OpenStreetMap under the Open Database License (CC BY-SA 2.0).

The 'animal style' of stylised, dynamic zoomorphic art is a geographically and temporally broad concept, covering vast territories of the Eurasian steppe regions as well as Siberia and southern parts of Central Asia (Sher 1988). From a temporal point of view the phenomenon endures beyond the Iron Age absorbing the post-Saka/Scythian periods until c.200 CE or even later (Andreeva 2018; Minyaev 2007; Zasetskaya 2008). As animal-style art is tightly connected to the Iron Age pastoralist societies of the Eurasian steppes its earliest appearance is believed to be linked to the initial emergence of the Iron Age pastoralist population, during the Early Iron Age or Early Saka period (Samashev 2021b). There are some key elements that are currently considered markers of identification of Iron Age cultures: types of arrows, metal belt elements, jewellery, and iconography (Chugunov 2000, 2020b). One of the most distinctive iconographic markers of the Early Saka period is the absence of depictions of mythical creatures (Chugunov 2020b). Moreover, Chugunov argues that some shapes, for example, the famous curled feline plaque from Arzhan-1, were in use exclusively within a narrow time window of around 300 years in the Early Saka period (Chugunov 2015, 2020a).

However, it is also worth noting that some objects had a long history of ownership. For example, Bronze Age arrows have been found in some Iron Age burials, hundreds of years after their production and use, usually as a single example, probably a talisman, that is easily distinguished among many typical Iron Age arrows (Chugunov 2000, 2019, 2020a).

The Iron Age on the territory of Kazakhstan, Western Siberia, and part of Xinjiang witnessed numerous shifts and variations in population, culture, and society across time and space, and the study of the period requires localised contextual studies beyond overarching generalisations (Shulga 2015; Chugunov 2020b).

Saying this, the inheritance of cultural and technological traditions over time should not be overlooked, to avoid representing the history of the region as non-stop migrations of different populations. Substantial archaeological data as well as the results of recent aDNA analyses show a complex process of genetic and cultural interactions of local and

immigrant populations that took place throughout the Bronze and Iron Ages, during which some local traditions survived or were adapted, and others were replaced (Allentoft et al. 2015; De Barros Damgaard et al. 2018; Narasimhan et al. 2019; Gnecchi-Ruscone et al. 2021; Unterländer et al. 2017).

One of the largest contextualised archaeological gold artefact collections of the Eurasian steppe Iron Age period originates from East Kazakhstan: the Eleke Sazy burial mound complex (Samashev 2021a, 2021b; Samashev et al. 2018, 2019; Toleubayev et al. 2020, 2021). Eleke Sazy is a high-altitude flat river valley, surrounded by the Tarbagatai Mountain range (Figure 2). The funerary complex consists of a large cemetery of burial mounds of different sizes and sometimes shapes, dating from as early as the Early Iron Age (Early Saka period) through to the Turkic and ethnographic Kazakh period. Despite extensive looting, both in the past and more recently, recent archaeological discoveries and excavations have recovered human remains, structures, gold, and other artefacts in undisturbed contexts, offering unique insights into Saka burial rituals and practices (Samashev 2021a). Over the last five years, Saka kurgans and other funerary monuments have been excavated at Eleke Sazy under the direction of Z. Samashev and A. Toleubayev by teams from the A. Kh. Margulan Institute of Archaeology, Astana, and Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan, providing valuable contextual data and materials, including gold objects (Samashev 2019, 2021b; Samashev et al. 2018, 2019; Toleubayev et al. 2020, 2021).

Figure 2. Location of Eleke Sazy, Arzhan 2, Tasmola and Urzhar kurgan burials. Map data from OpenStreetMap under the Open Database License (CC BY-SA 2.0).

Here, we focus on a small selection of gold objects from three kurgans at Eleke Sazy with the aim of illustrating an approach to artistic materials that also considers materials, technologies, and contexts. These are Kurgans 4 (Group II), Patsha (Group VI) and Kurgan 7 (Group IV).

Kurgan 4 Group II (diameter 50 m, height 0.6–1.25 m) is a double inhumation burial of a male and female (aged c. 17–18 and c. 13–14 years, respectively). Although the female burial had been heavily looted, the male burial was not looted and included numerous gold objects decorating the body and associated weaponry, including microbeads and clothing plaques (Samashev 2021a). The burial is a unique example of the very few undisturbed Saka inhumations excavated in modern times, and thus allows us to reconstruct the clothing, weaponry, and other attributes of an Early Saka male. In addition to the burial, a hoard was found under a stone of the crepidoma (structural platform) of the kurgan, consisting of different gold plaques, gold beads and microbeads, gold spirals, a gold pendant, stone beads, and a bronze mirror (Samashev 2021a). Based on the morphology of the arrowheads accompanying the buried youth, the kurgan was recognised as one of the earliest in the

region (Samashev 2019), partially supported by the C^{14} data for Kurgans 4 and 9 Group II: 793–547 cal BCE and 770–494 cal BCE, 2σ) (Gnecchi-Ruscone et al. 2021), which would make the burial one of the earliest unlooted in situ Early Iron Age Saka burials in the whole region.

Kurgan Patsha, Group VI (diameter 80 m, height 2.5 m) is the largest kurgan in Group VI and is among the largest burial mounds of the whole complex, also known as the 'Great Earthen Mound'. Unfortunately, the kurgan was recently and heavily looted, probably in 2007–2008 (Samashev 2021b). During the excavations of the kurgan in 2019, a hoard was discovered between the stones at the base of the grave shaft constructed under the burial at a depth of 4.5 m. The Patsha burial hoard consists of over 140 objects, including iron and bronze objects with gold overlay, pure gold objects some with precious stones, stones, and gold beads (Samashev 2021b). The hoard is one of the most diverse collections of gold objects discovered at the Eleke Sazy complex from a goldsmithing point of view. It includes cast and gold foil objects, gold microbeads, goldsmithing granulation discards, and gold nuggets. They have been given a preliminary stylistic date of between the 6th to 5th centuries BCE by Z. Samashev (Samashev 2021b), within the Early Saka period, and could possibly be of an earlier date, towards the end of the 7th century BCE, broadly contemporaneous to the Arzhan-2 kurgan.

The hoard was found in the form of a monolith of compacted artefacts mixed with soil and products of corrosion. Many objects appear to have been intentionally deformed. The monolith was disassembled in the laboratory of the East Kazakhstan Regional Museum of Local History; the artefacts were cleaned from the soil and the corrosion products, and some of them, mainly gold objects, were mechanically unbent. The work was done by a professional conservator, but a substantial amount of cleaning and conservation work was taken into account during the interpretation of the objects.

Kurgan 7, Group IV (diameter 89 m and height 5.5 m) is the largest construction in Group IV and one of the largest kurgans of the Eleke Sazy burial complex. The burial mound is surrounded by two stone ditches and a few rows of standing large stone altars. The burial chamber was excavated in 2020 and found to be empty, but a large hoard was found at the foot of the kurgan, at its south-eastern part, under the stone-made 'shell' of the burial mound (Toleubayev et al. 2020). The hoard was placed in a hole with a total diameter 50–60 cm, at a depth of 70–75 cm. The total number of gold objects unearthed was 830 pieces, including pendants in the form of fruits, a miniature cauldron, and three-dimensional and flat plaques (Toleubayev et al. 2021). Another small hoard was found under one of the altars and consisted of 23 bronze belt pieces and a few mushroom-shaped gold microbeads. The areas around the other altars were looted. The burial mound as well as the hoards are believed to be dated to the Middle Saka period—5th–4th centuries BCE (Toleubayev et al. 2021).

3. Results

3.1. Placement of Ornamentation

The discovery of extremely rare undisturbed and/or partially surviving early Saka burials over the last twenty years represents a substantial breakthrough in our understanding of early Saka culture. Among the most important discoveries are two such burials, burial 5 of the Arzhan-2 kurgan and Kurgan 4 (Group II), Eleke Sazy (Samashev 2021a; Chugunov et al. 2017). Finding the archaeological artefacts in situ affords a wealth of valuable information on how widely known and distributed animal-style gold objects were among the Saka population, and how they were placed on the body.

The excavated gold artefacts show that the Early Saka period decorative elements display a combination of sophisticated and original stylistic design and a high level of craftsmanship integrated into some cases with practical elements for use during their lifetime (where evidence for use-wear is present).

Miniscule gold beads, many just 1 mm in diameter, were used as adornment exclusively on the lower parts of the costumes, such as trousers, the edge of the skirt and on shoes (Figure 3). At Arzhan-2 more than 250,000 microbeads of three types were used to decorate

costumes of deceased individuals, who were both male and female (Figure 4) (Chugunov et al. 2017). At Eleke Sazy Kurgan, 4 tiny gold microbeads, numbering 1781 with a total weight of ~23 g, were used to decorate the shoes of the teenage boy buried there (Figure 5). The total weight of another type of cylindrical microbeads (total number 10,358) found in the hoard under a crepidoma stone of the same Kurgan 4, is only about ~42 g which is a testament to their tiny size (Figure 6). These beads have been interpreted by Z. Samashev as having adorned a piece of lower-body clothing such as trousers (Samashev 2021a).

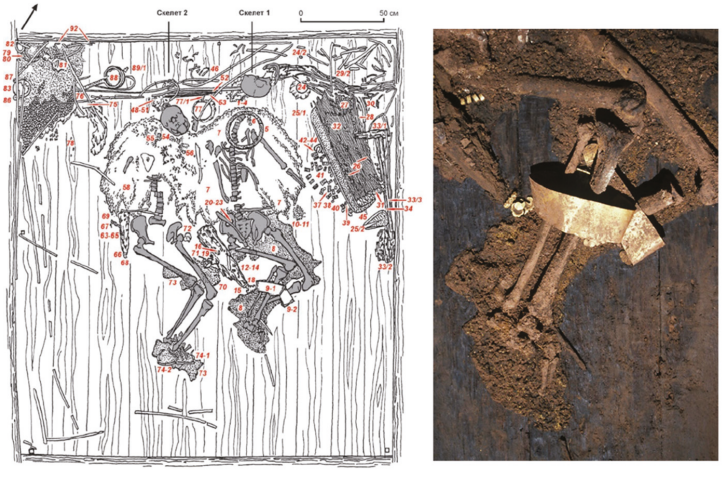

Figure 3. Arzhan-2 kurgan, burial 5, (**left**) double inhumation burial of a man and woman showing gold beads decorating the trousers and shoes of the man and edge of the skirt and shoes of the woman. (**Right**) Photo of the legs of the man with gold microbeads decorating the trousers and the shoes. Source: courtesy of K.Chugunov.

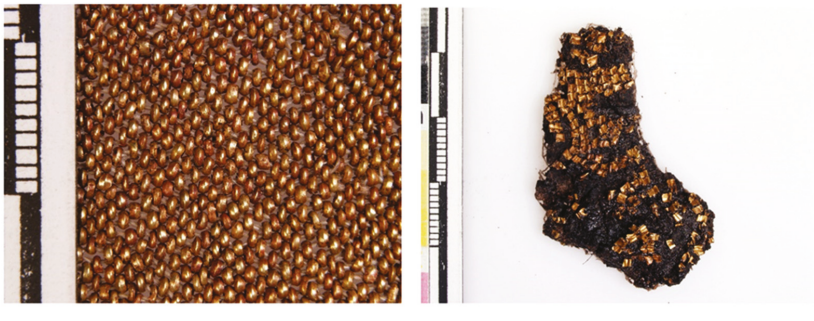

Figure 4. Two types of gold microbeads, Arzhan-2, burial 5. Source: courtesy of K.Chugunov. Photographer Terebenin V.S.

Figure 5. (**Left**) Gold microbeads decorating the shoes of the teenage boy, Kurgan 4 (Group II), Eleke Sazy, and (**right**) digital microscope image of the bead (Internal Museum Number КПо93-38630/1-1781). Source: (left) courtesy of Samashev (2021a).

The use of beads/microbeads for the adornment of costumes and shoes has a very long history in the steppe region, starting with the Middle Bronze Age Sintasha culture (the first chariot culture). In the territory of Kazakhstan, many bronze microbeads were identified in the burial of a Sintashta young woman, Grave 23, Tanabergen II burial ground, which is located in northern Kazakhstan (2480–1930 cal BCE (2σ)) (Tkachev 2007, 2020). The Late and Final Bronze Age Andronovo population (c. 1500–800 BCE) occupying the territories of East Kazakhstan and neighbouring regions, continued the use of bronze beads and microbeads to decorate their shoes and the edges of the lower part of their costume (Avanesova 1991; Usmanova 2010).

Horsemanship was a crucial part of Saka cultural expression, particularly for the elite (Tishkin and Besetayev 2019), with the presence of horse harnesses forming part of the 'Scythian triad' (along with weaponry and animal style art) (Besetayev 2021; Besetayev and Kariyev 2016), and therefore mobility of the lower part of a rider's body, i.e., for horse mounting and dismounting, was a matter of necessity, with nothing to constrict the movements of the rider. It is worth considering that the Saka people did not use stirrups (Tishkin and Besetayev 2019) and the horse was controlled exclusively by the muscles of the Saka rider, with the leg muscles, in particular, playing a crucial role. Therefore, the choice of microbeads as a decorative element of the lower part of a costume was a practical and at the same time elegant way of ornamenting trousers, skirts and shoes. At the same time, as noted above, the use of microbeads/beads as a decorative element was a long-lasting tradition of the Bronze Age steppe population, possibly inherited by Iron Age pastoralist societies.

Furthermore, the microbeads that decorated the trousers, skirts, or shoes of a horse rider were visible and could be appreciated by dismounted people, being located at their eye level. While the microbeads are remarkably small, they create a dazzling effect when sewn onto clothing and shoes in large quantities, as demonstrated by reconstructions of the costumes from Arzhan-2 and Eleke Sazy (Samashev 2021a; Chugunov et al. 2017).

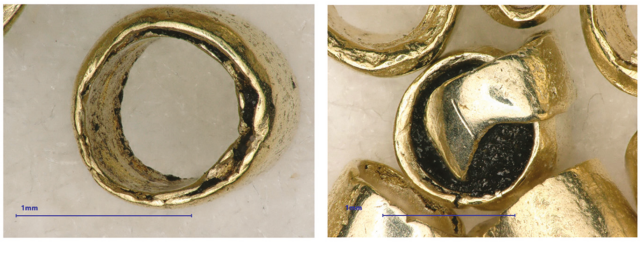

Figure 6. (**Left**) Digital microscope image of cylindrical gold bead, Kurgan 4 Eleke Sazy. (**Right**) Black carbonised substance inside of the bead. Internal Museum Number КПо93-38631/1-10358.

It is challenging to estimate whether such elaborately decorated costumes were in use in real life or produced as burial outfits only. If they were used at all, they were unlikely to have been used for everyday wear, but rather for occasional wear. While some of the Eleke Sazy microbeads display clear signs of use-wear, others do not. For example, the cylindrical microbeads found in the hoard most probably were never used: many of the beads still have a black carbonised substance inside of them and no signs of use. As such, these beads could have been obtained from a goldsmith specifically for their deposition as a part of the hoard.

In contrast to the use of small beads for the lower part of the body, larger gold plaques were used to decorate the upper part of the costumes in Arzhan-2, such as jackets and coats (Figure 7) (Andreeva 2021; Liu et al. 2021b; Chugunov et al. 2017). These plaques are large in comparison with the microbeads but still light. The reverse side of the plaques shows that regardless of their manufacturing technique (cast or forged) the plaques are hollow, making them relatively light (weight range: ~3.11–3.54 g each, average length ~2.0 cm, width range ~1.1–1.2. cm, thickness 0.4 cm) (Chugunov et al. 2017). There is an open question as to whether making them hollow aimed to save precious metal or simply to make the objects lighter and easier to wear and transport as part of a mobile society. It is likely that both possibilities were considered by ancient goldsmiths during the production of the plaques.

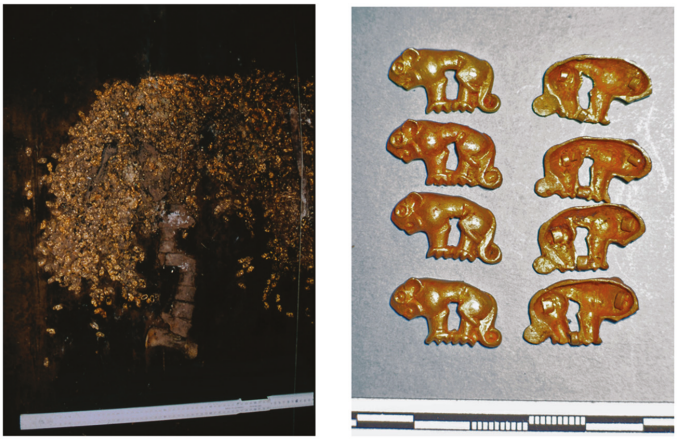

Figure 7. (**Left**) Decoration of a female's jacket with gold feline plaques, Arzhan-2, burial 5. (**Right**) Feline plaques. Source: courtesy of K.Chugunov.

The Arzhan-2 plaques are depictions of a single standing feline, left or right facing. The plaques were positioned on the costume of the deceased individuals differently, horizontally and vertically, creating the ornamentation of the outfits (Chugunov et al. 2017). From a technological point of view, the Arzhan-2 costume decoration plaques are cast or pressed using a die (pressed sheet technique) (Armbruster 2009). There are two or three sewing loops located on the reverse side of each plaque (Figure 7).

At Eleke Sazy, some costume decoration plaques depict a combination of different animals in a complex and stylised way, and in these cases, the question of the positioning of the plaques on a costume as a decorative element becomes more complex. A unique form of gold plaque found in the Patsha kurgan is one such example (Figure 8). The plaque is an example of the stylised combination of different animals. At least three (a hare, eagle, and owl) may be identified, and perhaps more are present in the design, for example, the stripes of a tiger. Therefore, it can be positioned on clothing in different ways to emphasise the shape of a certain animal depending on its orientation. Found as part of a hoard, the function and exact placement on either human or horse costume is uncertain due to the

lack of context in relation to the body as would be found in a burial, but the suggestion that the plaques were used to decorate the upper part of a costume is justified since their size and the fastening mechanism are very similar to the Arzhan-2 costume plaques, with two/three sewing loops on the back of the plaques (Figures 7 and 8).

Figure 8. Digital microscope images of Patsha sitting hare gold plaque, front and back sides, Patsha kurgan, Eleke Sazy VI, Internal Museum number КПо94-38837.

The total number of the unearthed 'hare plaques' is 24, and right- and left-facing plaques were found. The average weight per plaque is ~1.95 g inside the range of 1.49–2.52 g. The average length is ~2.9 cm, and the width is ~1.45 cm.

The use of decorative plaques to adorn the clothing of the upper body dates to at least 3000 BCE, as evidenced by a series of 240 leaf-shaped worked bone plaques with pierced attachment holes discovered in situ in an Eneolithic female burial at Menovnoe, Ust'-Kamenogorsk, East Kazakhstan (Samashev et al. 2007). One of the earliest examples of metal costume decoration plaques in the region, including some that had loops on their reverse sides that were attached to the main body using high-temperature joining techniques, date to the Late Bronze Age period Andronovo culture, on the territory of Kazakhstan (Avanesova 1991). Consequently, as with the beads, it is likely that the cultural traditions of wearing and the technological knowledge of the production of clothing plaques represent continuity from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age steppe populations.

3.2. Technology of Production

The 'hare' plaque was most probably a product of serial production, considering the presence of twenty-four identical plaques found in the hoard. The probable production process can be restructured as follows. Initially, a flat blank in the shape of the hare was cut from a gold sheet, and afterwards the blank was embossed/pressed using a die made of hard material, such as bronze or hardwood (Figure 9). It is not convincingly clear whether a positive or negative die was used for production of the plaques. However, some features point to the use of a positive die. Positive wooden dies were used extensively by Saka goldsmiths for the production of pressed sheet objects, such as the Arzhan-2 gorytos decoration plaques (Chugunov et al. 2017; Minasyan 2014).

In the next production step, the plaque was possibly anchored to a pitch-like material, i.e., tree resin, or the positive die itself was used to finish the plaque's front side through meticulous, if not exaggerated, chiselling (Figure 9). In a few cases, the chiselling was extensive to the point of perforating the gold sheet as if in an attempt to exaggerate the depictions of the animals inside the plaque.

Piercing of the metal due to chiselling as well as chiselling marks is clearly visible (Figure 9). It is worth mentioning that a corrugated metal form is substantially more robust than a flat form (Brepohl 2001). Considering that the plaques were made of rather thin gold sheets ~300 µm (0.3 mm), extensive chiselling of the plaques was possibly one of the ways to make the whole object more resistant to deformation, especially if it was being produced for use in life, and not only for deposition in a funerary or hoard context. The smoothness of the edges of the plaques, together with the scratched and the slightly depressed surface of the protruding parts of the front sides, and missing loops on some of the plaques, indicate

that the plaques were possibly in active use and worn as part of a costume in life, as opposed to having been produced solely for funerary deposition (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Digital microscope images of Patsha sitting hare gold plaque. (**Left**) Chiselling marks and protruding areas and (**right**) smooth edges on reverse side. Patsha kurgan, Eleke Sazy VI. Internal Museum number are КПо94-38838 and КПо94-3883.

The next production step was the piercing of four holes, mainly from the front to the back. Three holes mark the eyes of the creatures (hare, eagle, and owl), and the fourth probably defines the forelegs of the hare. However, it may mark the eye of another as-yet unidentified creature. The holes were pierced as decorative elements only, and they were not used as attachment mechanisms. The final production step was welding three sewing loops onto the reverse side of the plaque.

The Patsha hare plaques and the Arzhan-2 feline plaques share similarities in their production, namely that they were serially made using dies and chiselling, and had sewing loops joined onto the reverse side.

3.3. Chemical Composition

The results of the elemental analyses by a portable X-ray fluorescence spectrometer (pXRF) of the front side of the plaques are consistent in identifying gold of relatively high purity, about 90–91% (Figure 10). A relatively small amount of silver, of an average of ~7 up to a maximum of ~9%, was detected with ~1% of copper. The identified composition (the presence of silver as well as the amount of copper not exceeding 1%) corresponds more with native, alluvial gold (Martinón-Torres and Uribe-Villegas 2015; Martinón-Torres et al. 2007). No traces of PGE (platinum group elements) or tin (Sn), have been detected.

In contrast, the loops are joined to the plaques using a high-temperature technique and the pXRF data showed that the areas of the loops are copper-enriched in comparison with the front side of the plaques, sometimes with as much as ~4.5% copper. The substantial increase in copper content on the loop areas of the plaque most probably does not indicate the use of a different gold alloy for the production of the loops but rather the use of copper salts or copper-enriched solder for making high-temperature joins between the plaques and the loops (Figure 11). The addition of copper substantially decreases the melting temperature of gold alloys, enabling the goldsmith to make a join without damaging the objects themselves through melting (Scrivano et al. 2013, 2017; Brepohl 2001; Loepp 2021).

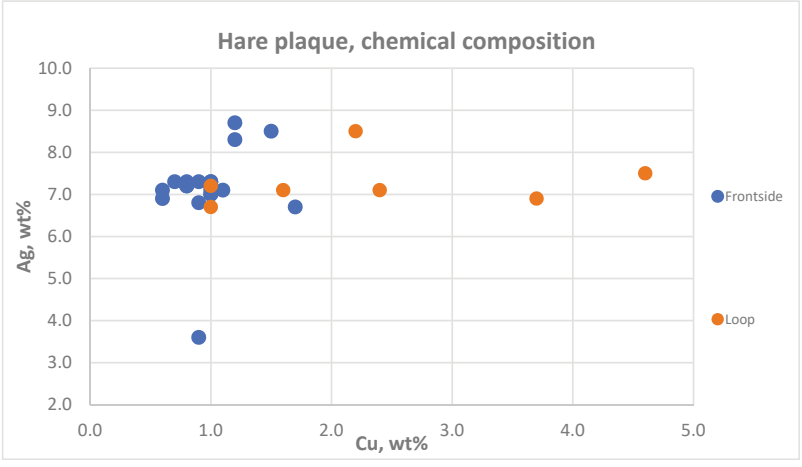

Figure 10. Scatterplot of the average copper and silver levels of the hare plaques (front side and loops) from kurgan Patsha, Eleke Sazy VI. Note that the pXRF detector window is larger than the loop, and hence 'loop' analyses include part of the surrounding metal sheet. Data averaged and normalised.

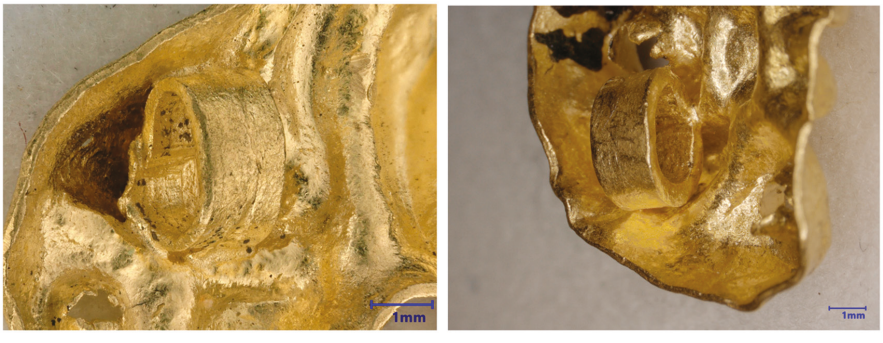

Figure 11. Digital microscope images of the reverse side of the Patsha sitting hare plaque, sewing loops. Patsha kurgan, Eleke Sazy VI, КПо94-38838 and КПо94-38837.

3.4. Comparative Analyses of Form

At least three animals are combined in the Patsha plaque. They are a sitting/resting hare and the heads of two birds, an eagle and an owl, embedded inside the hare's body (Figures 12–14). The body of the sitting/resting hare is profoundly depicted, including a massive hip joint and forelegs. However, the shape of the hare is not clearly visible as the plaque is tightly filled in with details of two birds and probably a feline, perhaps a tiger, that is indirectly messaged through the application of the horizontal stripes on the neck of the eagle/hare. The only explicit representation that immediately grasps attention in the plaque is an eagle head. The owl's head is a beautiful example of a realistic depiction of an animal, with the bird's head tilted to one side (Figure 13).

Rotating the plaque as well as exploring its reverse side affords an understanding of the goldsmithing skills and the way the goldsmith embedded the heads of the birds inside the hare's body. Interestingly, both depicted birds hunt hares, and the choice of the birds looks more intentional rather than simply stylistic as if the birds are ripping the hare apart (Figure 12). The predator/prey motif is common in other Saka art, more commonly depicting a feline biting a deer (Rudenko 1962; Artamonov 1973; Andreeva 2018; Chernikov 1965; Minasyan 1990). The plaque looks overburdened with details. It seems as if no place was left plain intentionally by the goldsmith.

Figure 12. Sitting hare (Lepus tolai) and digital microscope image of Patsha plaque, Patsha kurgan, Eleke Sazy VI. Source: Yuriy Danilevsky (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lepus_tolai;_Baikonur_03.jpg, used under CC BY-SA 3.0 https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/legalcode, no changes made, accessed on 5 December 2022). Internal Museum number is КПо94-38837.

Figure 13. Owl and digital microscope image of Patsha plaque, Patsha kurgan, Eleke Sazy VI. Internal Museum number is КПо94-38837.

Figure 14. Golden eagle and digital microscope image of Patsha plaque, Patsha kurgan, Eleke Sazy VI. Internal Museum number is КПо94-38837.

There are other gold plaques dating to the Iron Age that resemble hares, usually named "secret depictions" or "a sophisticated whorl" artefacts (Grach 1980; Beisenov and Bazarbayeva 2014; Beisenov et al. 2017). However, the most striking example that also represents a sitting hare is a carved antler costume buckle from Tasmola 5 burial ground, Kurgan 3, which was excavated by Kadyrbayev in 1961 in Central Kazakhstan (Margulan et al. 1966) (Figure 15). The burial ground is considered to be an early Saka complex attributed to the Tasmola culture (one of Early sub-Saka cultures), roughly dated to 700–500 BCE (Margulan et al. 1966), making it broadly contemporaneous with the Patsha kurgan hare plaques. Kurgan 3 of the Tasmola 5 cemetery was found partially looted, and prior to excavation had a diameter of 20 m and height of 1.6 m. The hare-shaped buckle was found near the right shoulder of the deceased person with four other bone/antler-made small pieces. The buckle's shape resembles a sitting/resting hare, with a few animals carved inside of the hare's body.

The length of the buckle is 5.2 cm, the width is 4.2 cm, and the depth is 1.1 cm. At least eleven animals can be identified inside and two of them are represented in their full shapes: a hare and a boar. Depictions of other animals include exclusively their heads. Among the depicted animals are three different birds of prey, ibex, saiga, elk, argali, two boars, and another unidentifiable animal (wolf or mouse?) (Figure 16). As was aptly noted by Beisenov and Bazarbayeva (2013) the plaque looks over-crowded by images as if the craftsperson was in fear of leaving a single plain surface.

The animal figures and parts are so tightly packed that without specific attention the plaque appears to be simply full of ornamentation, a similar visual effect to that of the Patsha gold hare plaque. Both objects look slightly overburdened, and at first glance, consist of unclear ornaments and details.

Figure 15. Tasmola 5 Kurgan 3 antler carved costume buckle, front and back sides. Source: National Museum of Kazakhstan.

It is interesting to note that both objects were made of different materials and found in different regions, but share the same principles of their creation: the internal space of a sitting/resting hare is fully filled with other animals with no space left empty. Moreover, both plaques can be rotated to change and reinterpret the shape of the plaque, creating a shape-shifting and dynamic effect. The head of the hare in both plaques appears to be either being ripped by the horns of two animals or transferred into the head of the bird of prey.

Figure 16. Tasmola 5 Kurgan 3 antler buckle with depictions of eleven animals. Source: National Museum of Kazakhstan.

3.5. Botanical Motifs

The Saka did not only represent the animal kingdom in their art, and depictions of different parts of plants in the form of whole plaques as well as beads and pendants constitute not the largest, but a substantial part of the Eleke Sazy gold assemblage. One simple and elegant group of gold objects from the Eleke Sazy collection are the gold flower plaques, which number 12 pieces (Figure 17). The four-petalled form of the flowers bears a striking resemblance to the Greater Celandine (*Chelidonium majus*), which is found in the Altai mountains of the East Kazakhstan region (iNaturalist contributors 2022). As mentioned by Pliny, Greater Celandine has a long history of medicinal use (Grieve 1931). Although high in toxins, it is used in traditional medicine to clear the sight and treat cancer and liver ailments, and the latex is used topically to treat warts and corns (Grieve 1931; Chevallier 1996; Plants for a Future 2022). While we do not know why this plant was chosen for depiction in the gold clothing plaques, if the identification of *Chelidonium majus* is correct, we can speculate that the plant held significance for the Saka perhaps because of its medicinal qualities.

Figure 17. Flower plaques from Eleke Sazy, Patsha kurgan, hoard. Source: Fitzwilliam Museum/East Kazakhstan Regional Museum of Local History. Internal Museum Numbers КПО94–38891 to КПО94–38902.

Another example of plant depictions are beads from the hoard unearthed from Kurgan 4, Eleke Sazy, where different types of beads resemble seeds (Figure 18). The beads are made of two parts joined together, and are around 2 mm in length, using a high-temperature process that is technologically time-consuming and requires meticulous temperature con-

trol skills. The lenticular beads may resemble seeds from *Chenopodium* spp., perhaps *Chenopodium album* (Sukhorukov and Zhang 2013), which has both food and medicinal uses. The barrel-shaped ribbed beads perhaps resemble the schizocarp of the Apicaeae family, a plant family with many members having culinary and medicinal uses, including cumin and coriander, as identified at a Saka female burial at Urzhar, East Kazakhstan (Nigmatova and Baitanayev 2019).

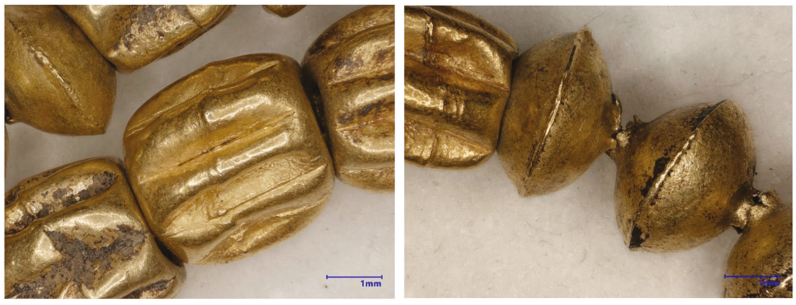

Figure 18. Digital microscope images of gold beads, Kurgan 4, Eleke Sazy II. Internal Museum number КПо93-38580/1-128.

The leaf-shaped pendant from the hoard discovered in Kurgan 4, Eleke Sazy II—having four lobes and a perforation at the terminal described as a 'beech nut' design by Liu (acknowledging that beech seeds have three lobes) (Liu et al. 2021a)—is found across the Eurasian steppe region in similar contemporaneous designs (Liu 2014): at mound M3 of the Dongtalede cemetery in the Southern Altai Mountains, Xinjiang (9th to 7th centuries BCE) (Liu et al. 2021a); burial mound 1 of Filippovka I, southern Urals (4th century BCE) (Yablonsky 2015); kurgan 6 of Taksai-1 site in western Kazakhstan (6th–5th centuries BCE) (Liu et al. 2021a; Lukpanova 2017); and kurgan 8 in the necropolis of Mecet-Saji in the Black Sea region (5th–4th centuries BCE) (Parzinger 2007; Liu et al. 2021a) (Figure 19).

Figure 19. Digital microscope images of beech nut design gold pendant, Kurgan 4, Eleke Sazy II. Internal Museum number КПо93-38580/1-128.

As well as demonstrating the mastery of local plant knowledge in their gold working, the Saka also used their adornments to show off their access to long-distance trade routes and exotic foodstuffs, as demonstrated by two pendant designs that appear to show fruits that were unlikely to have been cultivated locally, unearthed from the Kurgan 7 Eleke Sazy IV hoard (Figure 20). The first is a unique piece of jewellery in the form of a bunch of grapes, consisting of two different sizes of granules joined together at high temperatures. The larger spheres are made from two joined hemispheres and are hollow inside. The smaller granules appear to be made of solid gold. Grapes (*Vitis vinifera*) were domesticated in the Transcaucasian region beginning around 6000–8000 years ago, spreading westward into the Mediterranean, and eastward into China by the 2nd century BCE (Miller 2008;

Grassi and Arroyo-Garcia 2020; Zohary and Hopf 2000). A small number of grape seeds were recovered from the Saka-Wusun settlement site of Tuzusai in south-east Kazakhstan (410–150 BCE date range from a series of ^{14}C dates), and it is unclear whether they represent imported or locally cultivated fruits (Spengler et al. 2013). The grapes depicted in the Eleke Sazy pendant may therefore represent an exotic foodstuff, or symbolise wine drinking among the elite (Miller 2008).

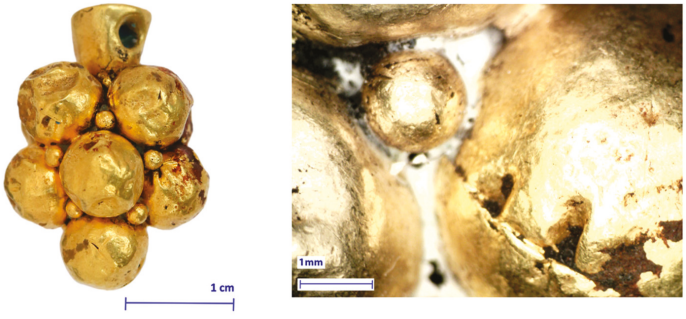

Figure 20. Bunch of grapes gold pendant and digital microscope image of the pendant (Dinolite images), Kurgan 7, Eleke Sazy IV. Macro photograph source: Y. Domashev/East Kazakhstan Regional Museum of Local History. Internal Museum number КПо93-39392.

The final botanical motif to consider is a pair of pendants from the same hoard, once again representing extremely fine and detailed work. The pendants are spiky in appearance, appearing to be covered in either individual grains, or represent the textured surface of a fruit exocarp (Figure 21). A distinctive feature of these two pieces is undoubtedly signs of wear and tear, where due to extensive wearing some spikes on the pendants have been almost erased by what appears to be long-term and extensive use (Figure 22). These were pieces that seem to have been prized possessions, worn frequently, and not simply made as part of a burial outfit or tribute. The technology used to produce the pendant is visible in the microscope images (Figure 22). Each spike is made of a hollow cone that has no visible joins, which are then joined to a sphere that itself was made of two hemispheres. The joining technology resembles the granulation technique, but instead of globular granules, small cones were used. The interpretation of these pendants is not clear in terms of what is being represented. Liu et al. (2021a) speculates that this conical shape may represent individual seeds; however, it is also possible that the pendants represent a sheaf of cereal, or indeed a fruit such as lychee (*Litchi chinensis*) or *Arbutus unedo*, which would represent exotic imports indeed from either eastern China or western Europe.

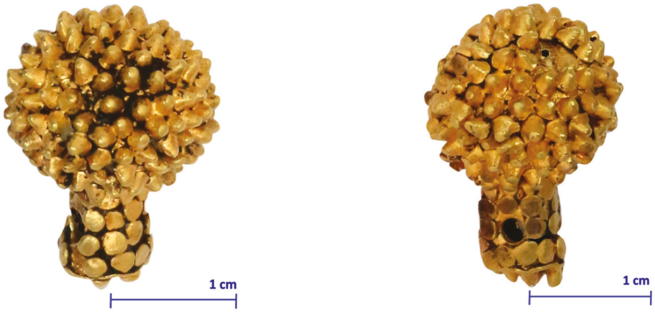

Figure 21. Two spiky gold pendants, Kurgan 7, Eleke Sazy IV. Y. Image source: Y. Domasehv/East Kazakhstan Regional Museum of Local History. Internal Museum numbers КПо 94-39387/1 and КПо 94-39387/2.

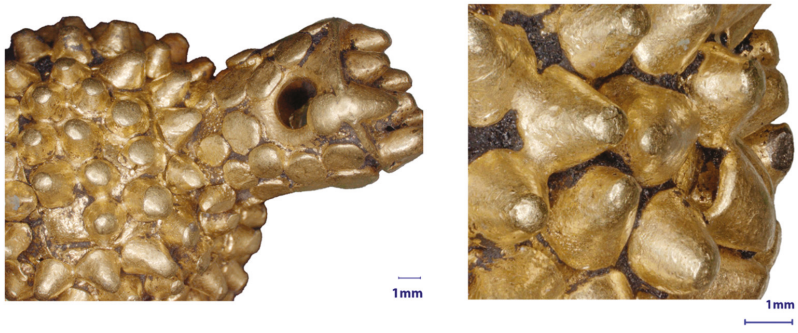

Figure 22. Digital microscope images of spiky gold pendants, Kurgan 7, Eleke Sazy IV. Internal Museum number КПо 94-39387/2.

4. Materials and Methods

Elemental analyses of the gold objects from Eleke Sazy described here were performed using an Olympus Vanta portable X-ray fluorescence spectrometer (pXRF), equipped with an Rh anode and a silicon drift detector, operating at 40 kV and 100 μA, with an aluminium filter in the X-ray path and a 3 mm collimator. Quantification was supported by the in-house Gold6 calibration, which is based on the factory-built Alloys Extra fundamental parameters algorithm, but further optimised for archaeological gold and silver alloys through empirical calibration with certified reference materials.

Objects were examined using a Keyence VHX6000 high-resolution 3D or Dinolite digital microscopes. Observations under various magnifications focused on traits of manufacture, wear, current condition, and microstructure. All the analyses took place at both the East Kazakhstan Regional Museum of Local History in Ust-Kamenogorsk, Kazakhstan, and the Archaeological Science Laboratories of the University of Cambridge, UK, within the frame of the 'Gold of the Great Steppe' exhibition, which took place between September 2021 and January 2022 at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Raw data from the pXRF and East Kazakhstan Regional Museum of Local History accession numbers for objects are provided in the Supplementary Material.

5. Discussion

It is clear that the Saka did not only depict the animals in their world with great care and attention, but also employed a detailed language of plants to express their skills, abilities, wealth, and contacts. How might we begin to understand the significance of the animals and plants depicted, beyond the fact that Saka goldsmiths invested many hours of skill and effort into recreating the natural world in such detail?

Herodotus, in his *History* (4.134.1) describes an incident of an unexpected appearance of a hare that caused the Scythians to start chasing it under the eyes of the amazed army of Darius (Herodotus 1987). Observation of the hare chasing persuaded Darius to retreat and leave the battlefield. It is not clear from Herodotus's words whether the hare was considered a good or bad sign by the Scythians themselves and what were the reasons for them to start chasing it. On the contrary, Herodotus mostly describes the reaction of Darius to the sudden appearance of the hare in the Scythian army, explaining the Persian interpretation of the incident and its consequences. What is clear is that symbolically the hare was very important for both sides. The Scythians were ready to catch it in the face of the enemy, and the Persians decided to retreat after the effect of its appearance. Despite the probable symbolic importance of the hare for the Scythian and Saka population, depictions of hares are not as common in Eurasian steppe region art, and specifically among the Saka population, as are deer, eagles, or felines. Consequently, if the hare was symbolically important among the Eurasian pastoralist societies, as was indicated by Herodotus, why then so far, are depictions found so rarely among the largest Eastern part of the pan-Scythian

world created by the Saka? Meanwhile, it is worth noting that depictions of hares in a more conventional form can be found more often in the Scythian-Greek and Scythian-Achaemenid bordering regions, where they probably bore culturally mixed symbolism (Molev 2015).

While the words of Herodotus were and should be considered in a critical manner, a few recent archaeological findings confirm his observations about the Scythians and their eastern steppe neighbours, including their use of cannabis, the pre-inhumation ceremonies of local rulers, their use of unusual organic materials (human skin) and wearing mini gold cups attached to belts (Spindler et al. 2020; Chugunov et al. 2017). Consequently, the chronicles of Herodotus are at least partially supported by recent archaeological evidence.

The shift from a sedentary to a predominantly (not wholly) transhumant pastoralist society that happened at the end of the Bronze and the beginning of the Iron Age in the Eurasian steppe region was an enduring and successful economic strategy according to the archaeological data of the period. It is hard to believe that the Iron Age pastoralist societies of the region did not use a calendar or had no idea of astronomy, considering the massive annual periodic movements of people and animals, the large scale of their political territories, their knowledge of both domesticated and wild plant resources for food and medicine, and the mixed agro-pastoralism practised by those living at the border of steppe and mountains (Spengler et al. 2013; Samashev 2021b; Chang 2018). A traditional calendar was used by pastoralist societies of the region starting from at least the 1st millennium CE, and the first official written evidence of its use was recorded in the 7th c. CE (Zakharova 1960).

It was in active use until the beginning of the 20th c. CE and called Tengrian, Turkic, Turkic-Mongol, or Mushel calendar. It was still in use at the beginning of the 20th c. CE in some steppe regions as well as is unofficially in use in many Turkic speaking countries, i.e., in Kazakhstan and Western Siberia (Dimitriyev 1982; Mukhanbetova 2001). It is a 12-year animal named calendar, the 4th period of which is named as a hare year, traditionally considered as the worst, "disastrous" year of the whole 12-year period. Many extremely deadly juts (mass mortality of livestock due to extreme weather conditions, drought, or ice-covered ground) happened in the past on the territory of Kazakhstan and Siberia during the hare year (Atusheva 2000). A few massive juts on the territory of Kazakhstan in 19th c. CE, 1867–1868, 1879–1980, 1891–1892, 1915–1916 were named by the local population as "total hare", "great hare", "younger hare" and "white hare" accordingly. During the juts mass mortality of the livestock could reach up to 72% and it was a disaster for the pastoralist societies where the main wealth, treasure, and source of food is livestock (Mukhanbetova 2001).

If a calendar with animal associations was in use during the Iron Age the Saka were aware of the disastrous hare year and their wish to soften its consequences is understandable. The creation of plaques that include a hare, the shape of which is completely obscured in depictions of other animals or ornamentations, could have had symbolic importance for the Saka population and could be connected to their knowledge of climate, time, astronomy, and landscape. Moreover, some of the depicted animals are the Mushel calendar symbols, such as a boar and bird. Leaving no written records, we can only speculate as to the calendar and astronomy knowledge of the Iron Age pastoralist societies; however, the sophistication of the visual message created by the Saka through the use of complex animal and plant designs hints at a deep understanding and symbolic structuring of the natural world, part of the 'Altai-Sayan' belief system as coined by Z. Samashev (Samashev 2021b).

The importance of medicinal plants—and the skills of those who were able to use them—to the Saka has been demonstrated by the discovery of the burial of Saka women in a kurgan at Tasaryk, Urzhar district, East Kazakhstan, dated to between 408–383 cal BCE (1σ) (Dzhumabekova and Bazarbayeva 2020). Known colloquially as the 'Urzhar Priestess' (Altynbekov 2018) the Saka woman, aged around 30–35, was discovered in a stone-constructed kurgan, as a single undisturbed burial in a 'box' made of large stone slabs. She was buried with an elaborate gold headdress depicting a mythical bird with fern-like adornments and accompanied by grave offerings in the form of animal bones, ceramic vessels, a wooden cup and dish, and a rounded worked-stone item interpreted as an altar

that was placed near her head (Baitanayev 2019). Significantly, her burial was accompanied by numerous organic remains. She was found to be wearing a wig made of vegetable fibres containing fern spores. Her body appears to have been placed on a mat or layer of sedges, rushes, and ferns. Seeds of *Cannabis* sp., *Rumex* sp. (most likely sorrel) and the apline plant *Dryas octopetala* (Mountain avens) were found in her pelvic area, and she was buried with a 'pouch' containing plants known for their medicinal properties, including *Polygonum aviculare* (prostrate knotweed), Carex sp., cereal lemma, Silene, possible coriander and cumin, *Gratiola officinalis* (hedge hyssop), *Carduus acantoides* (welted thistle), *Cannabis* sp., *Plantago* sp. (plantain), and pine needles and bark (Nigmatova and Baitanayev 2019).

Both the form and the function of Saka decorative metalwork are better understood by studying the context and provenance of the objects, and by employing the techniques of archaeological science to understand the decisions made by Saka craftspeople and their patrons. The choices and use of different decorative elements and consequently choices in manufacturing technologies and materials were directly connected with and driven by the mobile lifestyle of the Saka population, and evidence of use-wear on gold artefacts indicates that in many cases the objects had a life before being deposited in a funerary context, be that in a burial chamber or as a hoard tribute to honour the dead. It seems that stylistically and technologically Saka craftspeople followed the physical needs of society and adjusted their skills accordingly, for example, by serially producing tiny microbeads and light decorative plaques for decorating the costumes of horse riders. At the same time as these technical considerations, the complex integration and mixing of depictions of different animals in a single object were perhaps related to Saka society's beliefs, knowledge of climate, landscape, time, and astronomy, and requires more research in the future.

Animals were not the only motifs depicted by Saka craftspeople, and the botanical world was also rendered with great care and attention in fine gold work. The technological skill required to create such tiny and intricate depictions of the plant world, together with the evidence for heavy wear in some cases, demonstrates that the 'animal style' of the Saka would perhaps be better described as the 'ecological style'. Animals and plants adorned people and horses, each with their own underlying symbolic language and social significance. Through careful further study of the archaeological context, both funerary and domestic, and the underlying technological choices behind these images, future research may enable us to understand Saka lifeways and beliefs in greater depth.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/arts12010023/s1, Table S1: Hare_pl_Patsha_ES_VI_Chem.

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Earthly Beasts and Heavenly Creatures: Animal Realms in Early Medieval Chinese Tombs and Cave Temples

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Abstract: This analysis of the fabricated worlds in tombs and cave temples of China's Hexi Corridor shows that animals are integral to concepts of earthly and heavenly realms. Changes in animal imagery from the third through sixth centuries connect to the region's social, cultural, and demographic transformations, including an embrace of pastoralism followed by increasing cosmopolitanism with the spread of Buddhism. A profusion of domestic animals in Wei-Jin tombs establish microcosms, while otherworldly creatures on entrances and coffins play supernatural roles. Western Jin tombs emphasize fantastic beasts over familiar ones and fuel the mysticism of this era. A Sixteen Kingdoms tomb represents the synthesis of the celestial and terrestrial, setting the stage for Buddhist cave temples. In these, real-world animals are all but expunged while imaginary beasts adapt easily to the new habitat. The proliferation of human figures in the form of buddhas and bodhisattvas not only crowd out animals but indicates that the introduction of Buddhism ushers in an anthropocentric view of earthly life and paradise.

Keywords: China; Hexi Corridor; tombs; Buddhist caves; cave temples; Wei-Jin; Dingjiazha; Silk Roads; Dunhuang; Jiuquan

1. Introduction

Animals loom large in the ecosystem of the human imagination. In China's early medieval period, animals play an important role in the fabricated worlds of tombs and temples, where they reflect real-world changes and reveal how people conceived of the cosmos. This essay examines tombs and Buddhist cave temples from the third through sixth centuries in the Hexi Corridor (*Hexi Zoulang* 河西走廊), an important thoroughfare on the Silk Roads in today's Gansu 甘肃 province (Figure 1). Previous studies on art in this area have touched on animals' secondary roles alongside the principal actors of human subjects, and a few have looked in detail at specific animals. My analysis of animal imagery compares its distribution and stylistic rendering across several sites to illuminate profound changes in the way animals were perceived and connected to culture. From an initial profusion of pastoral animals in third-century tombs to their later displacement by imaginary beasts and multiplying buddhas in sixth-century cave temples, animals in the art of the Hexi Corridor are anything but peripheral. Their presence, transformation, and even absences are intertwined with changes in the region, including cultural exchanges with pastoralists, the infusion of new populations, the advent of Buddhism, and a worldview that was becoming increasingly anthropocentric.

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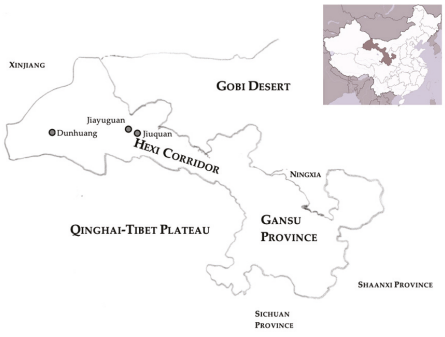

Figure 1. Map of the Hexi Corridor and Gansu Province.

2. Wei-Jin Tombs (Third to Early Fourth Century) Located between Jiuquan and Jiayuguan

Two important groups of tombs are rife with animal imagery, mostly in paintings and, to a lesser extent, in carvings. The Xigoucun 西沟村 and Xincheng 新城 tombs lie between the cities of Jiuquan 酒泉 and Jiayuguan 嘉峪关 in the central Hexi Corridor. They date to the Wei-Jin 魏晋 period (220–317 CE), which followed the fall of the Han 汉 dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) and ushered in more than three hundred years of political fragmentation across China. The construction and layout of large-scale tombs is uniform at both sites. All have long, ramped corridors leading to two or three underground chambers. Above the entrance to the front chamber, each tomb has a tall watchtower-like façade made of carved and painted bricks that soars up one face of an airshaft. Archaeologists commonly call this striking element a "screen wall" (*zhaobi* 照壁). The chambers on the other side of the screen wall are likewise made of brick and measure about three meters square (Figure 2). The front chambers, some of which have additional side chambers, have a unique construction of a sunken floor under a *fudou* 覆斗 (overturned dipper) ceiling, so that the space represents the courtyard of a manor under an open sky. The middle chamber, if present, has a raised floor and *fudou* ceiling. In the rear chamber of each tomb, the side walls curve inward to form a barrel-vaulted ceiling, and it is here that the occupants were laid to rest (Zhao and Ma 1996, pp. 4–14; Gansusheng Bowuguan et al. 1985, pp. 7–17). Each of these three spaces, the screen wall, front and middle chambers, and rear burial chamber, feature animal imagery that performs distinct functions in the burial.

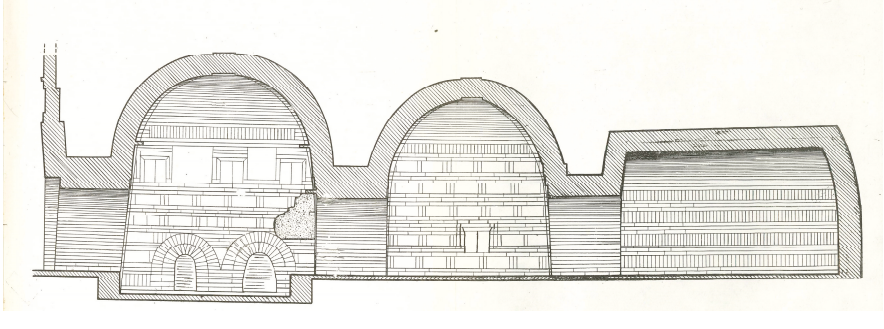

Figure 2. Cross section, Xincheng M3, brick, Wei-Jin period (220–317). (Gansusheng Bowuguan et al. 1985, Figure 13).

Animals abound in the front chambers, where they define environments, provide food for the deceased, and signify wealth, power, or virtue. They appear in paintings on individual bricks and centered on conventional themes showing life at home and in the

region (Figure 3). Apart from these general consistencies, however, the paintings in individual tombs differ in detail, dispersion, style, and presentation, presumably to accurately project the aspirations of the patrons who commissioned the tomb. Not surprisingly, one of the principal themes centers on animals as sustenance. Not only are there scenes of servants staggering under platters of meat, but also ones of animals about to be slaughtered and in various stages of being butchered and cooked. In fact, scenes of butchering and food preparation outnumber those of banqueting. One series of images from the east wall of Xincheng M1 illustrates the process from live animal to food as a goat is led in, killed, and hung by its legs so its blood drains into a pan (Figure 4). In paintings on adjacent bricks, meat hangs from hooks before serving women fry it. The meat in question includes chicken, beef, mutton, and even horse, which is identified by an inscription "*ma*" 马 (horse) beside a row of red slabs suspended from hooks (Gansusheng Bowuguan et al. 1985, p. 99). This indicates that animal protein was a staple of people's diet, and that it was highly valued. It is a departure from Han-dynasty customs and was probably due to local Chinese people adopting the customs of Xiongnu 匈奴 and other pastoralists, who also lived in the region and appear in tomb paintings (Sterckx 2011, pp. 14–15, 17, 20–21, 26–28; McLaughlin 2020, p. 37). These images of cooking and feasting supply what is known as a "happy home" in the tomb (Wu 2010, pp. 44–45). The emphasis on production over consumption suggests that patrons wanted to establish systems for the ongoing nourishment of the souls of the deceased. That is to say, the paintings not only present food as an end-product, but they set up the means of production from live animals to hot meals so that feasting can be a recurring event.

Figure 3. East wall of front chamber, Xincheng M5, carved and painted brick, Wei-Jin period (220–317). (Gansusheng Bowuguan et al. 1985, color pl. 1).

Figure 4. Goat being bled, east wall of front chamber, Xincheng M6, painting on brick, Wei-Jin period (220–317), (Gansusheng Bowuguan et al. 1985, pl. 68.2).

Other animal paintings set the mechanisms of the estates into motion. In the fields, oxen drag plows and harrows while chickens scratch in the yard and try to snatch grain, proving that even the happy home of the afterlife is not without quotidian nuisances (Gansusheng Bowuguan et al. 1985, pl. 45.2). Although the paintings are somewhat cursory with minimal details, they skillfully encapsulate the character of local creatures, which imbues even humdrum barnyard episodes with a dash of drama. In one painted scene, a rooster leads four hens (Figure 5). Lifting his claw with an air of grandeur, he inflates his chest and turns his head as if to address the hen directly behind him. She, too, raises her toe, imitating her mate's pomposity, a flex that the birds behind her ignore. Vignettes such as these appear to be grounded in close observations of creatures and a penchant for endowing them with personalities. This stylistic choice is one of several that the artisans could have made and conveys veracity and spirit, rather than merely cataloguing livestock. In this way, the animals echo Han dynasty *mingqi* 明器, so-called "spirit vessels" or burial goods made of earthenware or other materials and representing animals, architectural forms, household goods and the like to serve the tomb occupants in the afterlife. Animal *mingqi* in particular are often vivid representations that capture the creature's personality in an engaging way, presumably because their presence in the afterlife was valued as part of the larger household or estate ecosystem.

Figure 5. Rooster and hens, west wall of front chamber, Xincheng M3, painting on brick, Wei-Jin period (220–317). (Gansusheng Bowuguan et al. 1985, pl. 54.3).

Moving beyond the estate, animals help humans navigate the region and reveal particulars about how daily customs and routines were adjusting to broader changes. Three

tombs at Xincheng include paintings of large dogs lunging and straining on a leash or standing sentry, often in front of a fortified citadels (Figure 6). The hounds' floppy ears and long-haired coats, rendered through wavy strokes of the brush, indicate that they might be Tibetan mastiffs, one of the oldest breeds of dog and a sign of pastoralists' influence on daily life in the Hexi Corridor (Ren et al. 2017, p. 119). That pastoralism had permeated the local the economy is evident in the number of herding scenes, which compete with and even overshadow those of farming and sericulture. Women, men, boys, or mastiffs oversee herds of goats and cows or, less frequently, one or two camels. The artists capture the multitude and movement of these animals by means of stacking, crowding, and overlapping, artistic techniques that would become commonplace by the sixth century (Figure 7) (Rawson 2001, p. 128). These scenes stand in visual testament to textual records, which state that a mixed economy of agriculture and pastoralism dominated the Hexi Corridor in the third century (Zhao 2009, p. 2). The mingling of grasslands and oasis-fed farmlands in the corridor was ideal for a varied economy and food supply, something that Han dynasty officials recognized. The *Hanshu* 汉书, referring to an ancient name for the region, states:

> West of Wuwei 武威 ... the land is vast, and people are few. The water and grass are suitable for animal husbandry, and livestock in old Liangzhou 凉州 is the most plentiful under heaven.
>
> (Ban 1995, p. 1644.45)

Figure 6. Citadel with guard and dog, east wall of front chamber, Xincheng M5, painting on brick, Wei-Jin period (220–317). (Gansusheng Bowuguan et al. 1985, pl. 54.2).

Figure 7. Sogdian horse herder, north wall of front chamber, Xincheng M6, painting on brick, Wei-Jin period (220–317). (Gansusheng Bowuguan et al. 1985, pl. 53.1).

By the third century, the Hexi Corridor was attracting newcomers, and tomb paintings enlist animals to herald their arrival. In a painting from Xincheng M5, a herd of horses race across a red-bordered brick under the calm purview of what appears to be a Sogdian wrangler, identified by his large nose beneath deep-set eyes, short coat cinched with a belt and with tapered sleeves, and tall boots (Figure 6, above) (Dien 2007, p. 425). Likewise, paintings of horseback riding show the influence of pastoralists, for whom riding was an expression of power, in contrast to the goat herds, which indicated wealth (Barfield 1989, p. 21). Across the front chambers, the tomb occupants hunt and lead cavalries through the region. Their horses, with barrel chests, slender legs, and kicking hooves, extend and amplify the occupants' vigor. The most dynamic such scene unfurls across three walls of Xincheng M3. This composition is unique among the Xigoucun and Xincheng paintings in that it breaks free of the brick-and-mortar grid to achieve an expansive composition. On the south wall, what are probably Chinese tenant-farmers grip shields and halberds as they march, surrounding their mounted general (Xiao 1976, p. 85). In the next scene, the party encamps before setting out again on the east wall. Here, nobles ride spirited mounts that canter onto the north wall, where the tomb occupant not only rides point but is boldly outlined in red (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Military campaign, north wall of front chamber, Xincheng M3, painted brick, Wei-Jin period (220–317). (Gansusheng Bowuguan et al. 1985, color pl. 2.1).

Images of horseback riding further reveal relaxed gender roles, which are indicative of pastoral cultures (Yu 1967, p. 40). In one series of painted bricks in Xigoucun M7, a husband and wife ride with what is probably their private militia, comprised of another eight mounted soldiers (Jiuquanshi Bowuguan 1998, pp. 71, 81). Among the numerous images of hunting from horseback (with the aid of arrows, spears, or falcons), one from Xincheng M5 is especially intriguing (Figure 9). The horse spreads its legs to the front and back, flying at full gallop, while its rider calmly turns to release a Parthian shot at a fleeing hare. The archer's slim frame and a painted curve along the breast of her jacket suggest that she is female. The influence of pastoral cultures in the region accompanied their growing numbers after the fall of the Han dynasty (Bai 2011; Bai 1990). The Xigoucun and Xincheng tombs include paintings of people representing various ethnicities, as indicated by hair and clothing styles and including Qiang 羌, Di 氐, Xianbei 鲜卑, and Xiongnu, giving visual form to an observation made in the *Jinshu* 晋书, which stated that "In Guanzhong

关中 (a region encompassing the Hexi Corridor) there are more than a million people. In calculating their numbers, half are Rong 戎 and Di." (Fang 1995, p. 56.1533).

Figure 9. Female hunter on horseback, north wall of front chamber, Xincheng M5, painting on brick, Wei-Jin period (220–317). (Gansusheng Bowuguan et al. 1985, pl. 79.1).

Looking at the Xigoucun and Xincheng tombs, it is apparent that people living in the Jiuquan area during in Wei-Jin not only adopted pastoralism, including customs of meat-eating, herding and roles for women, but also viewed animals as integral to their lives and vision of cosmic harmony. Yet any traces of "animal style" art of the Xiongnu and Xianbei are absent in the paintings and other objects found in these tombs. This includes stylistic references to animal style's predator–prey symbiosis, contorted creatures, mix of naturalism and abstracted geometric design, and self-framed images with distinctive use of negative space. Instead, the paintings cleave closely to Han dynasty precedents, whether in the form of paintings or images in relief on bricks.

Speaking broadly, the themes in these tomb paintings also align with Han dynasty precents to include farming, hunting, banqueting, and entertainment, along with processions such as the one in Figure 8. Such themes provide comfort, repose, and enjoyment for the tomb occupants in the afterlife. Theyalso project or elevate social status and personal virtue by showing the tomb occupant as presiding over a domain in which the forces of *yin* 阴and *yang* 阳exist in perfect balance. Two important distinctions between these third- and early-fourth-century tomb paintings and their Han dynasty counterparts should be noted, however. First, heavenly themes and auspicious omens are absent, though I will explain below how such imagery appears elsewhere in these tombs. Second, also missing are scenes of filial piety and depictions of virtuous rulers, which were a common feature of late-Han-dynasty tombs of local elites (Powers 1991, pp. 31–34). In this respect, the Xigoucun and Xincheng tombs diverge even from their most similar Han-dynasty counterpart, the late-second-century-CE tomb at Helinge'er 和林格尔 in Inner Mongolia. This large tomb with six chambers also has paintings of meat preparation and the pasturing of animals, along with processions of cavalry and chariots (Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology 2007, pp. 101, 104, 68–72; Nei Menggu Wenwu Gongzuodui 1974, pp. 10–11). At Helinge'er, however, entire sections of the tomb are devoted to typical Chinese scenes of filial piety, Confucian disciples, and exemplary women (Nei Menggu Wenwu Gongzuodui 1974, p. 112). The absence of such imagery at Xigoucun and Xincheng suggests that people in the third-century Hexi Corridor eschewed Confucian exemplars and anthropocentric ideologies that were prominent in the Han dynasty.[1] Instead, the nature of power and virtue had been decoupled from Confucian beliefs to embrace multiculturalism and blend pastoral and agricultural customs.

Animals in the tombs also define spaces, whether the estate, farm, pastures, or region, a widespread tactic in Chinese art, where "animals . . . amount to a taxonomy of topogra-

phy," in the words of Eugene Wang (E. Y. Wang 2016, p. viii). Yet the orderly amalgamation and juxtaposition of the animals also imply prosperity and harmony, paying tribute to the virtue and bureaucratic capabilities of the tomb occupant (Sterckx 2002, pp. 47–49). Perhaps the artisans sought to capture the essence and character of creatures in their brushstrokes so that they would come to life in the subterranean world of the tomb. Rather than merely constituting a clinical inventory, the animals create a boisterous microcosm for the deceased in the afterlife. Non-worldly animals appear only in one tomb, Xigoucun M5, where two tiger heads leer on the east wall and a green-dragon-red-tiger duo occupies the north wall. The former seems to be an architectural detail. As for the latter, its high position on the wall, with the dragon to the east and tiger to the west, makes it likely that these are directional animals, even though the tiger's coloring departs from a conventional white. Apart from these outliers, however, otherworldly beasts are confined to the screen wall at the entrance to the chambers and coffins in the burial chambers.

As explained above, the screen wall is a carved and painted brick facade on one face of an airshaft (Figure 10). These climb between eight and twelve meters high to nearly reach the surface above (Gansusheng Bowuguan et al. 1985, pp. 5–11; Zhao and Ma 1996, pp. 7–9). Certain aspects of the design mimic brackets, columns, and verandahs, so that the structure resembles a *que* 阙 watchtower. Painted and carved guardians, directional animals, magical creatures, and hybrids, however, endow the screen wall with spiritual significance (Han 2011). Additionally, every screen wall at Xigoucun and Xincheng has a miniature brick door near the bottom. All of these, save one, are flanked by a chicken-headed and ox-headed guardian. These hybrids can be seen in Han dynasty pictorial stones found in eastern China, where they act as occasional attendants to the Queen Mother of the West. Their presence implies that the screen wall is a conduit to a celestial realm, though not necessarily the paradise reigned over by the Queen Mother of the West (Clydesdale 2019, pp. 298–99). Instead, the absence of the deity emphasizes the dual status of the hybrid attendants as denizens of the celestial and terrestrial worlds (Ho 2016, p. 103).

The magical and protective qualities conferred by these animals are echoed in paintings on one complete wood coffin and two lids retrieved from the rear chambers of two separate tombs (Figure 11) (Gansusheng Bowuguan et al. 1985, pp. 18, 23). The celestial couple Nü Wa 女娲 and Fu Xi 伏羲, representing *yin* and *yang*, respectively, decorate two of the lids (Abe 2002, pp. 112–13). Both have human heads and torsos, but instead of legs, they have snake tails that reach from their bodies on opposite ends of the coffin, across swirling clouds of the heavens, to comingle in the center (Zhao and Ma 2005, pp. 66–68). Despite their legendary origins as creators of the universe, Nü Wa and Fu Xi are depicted only in mortuary art, where they guard the boundary separating the worldly and otherworldly (Lewis 2006, pp. 125–26). The other coffin lid features another power couple, the Queen Mother of the West (*Xi Wang Mu* 西王母), a Daoist deity who rose to cult status in the Han dynasty, and her partner, the King Father of the East (*Dong Wang Gong* 东王公). They represent west and east as well as *yin* and *yang* (H. Wu 1989, pp. 110–11). Like Nü Wa and Fu Xi, the Queen Mother of the West can be considered a hybrid—for, according to the *Shanhaijing* 山海经, she has a leopard's tail, tiger teeth, and a good howl (Wang 2003, p. 35). The pairs of deities on the coffin lids embody the cosmic dance between yin and yang and offer protection and even immortality to the deceased (H. Wu 1989, pp. 116–17, 123). The beauty of these images stand out even more in the otherwise spare rear chambers, where the only decorations are simple paintings on the back walls depicting sundry artifacts associated with wealth or status. The correlations between the hybrids on the screen walls and coffins reveal that the supernatural phenomena depicted in the extremities of the tomb bookend the idealized but terrestrial environs that animals populate in the main chambers.

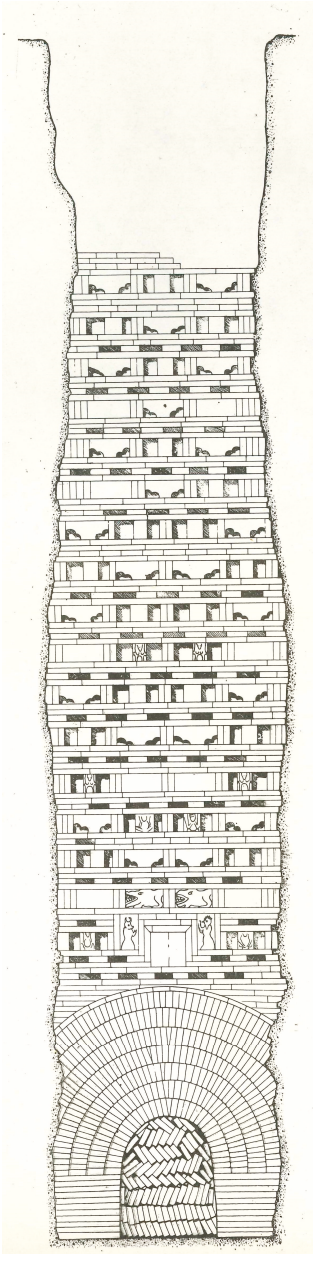

Figure 10. Screen wall Xincheng M7, carved and painted brick, Wei-Jin period (220–317). (Gansusheng Bowuguan et al. 1985, Figure 10).

Whether painted or sculptural, mortuary imagery was thought to be activated after the tomb was sealed (Rawson 2001, pp. 128–29). The real-world animals in the chambers and the magical and mythological ones on the screen wall and coffins not only identify each area as earthly or divine but enable them to benefit the deceased. The architectural engineering of each space, layout of the decorative program, degree of embellishment, and

even the relative size of the images, demonstrates that the earthly and divine carry equal importance within the burial program in these third- and early-fourth-century tombs near Jiuquan and Jiayuguan. This is not the case, however, with another set of tombs at Dunhuang 敦煌, an important oasis city along the Silk Roads, located four hundred kilometers to the northwest and at the western edge of the Hexi Corridor.

Figure 11. Drawing of coffin lids with Fuxi and Nüwa from Xincheng M1 and the Queen Mother of the West and King Father of the East, from Xincheng M6 incised wood with lacquer, Wei-Jin period (220–317). (Gansusheng Bowuguan et al. 1985, Figure 19).

3. Western Jin Tombs (Late Third to Early Fourth Century) near Dunhuang

About ten kilometers outside of Dunhuang, the Foyemiaowan 佛爷庙湾 site has burials dating from the Han through Tang 唐 (618–907) dynasties (Sun and Ma 1974, p. 11). Among these are a set of large-scale chambered tombs with brick paintings dated to the Western Jin 晋 dynasty (265–317). While in many ways comparable to those at Xigoucun and Xincheng in the central Hexi Corridor, they emphasize different aspects of structure and decoration and further divulge the escalating importance of fantastical animals in the burial.

M37, M39, and M133, the best-preserved Foyemiaowan tombs, are uniform in architectural design and painting. All three have a long passage leading underground to a tall screen wall. As at Xigoucun and Xincheng, these rise above the entrance to the tomb chambers. M37 and M39 are single-chambered tombs with small chambers or niches on both sides. The front chamber of M133 has two such niches and one side chamber. It also has a separate rear chamber. Coffins holding the remains of a female and male occupant were found in the main chambers of M37 and M39 and the rear chamber of M133 (Gansusheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1998, pp. 11–35). In all three tombs, the length of the ramps (between twenty and twenty-three meters), height of the screen walls (between seven and eight meters), and size of the front chambers (about three meters square) fall within the range of those at Xigoucun and Xincheng (Gansusheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1998, pp. 119–20). The most conspicuous difference is that the Foyemiaowan chambers have few paintings and minimal decor, while the screen walls are rich and colorful. Looking at how animal imagery manifests in these two spaces amplifies their divergent functions and shows that concepts of the cosmos had shifted to favor the marvelous and celestial.

In the main chamber of each tomb, paintings of estates and related activities are few and mainly found on the west wall where they cluster in small groups flanking the door

and floating on the otherwise unadorned brick surface (Figure 12). One or two brick paintings above depict an attic warehouse, while those below spotlight ordinary activities: sifting grain, dining, a mother playing with a child. Animals appear only twice. In one scene, an ox rests next to a *yaoche* 轺车, an open two-wheeled cart used for high officials (Dien 2007, pp. 371–72), while in another, a pair of wild chickens flounce across the brick (Figure 13). Additionally, some protruding bricks have tiger or lion faces painted on them. These seem to be an architectural element, rather than animal depictions, per se. Miniature paintings of rams positioned high up and centered on several walls of M37 and M39 are probably lucky symbols (see Figure 12, above). Compared to the animal kingdoms that suffuse microcosms in the Xigoucun and Xincheng tombs, the paintings in the chambers at Foyemiaowan make shorthand references to isolated aspects of life.

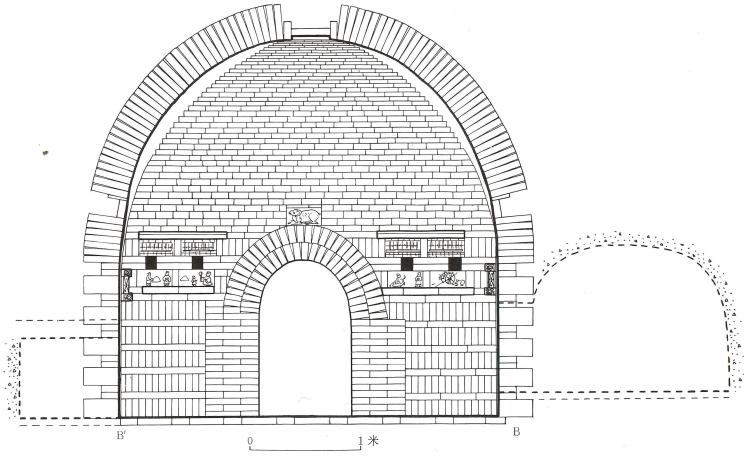

Figure 12. West wall of Foyemiaowan M39, brick, Western Jin period (265–317). (Gansusheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1998, Figure 6).

Figure 13. Two wild chickens, west wall of Foyemiaowan M39, painting on brick, Western Jin period (265–317). (Gansusheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1998, pl. 60.1).

This conclusion is tempered somewhat, however, by media other than painting. In M133, the small chamber to the south housed straw cows and troughs, so it represents a barn, while ceramic vessels as well as bronze cooking knives and forks stock the larger side chamber, making it a kitchen (Gansusheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1998, pp. 33, 39). Nevertheless, the treatment of animal imagery in the chambers of Foyemiaowan tombs do not approach the animated quality of their counterparts at Xigoucun and Xincheng. Perhaps this is because the chambers at Foyemiaowan have a different focal point, namely a spirit seat, which is an altar for the souls of the deceased to receive offerings. At Foyemiaowan, this takes the form of a painted curtained canopy within a niche or behind a platform (Wu 2010, pp. 68–70). For animals, their smaller quantity, depleted variety, and sedate portrayal at Foyemiaowan do not mean that they were not important to the economy at Dunhuang, but they do imply that they were not deemed central to happiness, wealth, or status in the afterlife.

The screen walls at Foyemiaowan, however, are another matter. M37, M39, and M133 all have well-preserved and elaborate screen walls, and these team with the finned, the feathered, and the furry, as well as the scaled and the thick-skinned. Like the screen walls at Xigoucun and Xincheng, they are home to imaginary creatures, but the Foyemiaowan screen walls follow an alternate design (Figure 14). At the bottom of all the screen walls, a bear-like creature serves as a column. The beast has pendulous breasts draped over a bulbous stomach and grips the capital in its paws (Figure 15). (Incidentally, this same creature inhabits the screen walls at Xigoucun and Xincheng, but not in a central or consistent position (Jiuquanshi Bowuguan 1998, p. 149; Gansusheng Bowuguan et al. 1985, p. 10 and pl. 3.1)). On either side, slender columns support a large *dougong* 斗拱 bracket, a typical element in Chinese architecture, which is flanked by either a dragon-tiger pair (directional animals), two tigers (indicating the west), or two birds. Near the top of the column and between the brackets is a bonbon-shaped motif that looks like the *sheng* headdress worn by the Queen Mother of the West (Sun 2012, p. 32). Like the chicken- and ox-headed figures at the bottom of the screen walls at Xigoucun and Xincheng, this is an oblique, rather than explicit, reference to the deity. Above the column is a painting of a guardian raising a mountain range over his head. His long stride and fierce pose call to mind images of Chiyou 蚩尤, the storm deity who is accompanied, as this figure is, by a pair of birds (Bush 2016, pp. 68–71). Apart from the additional human figures in M133 (who, incidentally, are Boya 伯牙, playing the *qin* 琴 and Ziqi 子期 listening appreciatively) the elements described above are largely consistent across the Foyemiaowan screen walls, which indicates that they have a special significance (Wang 2008).

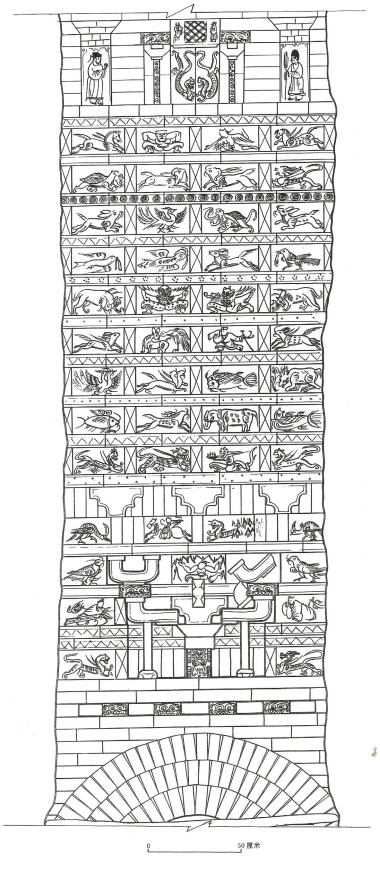

Figure 14. Screen wall, Foyemiaowan M133, carved and painted brick, Western Jin period (265–317). (Gansusheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1998, Figure 23).

Figure 15. Bear, screen wall, Foyemiaowan M133, carved and painted brick, Western Jin period (265–317). (Gansusheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1998, pl. 70.3).

Higher up, a latticed framework encloses a limited number of legendary humans slotted in among fantastic beasts. Humanoid and human figures are fewer in number than those in the screen walls at Xigoucun and Xincheng, however (Sun 2012, pp. 30–31). One such figure is local hero Li Guang 李广, who rides a galloping horse and turns to shoot his prey, an illusory tiger. Mostly, however, motley beasts dominate the structure. Some are monster mashups that have roamed the Chinese imagination from time immemorial. In M133, the row of bricks above the column houses two *bixie* 辟邪, one *qilin* 麒麟, and a *shoufu* 受福, whose name means "receiving blessings." The *bixie*, whose name means "averting evil," have attenuated bodies covered in feathers or scales. Sword-like wings spring from their shoulders, and two short horns top their feline faces. The *qilin* has a more robust body, also covered in feathers or scales, short wings, a three-forked tail, a single horn, and a flat face with bulging eyes (Gansusheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1998, pp. 65–70).[2] While the creatures above were members of a mythological pantheon, others on the screen walls are common animals (horses, rabbits, fish, sheep) made magical through the addition of wings or multiple heads, ears, and appendages. Still others are invasive species, so to speak, and arrived from the west. The white elephant migrated in with Buddhism, which was gaining traction in the region, and here can be seen, at least in part, in a Buddhist context and not just as a lucky figure (Dai 2011, pp. 60, 65, 67). Its presence on the screen walls complements the painted lotus flowers in the ceiling caissons that cap the chambers of M39 and M37, though the latter may carry more general connotations of prestige or Daoist harmony (Sun 2008, pp. 26–27; Zheng 2002, pp. 167–68). Whatever the origin of the creatures on these screen walls, it seems that the artists or patrons prized the extraordinary and the fanciful. This aligns with craze for strange creatures, which were interpreted as portents and omens, during this period (Campany 1996, p. 7).

The upper areas of most Foyemiaowan screen walls have suffered damage, except for M133, and its pristine state reveals something quite interesting. At the very top, two human guardians stand on either side of a tiny doorway painted with two writhing white tigers. Above this, and so minute as to be imperceptible to a person standing below, are an ox-headed and a chicken-headed attendant—doppelgangers to those at the bottom of screen walls at Xigoucun and Xincheng. Their presence, along with the painted tigers on the doors, indicates that they guard a portal to a western paradise. However, since the Queen Mother of the West herself is again absent, we are left to wonder whether they signal a new concept of paradise or the afterlife (Clydesdale 2019, p. 301).

Standing back to examine the screen wall, it is rampant with animals. They assume fierce poses, arching backs, planting feet, and kicking heels to awe the viewer. At the same time, the display of nature's force and mystery is tempered by a strict grid that isolates each creature, as if confining them in cages on a circus train. This is a variation within a "cataloguing style" to use Wu Hung's term, which is seen in auspicious omen imagery in the Wu Liang 武梁 shine, dated 151 CE, and the Helinge'er tomb (H. Wu 1989, p. 77). The many undulating spines create a dynamic but orderly pulse. Creatures on the left confront those on the right, establishing equilibrium if not perfect symmetry. The visual manifestation is reminiscent of literary techniques used in *fu* 赋 rhapsodic poems of the Han dynasty, where repetition, variety, and quantity dazzle and overwhelm the reader, even as the rhythm asserts the dominance of the poet or reader. (Cai 2018, pp. 50, 54–56). In the same way, the Foyemiaowan screen walls ultimately pay homage to the virtue of the tomb occupants, for whom the potent magic of these animals is harnessed (Sterckx 2002, pp. 233–37). On the screen walls, the capricious and terrifying powers of the cosmos are collocated into a pageant that could protect the souls of the occupants in their journey to the small portal at the top.

4. A Sixteen-Kingdoms-Period Tomb (Late Fourth to Mid-Fifth Century) at Jiuquan

The differences in the depiction and arrangement of animals in the central versus western Hexi Corridor could result from regional tastes and beliefs or show changes from one time period to another. However, one painted tomb from the central Hexi Corridor

epitomizes an interesting synthesis between the two approaches and is a precursor to the presence and treatment of animal imagery in the later Mogao 莫高 cave temples near Dunhuang. The tomb is named Dingjiazha M5 for the Jiuquan neighborhood in which it is located. It probably dates from the late fourth to mid-fifth century during the Sixteen Kingdoms (*Shiliuguo* 十六国) period (304–439), though some suggest it dates to the early fourth century (R. Wu 1989, pp. 11–17; Wei 2011). The first thing to note about the tomb is that it has a short screen wall, rising only three meters from the floor. The bricks are uncarved and stacked in a simple pattern that does not present the large brick-face as a surface for paintings. Paint traces remain, but the original decoration was rudimentary (Zheng 2002, p. 158). Entering the front chamber, real-world animals populate estates and farms on the walls, while heavenly creatures cavort across a unified composition on the ceilings (Figure 16). This scheme is made possible by plaster applied over the brick walls, the upper panels of which converge around a caisson in the center. Like the nearby tombs at Xigoucun and Xincheng, the front chamber at Dingjiazha has a sunken floor with a platform at one end. The rear burial chamber likewise lies beyond and has a vaulted ceiling and minimal decoration. Looking at the room, it is as through the otherworldly creatures on the screen walls at Foyemiaowan and (to a lesser extent) Xigoucun and Xincheng have stampeded onto the vaulted canopy of the Dingjiazha front chamber.

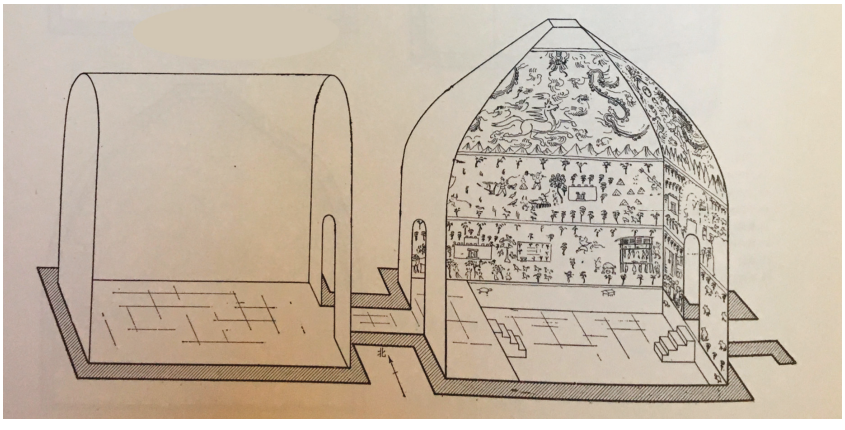

Figure 16. Schematic drawing of Dingjiazha M5 with view of north walls, Later Liang to Northern Liang dynasties (386–441). (Gansusheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1989, Figure 8).

A central figure dominates each ceiling panel. The west panel is opposite the door and immediately visible when one enters the chamber. Here, in the prime spot, the Queen Mother of the West hovers on the pinnacle of Mt. Kunlun 昆仑 (Figure 17). Opposite her and above the door leading out of the tomb is the King Father of the East. Together they create a west–east axis of *yin* and *yang*. On the south wall, a heavenly deer (*tianlu* 天鹿) accompanies a winged woman, probably an immortal (Wu 2013). A heavenly horse gallops through the clouds and across the north wall, its flame-like mane flickering in the wind (Figure 18). Above each panel, a dragon head dangles from the edge of the caisson and onto each ceiling panel. The dragons stretch their jaws and emit magical vapors that swirl around to frame the main figures of the Queen Mother of the West, King Father of the East, deer with winged immortal, and the heavenly horse. Smaller secondary creatures help identify each main figure. A nine-tailed fox, three-legged crow and toad in the moon encircle the Queen Mother of the West, while a raven in the sun floats above the King Father of the East. Below, a row of mountain peaks forms a border between the wall and ceiling, and the celestial and terrestrial worlds they represent. As at Foyemiaowan, painted borders further instill order in the ethereal scene, though here, the heavenly harmony cascades down to the worldly domain on the walls.

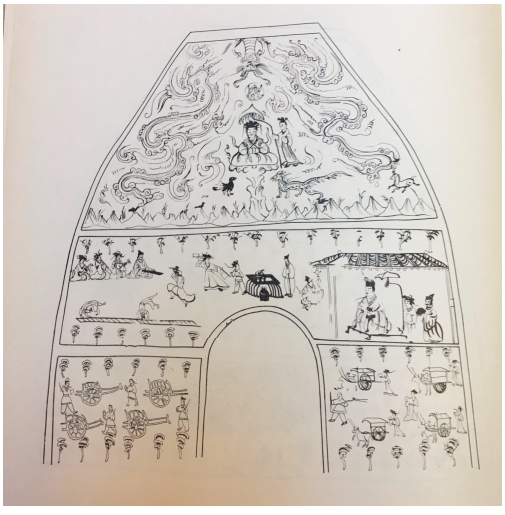

Figure 17. Schematic drawing of west wall, Dingjiazha M5, Later Liang to Northern Liang dynasties (386–441). (Gansusheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo, Figure 19).

Figure 18. Heavenly horse, Dingjiazha M5 north ceiling slope of front chamber, wall painting, Later Liang to Northern Liang dynasty (386–441). (Jiuquanshi Bowuguan 1998, p. 105).

The four walls are each divided into an upper and lower register. The tomb occupant perches in the most visible location on the west wall, directly below the Queen Mother of the West, where he sits under a canopy and watches a performance of acrobats and musicians. In the register below, attendants wait next to empty carts and women mill amid *ziping* 辎軿 carriages, signifying tribute gifts and guests paying their respects. The top registers on the other walls have familiar scenes in which oxen plow fields and chickens advance on farmers stacking grain. The bottom registers of the north and east walls likewise have scenes of butchering, hanging meat, kitchens, and herding. The south wall has an unusual spectacle of a nude woman making an offering to a tree, thought to be She 社, the local land god (Zheng 1995, p. 46). Apart from a curious simian-like creature in the tree, whose meaning is a mystery, all the animals (and the farmers for that matter) have counterparts in the Xigoucun and Xincheng tombs, though their numbers are reduced. A final layer, below the two registers of wall painting, hugs the area adjacent to the floor. Here, four painted tortoises (and a little house, visible in Figure 15, above) appear across three

walls, symbolizing the earth (R. Wu 1989, p. 7). From the turtles near the base, through the fields and festivities enjoyed by humans and augmented by animals, to the celestial extravaganza on the ceiling, which seems to revolve around the axis of the lotus in the caisson, the chamber creates an axis mundi.

While the tombs at Xigoucun, Xincheng, and Foyemiaowan relegated the heavenly and earthly to the separate zones of the screen walls and front chambers, the Dingjiazha tomb combines them into a unified realm in the front chamber. This allows divine creatures to roam free in their natural habitat. Heaven is not invisible and only narrowly accessible; it reigns over the terrestrial world and is intimately cojoined with it. The prominence of the Queen Mother of the West and her consort adds to this effect. Apart from her appearance on the coffin found in the burial chamber of the Xincheng tomb discussed above, this deity is not depicted at either Xigoucun or Foyemiaowan. Only peripheral attendants (the chicken- and ox-headed figures) or oblique symbols (the shape of her *sheng* headdress) are shown. At Dingjiazha, she makes a full comeback to reign over the celestial and terrestrial domains. Although the animals on the walls still reflect the blending of pastoral and agricultural economies and, to a lesser extent, lifestyles in the Hexi Corridor, their diminished presence indicates that traditional Chinese beliefs were regaining prominence in burials.

5. Fifth- and Sixth-Century Buddhist Caves at Dunhuang

This was not, however, the case outside of tombs. By the fifth century, Buddhism was thriving in the Hexi Corridor and especially around Jiuquan, where the ruler of the Northern Liang 凉 dynasty, Juqu Mengxun 沮渠蒙逊 (r. 401–433), sponsored the translation of sutras and the construction of cave temples (Soper 1958, pp. 141–43). In the ensuing decades, construction efforts and devotion were channeled towards Buddhist cave temples, which drew on the structure and decorative programs of tombs (Steinhardt 2001, pp. 188–91). Art in cave temples illustrates that as Buddhism expanded its reach, the role of animal imagery changed as well. Fantastic animals adapted to and thrived in the new milieu, but Buddhist doctrine endangered the depiction of real animals.

The largest and best-preserved complex of cave temples is at Mogao 莫高, seventeen kilometers outside of Dunhuang. The design and construction of the caves are indebted to earlier tombs, as is evident in the similarities of ceilings and the two-chambered or two-part format that accommodated separate modes of worship (Steinhardt 2001, pp. 180–81, 190). In the early promulgation of Buddhism in China, animals in art served as vehicles for divinities and as actors in stories (Sørensen 2016, pp. 137–38), and this is evident at Dunhuang. A horse conveys Siddhārtha Gautama in the Great Departure, seen on the south wall of Cave 275, built in the Northern Liang dynasty. In Cave 254, dating to the late fifth century in the Northern Wei 魏 (386–534) dynasty, animals play the parts (literally, in the form of hybrid demons) of Mara's army, intent on blocking Siddhārtha Gautama's grasp of enlightenment that will transform him into Buddha Shakyamuni (Li 2011, pl. 33). The most common animals in early caves are those associated with Jātaka, tales about Buddha Shakyamuni's past lives. In a rendition of the Tiger Jātaka in Cave 254, the Buddha-in-a-prior-life pitches himself from a cliff so that a hungry tigress and her starving cubs might feast on his body. The fact that the sacrifice is for an animal, not for a human mother and her children, underscores the Buddha's extreme compassion. The story is one of many Jātaka. Through them, devotees retrace, experience, and absorb the Buddha's past lives and slow ascent to human form and, finally, enlightenment.

In this Buddhist context, animals are not vital to the cosmic order, nor are they even signs of wealth or power. Whereas in the tombs at Xincheng and Xigoucun, animals established harmony and broadcast human virtue, in the Buddhist caves, animal herds are absent, as are images of making food and meat. There are three reasons for this. First, Buddhist doctrine prohibits the killing of animals for food and even raising animals was considered impure (Gernet 1995, pp. 70, 72, 79, 95–96). Second, Buddhism brought with it urbanization, cosmopolitanism, and agricultural development (Zürcher 2013b, pp. 366, 373–75). Third, as will be discussed below, the cave temples recreate Buddhist paradises.

The Buddhist cosmos relegated animals to a separate and lower realm, which meant they were unwelcome in paradise (Elverskog 2020, p. 87).

By the mid-sixth century, real animals were all but banished from cave imagery, and even the protective zones of Jātaka tales were dwindling. As Buddhist beliefs and practices changed, art became increasingly anthropocentric. This is evident in Cave 285, which was constructed in the mid-sixth century during the Western Wei 魏 dynasty (535–537). Here, phalanxes of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and donors blanket the walls (Figure 19). Jātaka give way to stories such as the Five Hundred Robbers, which stretches across the top section of the cave's south wall. In this tale, a king's officers capture a band of robbers and blind them before setting them loose in the wilderness. A bodhisattva takes pity on the helpless men, restores their sight, and persuades them to follow the Dharma. Whereas animals in Jātaka represent the arduous journey to buddhahood through countless cycles of death and rebirth, the human protagonists in the story of the Five Hundred Robbers underscore the transformation of Buddhism in the fifth and sixth centuries, wherein the gradual accumulation of merit was eclipsed by the allure of sudden salvation, which was available even to those with heavy karmic burdens (Zürcher 2013a, pp. 166–68).

Figure 19. Buddhas and bodhisattvas, north side of east wall, Mogao cave 285, Western Wei dynasty (535–56). (Li 2011, pl. 139).

This change also necessitated further elevation of the human figure. Image-worship was central to Buddhist practices of the time, with rituals depending on communion with buddhas or bodhisattvas in human form (Greene 2018, pp. 455–56, 463). Not only did patrons earn merit by sponsoring the fabrication of icons, but the sculpted or painted image acted as a vessel for the embodiment of the Buddha or bodhisattva itself, so that the image came alive (E. Y. Wang 2014, pp. 407–8; M. C. Wang 2016, pp. 22–27). Even the multiplication of images was salient to achieving enlightenment (Shen 2019, pp. 73–79). The materialization of buddhas or bodhisattvas ultimately creates a paradise within the

cave (Karetzky 1992, pp. 104–5). Looking at the art in Cave 285, the design embraces multiple styles and disparate subject matter, probably due to differing tastes among its many donors (Hiyama 2022, pp. 257, 261–63). The structure and dynamic composition on the ceiling, however, bears a strong resemblance to the painted ceilings in the front chamber of the Dingjiazha tomb. It too attracts marvelous creatures and deities, including Fu Xi and Nü Wa, who leap towards one another from either side of a floating jewel near the top of the panel (Hiyama 2022, p. 266). They have spouted legs and their long, reptilian tails wave behind them like banners. Even the figures' long lines and attenuated forms echo the painting style on the Xincheng coffin lids (Figure 20). One must look closely to spot real animals on the walls of the cave. Here and there, in the untamed wilderness, foxes, deer, or wolves dart or skulk among peaks. Even these scarce creatures are being methodically stalked by archers, giving the impression that they will soon be expunged altogether.

Figure 20. Fuxi and Nüwa, east slope of Mogao cave 285, Western Wei dynasty (535–56). (Li 2011, pl. 143).

6. Conclusions

The significant presence of herd and other local animals in Wei-Jin tombs between Jiuquan and Jiayuguan reveals a changing economy and cultural blending between Chinese and pastoral peoples in the third century. They also indicate that people believed that humans and animals alike contributed to cosmic harmony. Animals' functions, as markers of wealth and vehicles for power, are different from the supernatural import of hybrid creatures on the screen walls and coffins in these same tombs, which derive from Han-dynasty precedents. In the western end of the Hexi Corridor, Western Jin tombs from the late third and early fourth centuries prioritize magical screen walls, which are decorated with all manner of fanciful creatures. In the late-fourth- to early-fifth-century tomb at Dingjiazha, meanwhile, animals herald a reassertion of Chinese mythology and cosmology, even as Buddhism spreads. In fifth- and sixth-century cave temples outside of Dunhuang, earthly animals are on the run, crowded out by multiplying Buddhas and bodhisattvas and magical creatures that inhabit Buddhist paradises. These changes in art heralded profound social transformations that were precipitated by the fall of the Han dynasty and the arrival and spread of Buddhist doctrine from the third through sixth centuries.

When the Han dynasty fell, local magnate families quickly steered the Hexi Corridor from a system of military-farming colonies to an independent region by leveraging the agricultural infrastructure built by the Han and augmenting it with animal husbandry, sericulture, and trade (Liu 2009, pp. 40–41; Li 2006, pp. 87–88). Even as other parts of China descended into famine and warfare, the Hexi Corridor attained a measure of stability and prosperity (Liu 2009, pp. 87–89). This, along with the region's vast resources, beckoned to refugees fleeing the upheavals in the Chinese heartland. It is difficult to calculate population figures for the Hexi Corridor alone, but it is estimated that from the Western Jin to the beginning of the Northern Wei dynasty, the population of the broader swath of northwest China swelled from 3.27 million to 5.6 million (Li and Zhu 2012, pp. 117–18). This population increase was accompanied by an expansion of agriculture and promotion of cosmopolitanism that were integral to the spread of Buddhist doctrine and belief (Elverskog 2020, pp. 84–107). The abundance of real animals in art of the third century, and their subsequent flight and eventual displacement by magical creatures, is particularly meaningful considering such historical developments. Whether through presence, transformation, or absence, animal imagery is layered with meaning and connected to human society, beliefs, and imagination.

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Notes

1 One exception is a series of paintings that show an official presiding over a legal case found in a Western Jin tomb at Gaozhagou 高闸沟, Jiuquan. (Jiuquanshi Bowuguan 1998, pp. 19–20). These are on view at the Jiuquan Museum.

2 These creatures take various forms on the screen walls and can be cataloged into subtypes. For more on the morphing attributes of these animals, see (Bush 2016, pp. 76–88).

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Siberian Animal Style: Stylistic Features as Generic Indication

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Abstract: This paper is devoted to the problems of differentiation of stylistic variants in the common phenomenon of the so-called Scythian and Siberian animal styles, which is one of the main distinctive features of Eurasian nomadic art. The animal style is a concept of more scale than an artistic style proper which distinguishes with some formal characteristics and depends directly on generic traditions and ethnic and cultural roots of art. Together with the technical-technological methods these formal features could be evidential indications of the origin of works of art. The Siberian collection of Peter the Great includes some different groups of golden ornaments decorated in animal styles of different origins. The paper focuses on a compact group of items originating from various mostly unknown sites from different territories in Asia including the Oxus treasure, several items from the Siberian collection of Peter the Great from Southern Siberia, a few jewelry pieces from other collections of the world museums as well as items made of leather and felt coming from the First and the Second Pazyryk kurgans. A distinctive feature of this group of zoomorphic images are colored inlays that accentuate a hind-leg or a shoulder of the animal; such inlays have the form of an intricate figure made up of a circle and a curvilinear triangle abutting to it or elongated round brackets. Genetically, such an ornamental motif, which is not generally typical for Persian art, may be linked to a periphery area of the Iranian world and nomadic culture, while the group of sites can be dated back to the 4th–3rd centuries BC. The paper considers a bracelet from the Siberian collection of Peter the Great which is the only item in this category of jewelry type of bracelets. It represents a rare type of ornament with a multi-component structure. It consists of three open-work strips with zoomorphic compositions in an animal style similar to the above-mentioned stylistic group. All three parts of the bracelet are created in a unified style, but obviously in different individual manners. There is no doubt, that the zoomorphic images show three different authors' hands, and were made by different artisans. So, there is evidence of collective work on the object when each artisan makes his own operation to create a unique jewel at a workshop. Some parts of the composition on the bracelet are similar in style to zoomorphic images from kurgan Issyk in Kazakhstan which perhaps were made in the same workshop. This fact confirms the assumption of the origin of some of Siberian jewelry.

Keywords: Siberia; animal style; nomadic art; Peter the Great

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A cultural and artistic phenomenon of the so-called Scytho-Siberian Animal style is one of the main distinctive features of Eurasian nomadic art. At the same time, Animal Style art is a very complicated phenomenon with numerous local variants and it could not be determined as something homogeneous. The nomadic world is various, movable, and receptive, and there are a lot of traits of different contacts and impacts reflected in nomadic art. Nevertheless, none of the cultures with which Eurasian nomadic tribes came into contact possessed anything comparable with so-called Scythian Animal Style art. Nomads adopted some features, zoomorphic motifs, and animal images, which were consonant with their own ideological and mythological conception. Relations with the peoples occupying different parts of the Eurasian steppe zone remained for a long time a source of the exchange of artistic ideas and elements, which formed various versions of the Animal Style. Different peoples certainly practiced a kindred art with a common

mythological and ideological base, but nomadic art from different regions is characterized by different formal features.

Style in ancient art is a category, which is similar to the phenomenon of type concerning the sphere of material culture in archaeological studies (Klein 2016, p. 69). We should try to trace the cultural impulses in style and technique indications in the Animal Style of Scythian period among the Siberian art materials including the objects from Altai burial mounds. This is a complicated task since the cultural links could have been indirect.

There is a problem with where these objects came from and where they were produced. Another problem is who made them. Archaeological materials document the exchange of goods, technology, and people from across the Eurasian steppe (Linduff 2006, pp. 358–70) to and from nomadic tribes and settled oriental civilizations of highly developed culture and industry. Questions exist regarding how the artistic style could be formed, how it changed, and how it developed, enriching with different impacts.

Southern Siberia is a region neighbouring great ancient states, such as Achaemenid, Iran, and China. The great Scythian zone was traversed from west to east but was also crossed by nomadic passes from south to north. Southern Siberia lay in the territory of the intersection of the ways of mobile nomadic peoples who were very susceptive to outer cultural influences, especially in Animal Style. Eurasian nomadic culture shows evident signs of different influences from other cultures, which belonged to settled societies including Chinese, Iranian, and Greek societies. We find sometimes mixed features of Persian and Chinese stylistic traits in the same objects. Additionally, there is not any contradiction in fact of some formal adoptions from different sources and borrowing of some elements. It was a creative and natural process, which was stimulated by some ethno-political situations.

For instance, a possible historical explanation of the penetration of some Iranian impacts is a Yuezhi nomadic migration from Central Asia to Altai after Alexander the Great's conquest and their return to Bactria around 130 BC (Francfort 2020, p. 135). Thanks to archaeological investigations we can trace the great cultural changes that took place across the wide area inhabited by nomadic tribes following the great wars and other social upheavals. In particular, Alexander the Great's campaigns have been a catalyst for significant change in different areas. The Asian world has got a great impulse for movement and change. We can therefore assume that it was due to these circumstances that such a characteristic style of jewelry was found in the graves of nomadic noblemen from the 4th–3rd centuries.

Sometimes the signs of different sorts of contacts reflect in the objects of mixed character with heterogeneous parts joined, sometimes new hybrid forms arose under the influences. For example, I refer to a mirror from Grave 2 in kurgan1 of Filippovka I burial ground (Figure 1) (Okorokov and Perevodchikova 2020, p. 41, Figure 7:1). Stylistic features of the piece of art, as well as in some other objects from this grave show mixed nature and there is no doubt that the things were made of heterogeneous details. These details show features of different cultural and technological traditions. This evidence sets suppose, that the disk of a silver mirror was made in a workshop of Achaemenid Iran, but its handle belonged to nomadic tradition. So, some pieces of art had a hybrid nature and were produced by artisans of different cultural origins. This fact could be explained by the exchange of things and following using some imported details for the creation of hybrid objects. Quite possibly, jewelry workshops were located not only in the territory of the Achaemenid Empire, but also in the neighbouring periphery, and nomadic artisans could participate in the jewelry production together with goldsmiths of varied origins. Such workshops united artisans of different origins and served not only as production centers, but also as cultural centers and at the same time as professional and artistic schools. Just these centers were the points of formation and development of Animal Style.

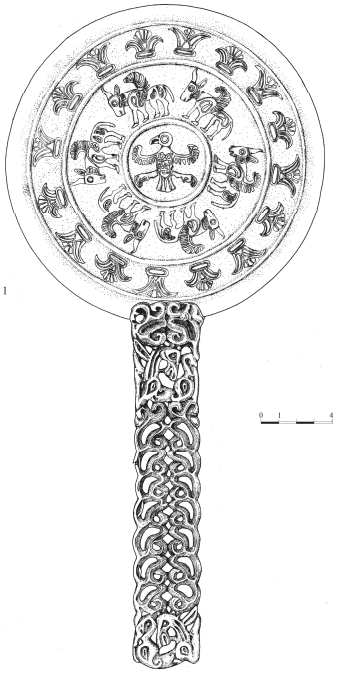

Figure 1. A mirror from Filippovka 1, kurgan 1, burial 2.

This is only typical of the Eurasian nomadic zone inhabited by peoples, who were in contact with both civilizations, Iranian and Chinese. The question is that of the mechanism of the mix of visual imagery and artistic forms, which occurs in objects of the same or very close type. Sometimes we find objects which consist of heterogeneous details that obviously belonged to different cultures and combined with each other evidently in the workshops somewhere available to the nomadic territory. Goldsmiths who worked for nomadic nobility were mostly from settled societies. Yet we cannot make an assumption that nomadic people who created such splendid art of Animal Style and used to make a lot of artistic things of organic materials could not produce any metalwork. They were fantastically creative and the Animal Style was born in nomadic midst and space.

Many works of art made of different materials from the Altai barrows of the Scythian period show a strong resemblance with the art of Achaemenid Persia. This fact should especially be emphasized in the case of the archaeological materials from Pazyryk kurgan 1 and kurgan 2. Some such objects are undoubtedly imported from the territory of the Achaemenid Empire. Yet there are no grounds to consider all works of applied art from Pazyryk barrows as imported goods. This art was inspired by the influence of Iranian art and we can find some very typical features borrowed from Iranian culture and involved in nomadic Animal Style. It is of great interest that at the same time and even in the same objects from Altai barrows, we can find images of griffins. These images derive from ancient Greek culture but reached the Siberian territory indirectly. They appeared in the Altai region from the 4th–3rd century BC and no earlier and were not widely spread in the Siberian territory. They occur in Pazyryk Animal Style and embellish the details of horse trappings (saddle-clothes and other things), perhaps, instead of the authentic fantastic beaked monsters being equivalent in meaning to them. The authentic Siberian monsters combine the features of different species—beasts of prey, deer, eagles, and other creatures. They are more typical to the eastern part of the Animal style area and never occur in the European Scythian art. The typical Siberian Animal style monsters similar to griffins, but never with the lion's body as in Greek mythology, could be determined

as "mythological eagle" (Rudenko 1958, pp. 101–3). Yet the Pazyryk griffins differ from the Greek and Persian ones. They have their own distinctive features which look similar to specific ornamental elements—a geometrical motif in the shape of a combination of a triangle with a circle on the hindquarter or on the shoulder of the monster's body. This ornamental element is not of Greek origin and indicates the Near East influence.

Golden ornaments from the Collection of Peter the Great are doubtless objects of great artistic merit, as is true of the things made of wood, leather, fur, and other organic materials from Altai burial mounds. Both of them sometimes show very similar decorative elements, motifs, and images in spite of making in different materials. There is no reason to suppose that all the things of Animal Style from Altai barrows were imported or produced by foreign craftsmen. Marks of these tendencies could be obviously traced especially in the art of Animal Style of the Scythian period, both in style and in technique treatment.

The Animal Style is a concept of more scale than a formal artistic style, and each local stylistic variant is distinguished by some formal characteristics. These characteristics depend directly on generic traditions and ethnic and cultural roots of art. Together with the technical-technological methods, these formal features could be evidential indications of the origin of works of art.

The Siberian Collection of Peter the Great is the first Russian archaeological collection. It contains about 250 extraordinary golden pieces in Animal Style, which served as specific ornaments in Eurasian nomadic cultures in Siberia in ancient times from the 7th century BC till the Middle Ages. All these objects were discovered in the early 18th century in course of Russian pioneers and cartographic expeditions intended to investigate unknown territories in Asia on purpose to lay the new trade ways to connect West and East. Excavation of ancient gold could be considered as a concomitant. On their way, they also searched for sources of gold, natural deposits, or ancient burial mounds rich with gold objects. These teams of pioneers excavated a lot of ancient burial mounds and dug out numerous gold objects, some of which were later were accumulated in Peter the Great's Siberian collection. That is why all the information about the exact location and territorial position of the excavated kurgans was, unfortunately, lost.

The collection was gathered, mostly owing to the efforts of Prince Matwey Gagarin, the military governor of Siberia, who executed the direct tsar's orders concerning the ancient gold from Siberian burial mounds excavated by diggers. This collection comprises really unique but heterogeneous gold objects from unfortunately unknown archaeological sites. These items are from various cultural sources. The provenance and attribution of the gold ornaments, which came into the Siberian Collection of Peter the Great are still much debated. The lack of an archaeological context for any of them, however, has so far hampered any decisive conclusions. The objects from the Peter the Great treasure were found somewhere in the vast territory of Siberia. The only way to determine the origin of each item is to compare the stylistic features and manufacture traces which could help these objects to be attributed and dated.

The main difficulty of dealing with the objects from Peter the Great treasure is unknown provenance which makes it impossible to specify the cultural center or nomadic group in which these gold ornaments were produced. The gold was dug out from the graves located somewhere within the area from modern Kazakhstan to the Altai mountains. The various personal ornaments among the finds may have come from the region between the Irtysh and Ob' rivers and even from the region of the Syr-Darya and Amudarya basins. Additionally, we can suppose that besides the Iranian cultural centers with highly developed goldsmith workshops, there were some local workshops in southern Siberia, probably in the Altai region, where some of the belt plaques in animal style could be cast or hand-made from the sheet.

At the same time, the jewelry from the Peter the Great Collection shows some common features in artistic images, which does not afford ground for taking these objects under consideration as separate cultural phenomena united owing to import and the exchange of goods only. The interaction of nomadic and sedentary societies is a major feature and,

perhaps, a main problem of human history at all times. Nomads adopted certain features of sedentary culture, transformed these according to their own necessity, and being mobile, were able to transfer these far beyond their point of origin.

Belonging to culturally similar nomadic groups, all these items demonstrate a lot of different variants and tendencies in artistic and technological aspects, according to ethnical and cultural appertaining. Marks of these tendencies could be obviously traced especially in the art of Animal Style of Scythian period, both in artistic style and in technique.

It should be noted that the colourful applied art of the Altai nomads of Scytihan times which is represented with the objects of different organic materials is extremely consonant in aesthetic aspects with Achaemenid Persian polychrome jewelry. The colouration of textiles, felt, and leather Siberian pieces is traditional to this culture as well as polychrome jewelry. Some of the types of things and techniques could be borrowed by nomadic tribes from different cultural sources, but only in the case of accordance with their aesthetic taste and conformity with the potential of their own traditional meaning.

Peter the Great's collection includes some different stylistic groups of golden ornaments decorated in Animal Styles of different origins. Some of them are derived from the Iranian world. Other ones are closely related to Chinese influences. A few things show the common features, distinguishing them from the others.

For instance, there is a compact stylistic group of items discovered in different territories in Asia, which are marked with similar decorative elements. It looks similar to colored inlays that accentuate the hind leg or shoulder of the animal; such inlays have the form of an intricate figure made up of a circle combined with a curvilinear triangle abutting it or with elongated round brackets. Genetically, such an ornamental motif, which is not typical for Persian art, may be linked to a periphery area of the Iranian world and nomadic culture, while the group of monuments can be dated back to the 4th–3rd centuries BC. This decorative element is derived from very early times and shows a strong resemblance with Assyrian art.

This group can be compared with similar objects from other world museums including the Oxus treasure from the British Museum and others. Indeed, several items from the Siberian collection of Peter the Great from Southern Siberia, this stylistic group comprises a few jewelry pieces from other collections as well as items made of leather and felt coming from Pazyryk 1 and Pazyryk 2 kurgans (Korolkova 2017, pp. 50–60; 2020, p. 220). In the Siberian Collection, we can single out a group of ornaments with zoomorphic images which show a strong resemblance with similar objects from other collections. This group comprises some ornaments of various functions: two collars, a bracelet, a roundel, a pair of belt-buckles with an animal combat scene showing a winged monster attacking a recumbent horse (Figure 2), and a splendid ornament with a fantastic bird of prey attacking a wild goat (Figure 3). All these things are embellished with inlays embedding the stones in cavities with the outlined cells, composed in a geometrical pattern with a circle in the center, which is flanked with one or two curved triangles. Such an ornamental composition usually marks the shoulder and the hindquarter of an animal figure. The same ornamental pattern we can find on the leather and felt goods from Pazyryk burial mounds, which are generally regarded as having been made under the great influence of the Achaemenid culture. Most of them were discovered in the Pazyryk 1 and Payryk 2 kurgans.

It should be noted that we never place the above-mentioned geometrical decorative element in Persian art proper, in spite of the artistic tradition in Achaemenid art to mark an animal's shoulder and hind quarter with a special "drop"-shaped accent.

Figure 2. A belt-plaque from the Siberian Collection of Peter the Great. State Hermitage. Inv. Si 1727 1/5.

Figure 3. An aigrette from the Siberian Collection of Peter the Great. State Hermitage. Inv. Si 1727 1/131.

Some of the objects from the Siberian Collection bear the clear imprint of Achaemenid Persian art, and they are marked with similarly specific ornamental motifs. The most splendid and typical one is a gold torc with open ends terminating in lion griffins (Figure 4). This type of monster is similar in style to the Iranian images and similar to the murals of Susa. The treatment of the cloisonné technique is exactly like that of a gold armlet from the Oxus Treasure. This fact was doubtless noticed by O. M. Dalton (Dalton 1964, pp. 52–53). He concluded that the two ornaments should have been considered synchronous and closely related. He supposed that the torc travelled north from the Persian border, perhaps from Bactria, or that a craftsman from the south, migrating to Siberia, there carried on his tradition. Polychrome incrustation executed in technique cloisonné which is typical of Persian art should be considered a sign of the Iranian origin of the object or of the craftsman who has created the piece of jewelry, or, at least, of an artistic tradition migration. Yet the question is of the provenance of the objects. Indeed, it becomes even more complicated.

Figure 4. A torc from the Siberian Collection of Peter the Great. State Hermitage. Inv. Z-568.

It cannot be denied that images of monsters are also typical in the Iranian culture of Achaemenid Persia. Yet we should keep in mind that the civilization of the Ancient Near East had many various sources, which caused the complicated history of this region. Furthermore, we should keep in mind that the artistic culture of Achaemenid Iran, in turn, imbibed different traditions of Near East civilization including Assyrian culture. There is an evident similarity in composition between the monster's figure with a curved body in the relief from the Temple of Ninutra at Nimrud of Assurnasirpal (883–859) (British Museum, Korolkova 2020, p. 221, Figure 6) and the fantastic winged and horned beast of prey in the golden belt plaques from the Siberian Collection in the scene of tormenting a recumbent horse (Figure 2).

Referring to Dalton, when the Persian Empire was established, its art was borrowed from earlier sources (Dalton 1964, p. 42). The Persian objects from the Oxus treasure were under the influence of the great imperial system. Mesopotamian mythological fancy appears in the images of griffins and other monsters in Persian art and further in Scythian culture.

Polychrome incrustation in jewelry is an evident feature of the Achaemenid culture. Yet it derives from earlier epochs and cultures of the ancient East. There is a reason to believe that the technique commonly described as orfèvrerie cloisonné, originated in the Nearer East. Initially, it was very typical to Egyptian and Phoenician applied art as well as to Assyrian art of the 9th–8th centuries BC, a culture also rich in cloisonné technique. Its great development took place in Achaemenid Persia. Then from Assyria and Persia, this type of art entered the Scythian world and the region of the Oxus treasure. The monsters of the Iranian world look similar to winged creatures with goat horns and beaked eagle

heads, or lion-headed hybrid animals with lion or ungulate bodies. Such hybrid figures decorate the ends of the Hermitage torc (Figure 4. State Hermitage, Z-568). The closest parallel to this torc in style and technique is a pair of bracelets from the Oxus treasure (BM ANE 124017, Victoria and Albert Museum, 442–1884). These jewelry pieces belonged to the Iranian workshop of a "royal circle", in spite of the opinion of some who derive this collar from the Siberian art influenced by Achaemenid jewelry (Rudenko 1962, pp. 18–19). Yet, different scholars had different views on the provenance of this torc and derived it from Eastern Iran, as well as the next object (Ivanov et al. 1984, cat. 2, 3). Another golden spiral torc from the Siberian Collection (Figure 5, State Hermitage, Si 1727 1/62), with open ends terminating in feline beasts of prey (perhaps, tigers) demonstrates a very similar style and similar decoration technique, with inlays but without cloisonné. This gold torc from the Peter the Great Collection is probably dated from the 4th–3rd century B.C.

Figure 5. A torc from the Siberian Collection of Peter the Great. State Hermitage. Inv. Si 1727 1/62.

The figured terminals of the torc were embellished with turquoise inlays. The feline tails end with griffin heads, while ears, ribs, and other body surfaces are set with inlay cells for turquoise. The style of this object is comparable with the Pazyryk style as well as with the pieces from the Oxus treasure and from Issyk barrow (Kazakhstsan). Scholars defined this torc as an example of native Siberian goldwork influenced by Achaemenid art (Rudenko 1962, p. 18; Artamonov 1973, p. 169; Farkas 1973, p. 83). Probably, there is a reason for this conclusion. At the same time, it should be noted that we cannot consider the two above-mentioned collars as separate examples of ancient jewelry. Their relation is undoubted since they show a strong resemblance in goldsmith skill in spite of the distinction of decoration. The torc with the feline-shaped terminals could be considered an intermediate variant between the "royal school" and the peripheral cultural circle. It should be taken as evidence of a strong Iranian influence on jewelry arts in the vast territory of the Achaemenid empire and neighbouring area. This intermediate link closely connects with nomadic Pazyryk culture.

Some scholars (Artamonov 1973, p. 168; Farkas 1973, p. 83) supposed that the terminals of this torc were made in cast technique, but in spite of this opinion, it should be noticed that now we can contend well-grounded that the feline figures were hand-made on matrix from two parts (Mongiatti and Korolkova 2020, pp. 327–54).

As to a splendid gold ornament with a fantastic bird of prey attacking a wild goat from the Peter the Great collection (Figure 3; State Hermitage, Si 1727 1/131), most scholars considered this object of unknown function to be an aigrette. The ornament represents a fantastic bird of prey with its wings spread, holding a wild goat in its talons. This object combines the two methods of polychrome decoration and shows both cloisonné and inlays embedded in cavities on the shoulder and on the haunch of the goat.

The Altai parallels show some similar compositions in the decorative elements of funeral horse trappings. It is reasonable to suppose that this scene is of great semantic significance. Yet, the object may have served rather as a chieftain's aigrette than as a frontlet of a horse's headgear. The aigrette from the Siberian Collection is a rare object which shows a strong resemblance in style and ornamental details both to the jewelry from the Oxus treasure and to the Pazyryk male headgear adornment recently reconstructed by Elena Stepanova (Stepanova 2017, p. 113). Recent investigations and restoration work dealing with felt and leather details of a piece of male headgear from the kurgan Pazyryk 2 at the Hermitage museum was revealed to be very similar to the golden aigrette from the Siberian collection of Peter the Great in composition and Animal Style. According to the Altai parallel, it is reasonable to assume that this ornament may have been used as an adornment of a sacred male headgear. Compared to the Oxus treasure bracelets and aigrette, the workmanship of the Siberian aigrette is somewhat coarse. We should assume the existence of another workshop of the same time and of very close cultural traditions. Yet all these pieces are similar enough to have formed one stylistic group.

Aside from cloisonné on the neck of the monster on the torc from the Peter the Great collection, a craftsman used another method of inlay in the same object, in the cells filled in with turquoise. Such a technique, in Dalton's opinion, employed a simple method of embedding the stones in cavities made on the metal sheet. The Sarmatians further continued to use both methods (Farkas 1973, pp. 80–83).

One question of great interest is the identity of the real species of prey in the monster's talons. This is important from the point of view of the definition of the origin of the object since it looks similar to Capra sibirica, which is closely related to the European Capra ibex, but has only inhabited some Central Asiatic regions including Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, the Pamirs, the Tien Shan, and Southern Siberia. Thus, this object and the rest in the group seem to have been produced somewhere in this territory.

The iconography of this item with a griffin-like monstrous bird attacking an ibex is also paralleled on a felt saddle cloth from the horse equipment from Altai in Pazyryk, kurgan 1. Like other parallels from Altai in the first millennium BC, this reflects to varying degrees the interactions of Achaemenid Persia with the nomadic cultures of Central Asia, Southern Siberia, and Iran.

There are some specific features in the treatment of this object which are of great interest. For example, the spread tail of the monstrous bird is treated with tiny little tubular loops disposed of in vertical rows in the riffles between feathers. These cylinders were intended, perhaps for attachment of the missing incrustation, in the five grooves on the bird's tail feathering. It is a very strange thing, but the only technique reminiscent of such a method of embellishment occurs in ivories from Nimrud. They were discovered at Fort Shalmaneser and could be dated from the 8th century BC (Mallowan 1966, pp. 566–69, figure. 513–15). Some ivory panels, plaques, and pyxis from Nimrud demonstrate a very similar method of embellishment, despite the difference in material and chronological distance. The resemblance is so close that there is no doubt of the genetic relations between these two examples of decorative art. So, we can derive the method of decoration of the Siberian ornament from Assyrian art as well as Achaemenid Persia, where the cloisonné technique was adopted.

On the ivory panel from the Fort Shalmaneser (Iraq Museum, Bagdad ND 9475) a single piece of green glass inlay remains in the stalk of one of the papyrus flowers (Mallowan 1966, p. 568).

There is a similar example of the same type of incrustation on the small eagle figure from the Siberian Collection (State Hermitage, Z-557; Ivanov et al. 1984, p. 20, cat. 14; Korolkova 2020, p. 224, Figure 13), the neck and breast of which are decorated with cloisonné. This item was incrusted with turquoise and the eagle's tail was framed by the small cylinders to carry the inlays which are missing.

The aigrette combines the three methods of polychrome decoration and shows both cloisonné and inlays embedded in cavities accented with the shoulder and the hindquarter

of a goat, and perhaps, the above-mentioned way of incrustation with small cylindrical pieces.

Neither Scythian nor Sarmatian periods in Animal Style art demonstrate the use of lapis-lasuli to incrust the ornaments preferring to inlay turquoise or blue glass-frit mass, as distinct from the Persian culture. This tradition is rather a distinction of ancient Central Asiatic cultures. To clarify the technique, it should be stressed that the inlays on the torc were embedded in cavities not cut, but hammered on the matrix. Aside from some common features, including the above-mentioned decorative element in the shape of a triangle combined with a circle, it should be noted that another specific feature of the embedding of inlays is a double-line contour that outlines the cell of inlay. This feature is one of the indicators of the close in style and cultural origin group of jewelry.

Among the items of this stylistic group are a couple of the belt plaques from the Siberian collection of Peter the Great, with an animal combat scene showing a winged monster attacking a recumbent horse with reversed hindquarters (Figure 2, State Hermitage, Si 1727 1/5, 6). The objects of this stylistic group are mostly made via methods of cold treatment of metal. These belt plaques are also chiselled, which is usual in this cultural tradition.

Recurring to the subject of the specific group of ornaments with inlays, we should mention some additional analogy items which are little known.

One of them is a bracelet from a private collection. The Animal Style design adorns the bracelet and represents a fantastic image with mixed features of different animals. This item, no doubt, belongs to the same group of ornaments as the above-mentioned objects from Peter the Great's Collection (Korolkova 2020, p. 226, Figure 15).

Another one is presumably the hilt of a dagger with a double feline figured composition comparable with some Persian examples as well as very late items of Indian weapons. This hilt is unfortunately lost and it is represented only in the drawing of the collection of I. G. Messershmidt, a German scientist of the early 18th century who was sent to Siberia to investigate this region and its history by Peter the Great. The drawings of the lost objects from his collection are preserved in the archives of the Academy of Science in Saint Petersburg (Korolkova 2020, p. 226, Figure 16).

All these objects are marked with the imprint of influences of Near East civilization and continue the development of cultural traditions which derive from Assyrian and Persian cultures. We still do not know the center of their production, but it evidently belongs to the territory bordering Achaemenid Iran and the nomadic zone and, perhaps settlements in Central Asia.

The question of Assyrian, Iranian, and notably Greek and Chinese influences in Scythian Animal Style art was under consideration by Gregory Borovka, who has emphasized that "it has assimilated and adapted foreign motives without impairing the vigour Scythian craftsmanship or its devotion to traditional subjects and conventions" (Borovka 1928, p. 6). However, G. Borovka (Borovka 1928, pp. 88–89) supposed that the Altai region was not the cradle of the original Animal Style, but instead the great centre of its expansion when it had attained maturity. He stressed the enormous importance of connections subsisting between the Scythian world and ancient China in the process of forming the Animal Style art (Borovka 1928, p. 7).

There is another golden object that could be included in this stylistic group. This is a wide bracelet from the Siberian collection of Peter the Great (Figures 6 and 7. State Hermitage, Si 1727 1/68), which is the only item of this category of jewelry in the collection of this type of bracelet. It represents a rare type of armlet with a multi-component structure. It consists of three open-work friezes with zoomorphic compositions in an animal style similar to the above-mentioned stylistic group, related to Iranian culture. All three parts of the bracelet are created in a common style, but obviously in different individual manners. There is no doubt that the zoomorphic images show three different authors' hands, and that the parts of the bracelet were made by different goldsmiths. Thus there is evidence of collective work on the object, during which each artisan creates their own method of

creating a unique jewel at a workshop. This could be explained, for example, by a lack of time, as in the case of working on items for a funeral.

Figure 6. A bracelet from the Siberian Collection of Peter the Great. State Hermitage. Inv. Si 1727 1/68.

Figure 7. A bracelet from the Siberian Collection of Peter the Great. State Hermitage. Inv. Si 1727 1/68. Panorama view.

In each of the three friezes a typical iconic pattern occurs, such as reversed hindquarters of animal bodies. Some parts of the composition on the bracelet are similar in style to zoomorphic images from the kurgan Issyk in Kazakhstan which were perhaps made in the same workshop (Figure 8). This fact confirms the assumption of the origin of some Siberian jewelry. The central frieze of the bracelet shows great artistic merit, and professional methods of a clear and balanced composition, which are connected with Central Asian traditions. No inlays adorn this golden strip.

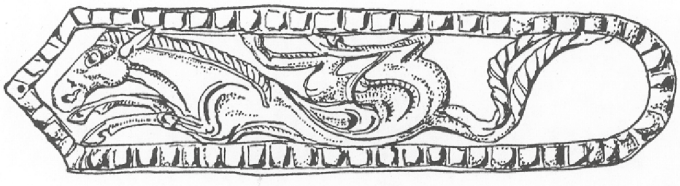

Figure 8. An ornament from a dagger. Issyk kurgan. Kazakhstan.

One of the outer friezes was made by a goldsmith, who represented the artistic tradition similar to the above-mentioned group of things with inlays of specific forms, which derives from Achaemenid Iranian culture. All three friezes show a strong distinction in numerous iconic features, such as proportions of animal figures, and treatment of details, which prove the work of three different persons. More than that, the three elements of the bracelet show a great difference in the professional and artistic level of the goldsmiths.

The third frieze was executed by a craftsman of less artistic merit, who tried to follow the ways of decoration and composition adopted from the Iranian tradition. All the strips were made with a technic of casting with a lost vax model. Participation of three different persons of different cultural origins in the process of manufacturing one object, as well as their collective work in a goldsmith workshop, should be considered a very important observation, which shdes light on the matter of artistic and manufacturing features of the ancient world and the development of nomadic Animal Style art.

A similar situation was observed and noted by Konstantin Chugunov in the case of a study of a dagger with decoration in Animal Style from the kurgan Arzhan 2 in Tuva, where two different styles and technical methods of zoomorphic decoration were obviously determined in one object. This fact was explained by the author of the article as an example of the cooperation of craftsmen in jewelry production of different origins and different traditions (Chugunov 2004, p. 73). Traces of different cultural and artistic influences can be observed in jewelry style and technique. A similar situation was alluded to by Vladimir Kisel concerning the early Scythian art of the Caucasian region and the Black Sea area (Kisel 2003, p. 135). Such a situation seems to be typical of the nomadic world. The main issue is establishing how and why such jewelry items arrived in Siberia and who produced them. Yet the question of the provenance is more complicated.

Archaeological research has revealed the extent of the exchange of goods, technology, and people across the Eurasian steppe between nomadic tribes as well as sedentary Oriental civilizations that were highly developed both culturally and technologically.

The so-called Scythian "Animal Style" shows the presence of different stylistic forms and artistic traditions, but its meaning, content, and imagery remained quite uniform throughout a vast territory. The region of Southern Siberia can be considered the focal point for ancient cultural interactions between different Asiatic peoples and nomadic tribes in the first millennium BC.

We have to recognize at least two vectors of cultural and artistic influences on Animal Style art, from northern China and from the Iranian world. The only region where a conjunction of mixed tendencies of stylistic features from the Iranian world, Central Asian, and northern Chinese traditions as well as gold-working techniques could be observed in the same culture as the organic artistic phenomenon connected with the ethnic group, was southern Siberia, including Altai. Additionally, the existence of the local gold-working workshops in this territory is not out of the question.

The ancient Eurasian nomadic world was at once a heterogenous conglomerate of peoples and cultures, and a very permeable environment, extremely receptive to foreign influences. The nomads borrowed visual patterns and imagery from other peoples and wove them into their own mythological context. Since the Eurasian nomads inhabited a vast region that was surrounded by several major cradles of civilization (China, Iran, Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Greece), the Scythian "Animal Style" does not represent a single

artistic tradition but had many sources and versions, in spite of being, on the whole, an artistic phenomenon characteristic exclusively of the Scythian world.

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Strange Creatures of Chu: A Regional Approach to Antlered Tomb Sculptures

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Abstract: Lacquered wooden sculptures of fantastic hybrid beasts adorned with real deer antlers are among the most extraordinary examples of sculpture found in Chu tombs dated from the sixth through the third centuries BCE. Conventionally known as *zhenmushou* 镇墓兽 or "protecting tomb beasts", the antlered sculptures have grotesque features, including bulging eyes, fangs, and protruding tongues. In the fourth century BCE, production and use of these sculptures increased and peaked in the Hanxi region of Hubei province. Although most of these figures have been found in tombs in Hanxi (west of the Han River), distinctive variations of antlered tomb sculptures are also documented in regional areas of the Chu polity, including the Nanyang Basin, the Upper Huai, Eastern Hubei, and Jiangnan. Through a systematic regional analysis of Chu antlered sculptures, this paper presents a spatial framework for analyzing this unique genre of Chu funerary sculpture. This approach provides fresh insight into the interregional networks of interaction across the Chu state and beyond, via waterways and the Suizao corridor from the sixth through the third centuries BCE.

Keywords: Chu culture; zhenmushou; regionalism; funerary sculpture; lacquer; hybrid animals; material culture; Eastern Zhou; Early China

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1. Introduction

After the collapse of the Zhou ruling house in 771 BCE and the move of the Zhou capital near Xi'an in modern-day Shaanxi to Luoyang in modern-day Henan, dozens of independent polities arose across the landscape of ancient China. In this age of political intrigue and internecine warfare in which independent courts vied for hegemony over China, known as the Eastern Zhou dynasty (771–256 BCE), both intellectual thought and the arts blossomed. Art production, no longer centered on the Zhou court, took place at independent courts. By the sixth century BCE, one of the most important artistic centers could be found in the state of Chu, the largest and most powerful kingdom in the regional south. The Chu kingdom spread across modern-day Henan, Hubei, Hunan, and Anhui from south of the Yellow River to south of the Yangzi. Although elements of Chu art are derived from earlier Shang (ca. 1600–1046 BCE) and Western Zhou (ca. 1046–771 BCE) artistic traditions, it can be described as an amalgam of the many regional cultures that comprised the vast state. Chu art is diverse, imaginative, and innovative. This is especially evident in Chu animal art. Objects excavated from Chu tombs reveal that Chu had a special affinity for zoomorphic imagery, especially images of fantastic hybrid creatures, which appear in a variety of media, including bronze, wood, lacquer, and clay. Among the most extraordinary examples of hybrid animal imagery found in Chu tombs are wooden sculptures of long tongued hybrid beasts painted with lacquer and adorned with real deer antlers. These sculptures, conventionally known as *zhenmushou*[1] 镇墓兽 or "protecting tomb beasts", are the focus of this paper.[2]

Herein, I analyze Chu antlered and tongued sculptures using a regional approach. This approach provides a new spatial framework for analyzing these sculptures and provides insight into the interregional networks of interaction across the Chu realm via waterways and the Suizao corridor. To date, over 300 sculptures of antlered hybrid creatures

made of wood have been excavated from Chu tombs dated from the sixth through the third centuries BCE in Hubei, Henan, and Hunan provinces (Chaffin 2007; Ding 2012). I begin with the emergence of the earliest examples in the Hanxi (west of the Han River) region of Hubei province in the sixth century BCE, the same time a distinct Chu culture emerges in the archaeological record (Xu 1999, p. 21). In the Hanxi region, we can trace the development of these sculptures from the sixth through the fourth centuries BCE, when a mature style, which I refer to as the "Hanxi style," emerged (Chaffin 2021, pp. 97–105).[3] Although most antlered and tongued hybrid sculptures excavated to date have been discovered in tombs in the Hanxi region,[4] Chu tombs to the north of Hanxi in the Nanyang Basin and the Upper Huai, to the east in Eastern Hubei, and as far south as Jiangnan have also yielded distinctive variations of these sculptures.[5] By the third century BCE, the use of antlered and tongued sculptures declined as the Chu polity weakened and was eventually conquered by the northern state of Qin, which unified the Warring states in 221 BCE.

2. Hanxi

The earliest examples of antlered sculptures carved out of wood date from the late sixth through the early fifth centuries BCE during the Springs and Autumns period (771–453 BCE) and were excavated from Tombs 4 and 6 at Longwan, Xiaohuangjiatai, in Qianjiang County, Hubei (see Appendix A).[6] One was excavated from Tomb 4 and two were excavated from Tomb 6 (Qianjiang bowuguan 1988).[7] Antlered tomb sculptures dated to this period vary slightly in typology, and lack the zoomorphic facial features, such as the carved eyes, snouts, fangs, and long tongues that appear, characteristically, on the mature form of these sculptures. They are constructed of a series of parts using mortise and tenon joinery,[8] including a straight body with a slightly angled neck and truncated round or oval head, a square or truncated pyramidal base, and real deer antlers. Moreover, some early examples include a square collar located at the midsection of the body, such as the example in Figure 1 excavated from Tomb 6 at Xiaohuangjiatai in Longwan, Qianjiang County.

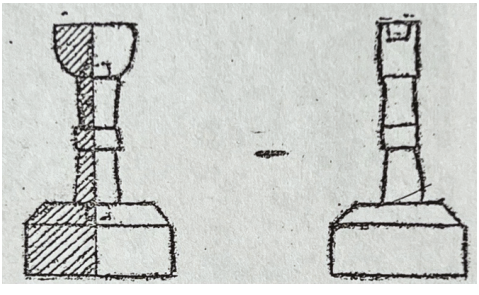


Figure 1. Front and side views of lacquered wood antlered tomb sculpture excavated from Tomb 6 at Xiaohuangjiatai, Qianjiang County, Hubei Province. Note the sockets for deer antlers in the side view. From Qianjiang bowuguan (1988, p. 39, fig. 7.10).

The Springs and Autumns period sculptures excavated at Xiaohuangjiatai were found in tombs belonging to members of the lower aristocracy.[9] Tomb 4 contained a single-chambered wooden burial structure with a wooden coffin and space at the head end of the coffin for burial goods, while Tomb 6 was a larger paired burial consisting of a wooden burial structure divided into two side-by-side chambers (see Qianjiang bowuguan 1988, p. 35, figs. 3 and 36, fig. 4). In each of these tombs, an antlered sculpture was positioned in the space at the head end of the wooden burial structure near the coffin. As a paired burial, Tomb 6 had two antlered sculptures, one at the head end of each coffin. Other offerings, such as pottery vessels and lacquered wooden items, were also placed in this location, as well as along the side of the coffin at the head end.

As evidenced by sculptures discovered in tombs excavated in Dangyang County, Hubei (see Appendix A), minor changes to the form of antlered sculptures were made in the Hanxi region between the early and middle fifth century BCE. The main modification at this time was to the shape of the base, which became a square one carved into a pattern of raised and sunken sections.[10] From the late fifth through the early fourth centuries BCE, the mature style (the Hanxi style) began to take form with modifications to the shape of the body and head of Dangyang sculptures.[11] The head was enlarged and assumed a more square shape with carved facial features, including roundels at the brow, round eyes, a nose, fangs, and a protruding tongue. The neck was accentuated even further, taking on a serpentine C-form. Moreover, two square collars on the body became standard, with one located below the curved neck and the other forming a tenon shoulder where the body joins the carved square base.

One of the earliest instances of the mature Hanxi style is a sculpture excavated from Tomb 230 at Jinjiashan in Dangyang (see Hubei sheng Yichang diqu bowuguan and Beijing daxue kaogu xi 1992, p. 157, fig. 114.4). Tomb 230 belonged to a member of the lower aristocracy and contained a wooden burial structure and coffin. As with the Springs and Autumns period tombs excavated at Xiaohuangjiatai, Qianjiang County discussed above, burial offerings, including the antlered tomb sculpture, were placed at the head end of the tomb (Hubei sheng Yichang diqu bowuguan and Beijing daxue kaogu xi 1992, p. 58, fig. 39).

Although the earliest examples of antlered sculptures made of wood were discovered in tombs in Dangyang and Qianjiang counties, most documented examples have been excavated from tombs in Jiangling County, Hubei province. Hundreds of tombs excavated near Jinancheng, an ancient walled settlement site, yielded antlered figures related to those found in Dangyang and Qianjiang counties.[12] The largest number of antlered sculptures excavated at any Chu mortuary complex to date have been found in tombs at Yutaishan and Jiudian (see Appendix A).[13]

Antlered sculptures excavated from tombs in Jiangling County range in typology from stands for antlers,[14] to single-headed hybrid beasts with long tongues; addorsed long tongued hybrids; and long tongued human-headed sculptures (Figure 2a–e). The earliest antlered sculptures found in tombs in Jiangling resemble the late sixth through the early fifth centuries BCE sculptures discovered in Qianjiang County discussed above, including the absence of apparent facial features, but they date somewhat later to the late fifth century BCE (Figure 2a).[15] The next type, single-headed antlered hybrid sculptures with facial features (round eyes, snout, fangs, and tongue), can be divided into two subtypes: Those with painted facial features (Figure 2b) and those with carved facial features (Figure 2c). The former subtype has a curved neck and straight body fitted into a truncated smooth base. The latter subtype represents the mature Hanxi style characterized by its C-shaped neck, square body collars, and square base with geometric carvings. Hanxi style sculptures flourished and peaked in the Hanxi region in the fourth century BCE and represent more than half of known excavated examples in Jiangling.[16] Addorsed versions, which appeared around the fourth century BCE and are generally only found in tombs belonging to the upper aristocracy, resemble singled-headed Hanxi style sculptures but have twin bodies and heads that rise from the same mortise at the center of the carved base (Figure 2d).[17] Long tongued, human-headed sculptures are the rarest type; only one has been discovered in Jiangling County to date, excavated from Tomb 555 at Yutaishan dated to the third century BCE (Figure 2e).[18] The sculpture has carved facial features reminiscent of wooden tomb figurines, but paired with a long tongue and crowned with real deer antlers. The body of the sculpture is straight and is fitted into a plain square plinth.

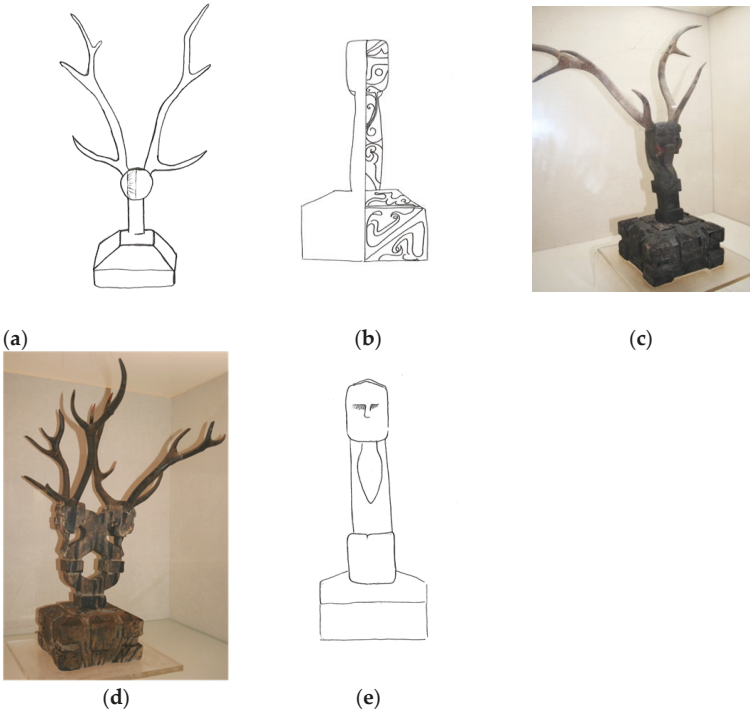


Figure 2. Five typologies of lacquered wood antlered sculptures excavated in Jiangling County, Hubei. (**a**) Line drawing of antler stand excavated from Tomb 142 at Yutaishan. Adapted from Hubei sheng Jingzhou diqu bowuguan (1982, plate 67.1) courtesy of Zay Olsen. (**b**) Line drawing of antlered tomb sculpture with painted features excavated from Tomb 516 at Yutaishan. Antlers are not shown. Adapted from Hubei sheng Jingzhou diqu bowuguan (1982, plate 67.2) courtesy of Zay Olsen. (**c**) Single-headed antlered and tongued sculpture with carved features (mature Hanxi style) in the Jingzhou Museum. Photo by author. (**d**) Addorsed antlered and tongued sculpture with carved features in the Jingzhou Museum. Photo by author. (**e**) Line drawing of anthropomorphic antlered and tongued sculpture. Antlers are not shown. Adapted from Hubei sheng Jingzhou diqu bowuguan (1982, plate 68.3) courtesy of Zay Olsen.

As with the examples found in Dangyang and Qianjiang counties, antlered sculptures in Jiangling County were interred in tombs belonging to both high-ranking and low-ranking aristocrats. The majority of tombs excavated in Jiangling belong to lower ranking aristocrats and have wooden burial structures that are divided by wooden partitions into up to three compartments, including a main compartment for the interment of the deceased in a wooden coffin, and a head compartment and/or side compartment to house burial goods. Larger Chu burial structures in Jiangling have up to seven compartments, with the main chamber typically located at the center of the structure and compartments for burial goods at the sides. Although there are exceptions, such as the anthropomorphic antlered sculpture excavated from Tomb 555 at Yutaishan that was interred in a side compartment of the tomb, antlered sculptures in Jiangling tombs, such as other sites in the Hanxi region, are almost always found at the head end or in the head compartment of tombs (Hubei sheng Jingzhou diqu bowuguan 1984, p. 108).[19]

During the fourth century BCE, a general formula seems to have determined the decorative program on the surface of Hanxi style sculptures excavated in Jiangling. For instance, the painting on a sculpture from Tomb 264 at Yutaishan (see Hubei sheng Jingzhou diqu bowuguan 1984, p. 110, fig. 88.2) is related to the decoration on an addorsed antlered sculp-

ture from Tomb 1 at Tianxingguan (Figure 3). Although there is a discrepancy between the status of the two tombs, as the former belonged to a low-ranking aristocrat and the latter belonged to a high-ranking aristocrat, and between the sizes of the sculptures, the decoration on the two sculptures is nearly identical.[20] The necks of both figures are adorned with S-shaped profile dragons with protruding tongues, and the bodies and most of the bases are covered with the same S-shaped spirals and non-representational curvilinear patterns, also known as the scroll and axe pattern. Furthermore, the collars on the bodies of the sculpture and the lower central panels of the bases are embellished with the same angular zigzag pattern.[21] A twin-headed sculpture from Tomb 1 at Wangshan (see Hubei sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1996, p. 96, fig. 67) features a similar program of decoration, but the figure lacks representational decoration; namely, the S-shaped dragons on the neck.[22] In place of dragons, which instead appear on the front side of the lower body of the Wangshan sculpture, the neck of the figure is embellished with S-shaped forms that mirror the shape of the profile dragons. In general, figures that lack the dragon motif often feature abstract S-shaped forms on the neck and body and those that lack the angular zigzag motif on the collars are instead embellished with angular or curvilinear volutes.

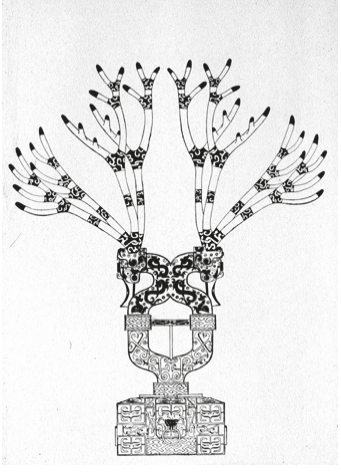


Figure 3. Line drawing of addorsed antlered and tongued tomb sculpture made from lacquered wood and excavated from Tomb 1 at Tianxingguan, Jiangling County, Hubei Province. From Hubei sheng Jingzhou diqu bowuguan (1982, p. 104, fig. 28).

The vocabulary of painted motifs seen on the surface of Hanxi style antlered and tongued sculptures is not unique to the sculptures. The profile dragons and angular zigzag patterns are derived from bronze and textile designs, respectively, while the curvilinear scroll and axe forms originated from lacquer painting. The intersection of bronze, textile, and lacquer decorative styles during the Warring States period has long been acknowledged. Colin Mackenzie has emphasized the important role textile patterns played in the development of Warring States period decoration (Mackenzie 1999, pp. 82–91). For example, a textile from a fourth century BCE tomb at Mashan, in Jiangling County, features an angular zigzag pattern related to the pattern that appears on the collars and the lower rectangular panels of the carved base of Hanxi style antlered and tongued sculptures (Hubei sheng Jingzhou diqu bowuguan 1985, p. 43, fig. 35). This motif, which originated from textiles, appeared on a variety of objects during the Warring States period, including bamboo basketry, furniture, tableware, and armor. In Tomb 1 at Tianxingguan, which yielded the tall addorsed antlered and tongued sculpture mentioned above (Figure 3), the pattern decorates the lacquered wood rim of a drum, as well as door motifs on the walls of the four chambers (see Hubei sheng Jingzhou diqu bowuguan 1982, p. 98, figs. 7,

21, and 77). In addition to the antlered and tongued tomb sculptures and the painted doors in the Tianxingguan tomb, the angular zigzag motif most often appears on items made for personal use.

The curvilinear scroll and axe patterns comprising the decoration on the lower bodies of Hanxi style sculptures, as well as the carved panels of the base, were drawn directly from the fluid designs of contemporary lacquer painting. Moreover, curvilinear patterns were popular in embroidered textiles. Mackenzie (1999, p. 90) has shown that an interest in juxtaposing curvilinear and rectilinear designs; namely, placing curvilinear forms over an angular background on a singular object, did not take hold until the Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE). The use of both types of patterns on Hanxi style antlered and tongued sculptures shows an interest in combining the two different patterns on one object for aesthetic appeal as early as the fourth century BCE.

The S-shaped dragons painted on the necks of Hanxi style sculptures were derived from two-dimensional images of dragons or felines inlaid into the surface of bronzes in colorful metals. Metal inlay was a technological innovation of the late Springs and Autumns period that continued to be popular throughout the Warring States period (So 1995, p. 25). An early example of inlay can be seen in two lidded cups, one elliptical and one round from Tomb 2 at Xiasi, which is dated to the second quarter of the sixth century BCE (see Henan sheng wenwu yanjiusuo et al. 1991, plate 56: 1–2). The vessels have copper inlaid dragons or felines that wrap around the circumference in two bands: One around the belly and one around the rim of the lid. The creatures alternate between forward and rear facing, with the latter serving as the cast-inlaid copper antecedents of the painted dragons on the Hanxi style antlered tomb sculptures.

Although the vocabulary of motifs seen on Hanxi style antlered sculptures excavated in Jiangling County is fairly consistent, the sculptures vary in size depending on the status of the tomb occupant. In large upper class aristocratic tombs, antlered sculptures are impressive in height. The addorsed antlered hybrid sculpture from Tomb 1 at Tianxingguan measures 5.57 feet tall (Figure 3), and one from Tomb 2 at Tianxingguan measures 4.39 feet tall (Hubei sheng Jingzhou diqu bowuguan 1982, p. 105; Hubei sheng Jingzhou bowuguan 2003, p. 187). Twenty-point racks augment the imposing quality of these sculptures and reflect the status of the tomb occupant.[23] Sculptures found in medium-sized tombs with one to three burial compartments and belonging to occupants of lower status typically measure around 3 feet tall and have smaller racks. For example, the Hanxi style single-headed antlered sculpture from Tomb 264 at Yutaishan measures 3.46 feet tall and has, by comparison, a modest eight-point rack (Hubei sheng Jingzhou diqu bowuguan 1984, p. 108).[24]

Other sites in the Hanxi region yielded antlered sculptures related to those found in Jiangling. Tomb 1 at Baoshan, in Jingmen (see Appendix A), dated to the fourth century BCE and believed to belong to a high-ranking Chu court officer's wife (Hubei sheng Jingsha tielu kaogu dui 1991, pp. 8–44), yielded a sculpture that does not significantly deviate from Hanxi style sculptures with carved features and bases excavated in Jiangling (see Hubei sheng Jingsha tielu kaogu dui 1991, p. 42, fig. 26). Moreover, the painted decoration is reminiscent of the Hanxi style sculptures excavated in Jiangling. Curvilinear S-shaped forms embellish the neck of the figure, volutes decorate the body and base, and the popular angular zigzag pattern decorates the two collars on the body of the sculpture. As with the majority of finds elsewhere in the Hanxi region, the Baoshan antlered sculpture was placed in the head compartment of the tomb.

Excavations in Jingmen (see Appendix A) have revealed that the inclusion of antlered sculptures in tomb inventories was not limited to the upper and lower aristocracy. Four tombs dated from the fourth through the third centuries BCE excavated at Luopogang and Zilinggang and believed to belong to commoners also yielded antlered sculptures. Antlered sculptures excavated in regional centers across the Chu realm reflect the status of the tomb occupant through size and quality, and in some cases by the materials used to craft the sculpture. The majority of known examples of antlered sculptures are carved from wood and painted with lacquer, but those discovered in Tombs 30, 87, and 93 at

Luopogang and Tomb 19 at Zilinggang were modeled from clay or clay and wood (Hubei sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Jingmen shi bowuguan 1996; Jingmen shi bowuguan 2008). The Luopogang sculptures were crafted from clay and wood, with the head and body made of clay and the base and the antlers possibly carved out of wood (Hubei sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Jingmen shi bowuguan 1996, p. 94).[25] A terra cotta sculpture excavated from Tomb 19 at Zilinggang (Jingmen shi bowuguan 2008, p. 83, fig. 86) was assembled using three components similar to the carved wood antlered sculptures found at other sites: A head and body, base, and imitation antlers (Figure 4). The sculptures discovered at these two sites resemble Hanxi style figures excavated in late fifth through the early fourth centuries BCE tombs in Dangyang, Jiangling, and Jingmen. The figures have round eyes, protruding tongues, and roundels at the brow. Moreover, they have square collars around the neck, modeled in imitation of carved wood. However, the clay versions have three collars rather than two, one at the joint between the head and the body, and two at nearly equidistant intervals below. Holes at the top of the head allow for the insertion of modeled clay, carved wood or real antlers. An opening between the frontal face of the figure and the back of the head is unusual but may have been utilized to give the impression of the curved neck seen on the Hanxi style figures (see Jingmen shi bowuguan 2008, p. 83, fig. 86).

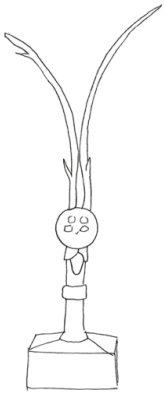


Figure 4. Line drawing of terra cotta antlered and tongued tomb sculpture excavated from Tomb 19 at Zilinggang, Jingmen, Hubei Province. Adapted from Jingmen shi bowuguan (2008, plate 25.6) courtesy of Zay Olsen.

As with the antlered sculptures made of lacquered wood found in medium-sized tombs elsewhere in the Hanxi region, the ceramic sculptures from Luopogang and Zilinggang were buried at the head end of their respective tombs. The tombs at Luopogang and Zilinggang were poorly preserved, but at least two of the tombs that contained clay examples of antlered sculptures also contained wooden burial structures. Tomb 87 at Luopogang had a wooden burial structure divided into two compartments, a main compartment for the burial of the tomb occupant and a head compartment for burial objects, while the burial structure in Tomb 93 was more modest with a single chamber (Hubei sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Jingmen shi bowuguan 1996, p. 202, fig. 106 and 204, fig. 108). Tomb 30 at Luopogang was a rectangular pit tomb with an *ercengtai* 二层台 ledge around three sides (Hubei sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Jingmen shi bowuguan 1996, pp. 139–40). The remaining burial offerings that did not deteriorate over time were clustered at one end of the tomb. Unfortunately, the original structure of Tomb 19 at Zilingang could not be determined and the writers of the archaeological report do not indicate where in the tomb the sculpture was found (Jingmen shi bowuguan 2008, pp. 82, 238). Hopefully, future excavations of commoner graves will reveal how widespread pottery versions of antlered sculptures were. To date, they seem to have been reserved for those who could

afford more than a simple earthen pit burial. Although a bronze knife was discovered in Tomb 30 at Luopogang, the tomb occupants at these sites were mainly supplied with a small arrangement of pottery objects for the afterlife, indicative of their low status.

3. The Nanyang Basin

To the north of sites in the Hanxi region, several examples of antlered sculptures made of lacquered wood and dated from the fifth through the fourth centuries BCE have been excavated from Chu tombs at Yugang, in Xiangyang County, Hubei Province (see Appendix A). Since 1987, over 300 Chu tombs have been excavated at the site (Xiangyang shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2011a, 2011b). The antlered sculptures unearthed from the tombs are few in comparison to the overall number of tombs excavated, but they give us important insight into the network of cultural exchange between the people living in the Nanyang Basin (north of the Han River) and those living to the west and east of the Han River (Hanxi and Handong regions) from the fifth through the fourth centuries BCE.[26] The Yugang antlered sculptures represent a unique combination of local and regional styles. As with finds in the Hanxi region, the sculptures were found at the head end of medium-sized tombs supplied with wooden burial structures, coffins, and up to three burial compartments. Three types of antlered sculptures were discovered, including sculptures with abstract and/or geometric painted decoration, sculptures of zoomorphic creatures with carved features and fitted into square-shaped plinths, and sculptures of hybrid beasts with crouching tiger-shaped bases. The former includes sculptures that are similar in typology to the earliest antlered figures unearthed in the Hanxi region, which lack carved facial features, and have round or oval faces with a flat profile and straight or slightly curved bodies. The figures that retain painted decoration feature curvilinear patterns and/or triangular spirals on the body and the base. Moreover, a painted sculpture from Tomb 124 (Figure 5a) features abstract decoration on the face, while an example from Tomb 101 has painted facial features that might be interpreted as eyes (Figure 5b).

(**a**) (**b**)

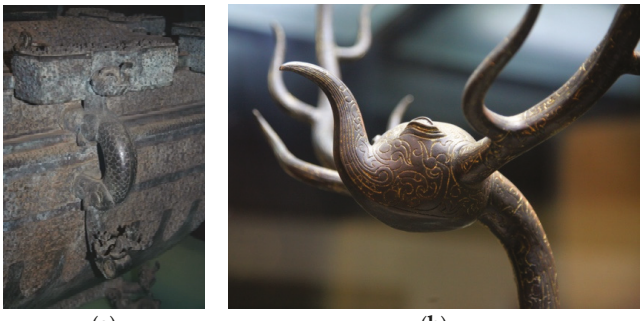
Figure 5. (**a**) Lacquered wood antlered sculpture from Tomb 124; (**b**) lacquered wood antlered sculpture from Tomb 101. Both excavated at Yugang, Xiangyang, Hubei. Note the sockets for antlers. From Xiangyang shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo (2011b, color plates 45.3 and 45.4).

Another sculpture with a square base but of slightly different typology highlights the transmission of artistic styles between the Nanyang Basin and Handong (east of the Han River), especially regarding the design of three-dimensional antlered hybrid creatures. Excavated from Tomb 134 dated to the late fifth century BCE, the sculpture has a round head and a slightly curved neck terminated in a square collar that functions as a tenon

shoulder (Figure 6). Its almond-shaped eyes, carved in intaglio, contrast with the round raised eyes of Hanxi style figures. The eyes are carved toward the top of the beast's round head, giving the figure a less ferocious appearance than the Hanxi style figures with frontal visage. Moreover, a pointed upturned nose and a short tongue set this figure apart. This is the only example excavated in Yugang that retained its original deer antlers. The antlers are painted at the tines and the branching points, such as those found in the Hanxi region, but the figure's body is painted with vertical bands of S-shaped spirals bordered by narrow bands of concentric circles. The base features units of triangular spirals, which seem to have been a favored motif for Yugang artisans.

Figure 6. Antlered and tongued sculpture from Tomb 134 at Yugang, Xiangyang County, Hubei. From Xiangyang shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo (2011b, color plate 45.2).

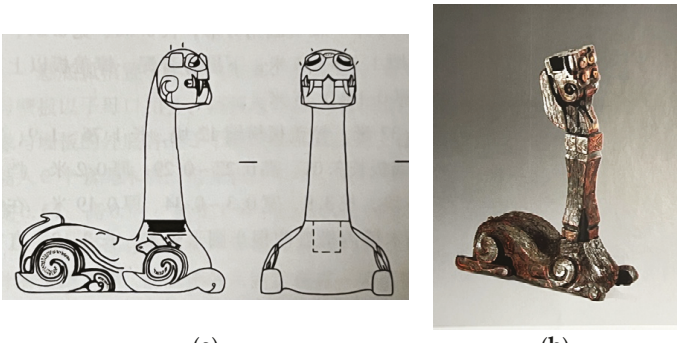
The typology of the sculpture from Tomb 134 is related to contemporary objects found in the fifth century BCE tomb of the Marquis Yi of Zeng, excavated near Leigudun, Sui County (see Appendix A) in the Handong region of northeastern Hubei in 1978 (for the full tomb report see Hubei sheng bowuguan 1989). Three-dimensional animal-shaped appendages on bronze vessels found in the Marquis' tomb feature the same round head, almond-shaped eyes, upturned snout, and smooth curved neck as the Yugang figure (Figure 7a). The round head of the bronze crane-like sculpture adorned with bronze deer antlers and discovered in the main coffin chamber of Marquis Yi's tomb also resembles the Yugang sculpture, but the antlers emerge laterally from the round head rather than from the crown (Figure 7b). The bronze animal appendages and the crane have heretofore been considered distinctly Zeng in style, although many of the bronze vessels found in the tomb are derived from a Chu prototype (Yang 1999, p. 277). The comparison between the Yugang figure and the bronze sculptural images of fantastical animals found on bronzes in the Marquis Yi's tomb provides yet another example of artistic and cultural exchange between the two regions, in this case, via the Suizao corridor (see Appendix A).[27]



(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 7. (**a**) Detail of bronze *jian fou* excavated from the Tomb of the Marquis Yi of Zeng. Hubei Provincial Museum. Photo by author. (**b**) Detail of head of bronze crane excavated from the Tomb of the Marquis Yi of Zeng. Hubei Provincial Museum. Photo courtesy of Larry F. Ball.

The third type of sculpture unearthed at Yugang has a distinctive base carved in the shape of a recumbent tiger's body. Five sculptures of this type were discovered in tombs dated to the fourth century BCE, slightly later than the Yugang figures with square bases. Two sculptures with long, smooth necks that rise from a crouching feline below represent a local style. The long-necked figure from Tomb 143 (Figure 8a) has a round head with carved features, including a short protruding tongue, and an upturned nose similar in style to the sculpture from Tomb 134 (Figure 6).[28] The others have heads and bodies modeled after Hanxi style sculptures (Figure 8b). This indicates that the popular Hanxi style models discovered in Chu territory to the south of Yugang were known in the Nanyang Basin. The Hanxi style was likely transmitted to this northern region of the Chu state via the Han River. In this case, the Hanxi style was reinterpreted to suit local tastes by fitting a Hanxi style body and head into a feline-shaped base rather than into a square one.[29] The use of the feline-shaped base appears to be a clever innovation but is probably inspired by the lacquered wooden sculptures of birds perched on crouching tigers found primarily in the Hanxi region (As an example, see Hubei sheng Jingzhou diqu bowuguan 1984, p. 112, fig. 90).



(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 8. (**a**) Line drawing of lacquered wood antlered and tongued sculpture from Tomb 143 at Yugang, Xiangyang County, Hubei. From Xiangyang shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo (2011a, 219 fig. 195.16). (**b**) Lacquered wood antlered and tongued sculpture from Tomb 145 at Yugang, Xiangyang County, Hubei. From Xiangyang shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo (2011b, color plate 46.1). Both sculptures were originally equipped with deer antlers.

Where decoration is concerned, the Yugang sculptures mainly feature curvilinear forms and triangular spirals. The abstract curvilinear forms painted on the necks and bodies of the figures with feline-shaped bases are related to designs seen on the Hanxi style antlered sculptures. However, the square collars decorating the Yugang sculptures are embellished with triangular spirals in place of the typical angular zigzag pattern. On a sculpture from Tomb 112, geometric spirals also decorate the body (Xiangyang shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2011a, p. 134, fig. 100). As mentioned above, this motif seems to have been favored by Yugang artisans. Furthermore, it may corroborate artistic transmission between Nanyang and the Suizao corridor, as lacquered wooden objects in the tomb of the Marquis Yi of Zeng also feature this motif (for example, see Hubei sheng bowuguan 1989, fig. 79).

4. Eastern Hubei

Beyond Hanxi and the Nanyang Basin, variations on the antlered tomb beast have also been excavated at tomb sites along the Yangzi River in Echeng and Huanggang counties in Eastern Hubei (see Appendix A). The typology of the earliest antlered sculpture found in this region, dated to the fourth century BCE, may have been inspired by a Hanxi prototype, but slightly later examples are more unique. The earliest were excavated from the large aristocratic Tombs 3 and 5 at Baizifan in Echeng County (Hubei sheng Echeng xian bowuguan 1983, pp. 223–54). Divided into a series of six compartments with the main coffin chamber at the center, the plans of the tombs are similar to large tombs in the Chu heartland. However, the head compartment of Tomb 5 (Figure 9) yielded two sculptures rather than only one, showing a departure from common practices in Hanxi and the Nanyang Basin (Hubei sheng Echeng xian bowuguan 1983, p. 226, fig. 4).[30] Situated on square plinths carved into square sections, the bodies of the Baizifan sculptures are composed of two truncated pyramids, one inverted over the other. They are joined at the waist with a square collar reminiscent of those on contemporary Hanxi style sculptures. The heads of the figures mimic the shape of the collar on the bodies and lack carved facial features, including the characteristic long tongue. Unfortunately, the writers of the original tomb report do not indicate whether the Baizifan sculptures originally had mortises for deer antlers; however, based on the typology of the sculptures and their location in the tomb, they are likely related to antlered sculptures found in Hanxi and Nanyang.[31]

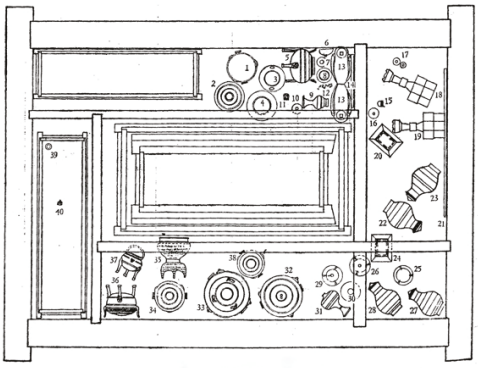


Figure 9. Line drawing of Tomb 5 at Baizifan showing two sculptures in the head compartment of the tomb. From Hubei sheng Echeng xian bowuguan (1983, p. 226, fig. 4).

Three sculptures dated slightly later than the Baizifan sculptures from the late fourth through the early third centuries BCE and unearthed from medium and large tombs in Huanggang County are quite unusual in comparison to the Hanxi models and reflect more tenuous cultural ties with the Chu heartland.[32] The head compartment of Tomb 1 at Lu-

chong, a large tomb dated to the late fourth century BCE, only yielded fragments of an antlered sculpture (see Huanggang shi bowuguan 1999, p. 245, fig. 29.6), but the archaeologists were able to determine that the sculpture was supplied with wooden antlers rather than real ones (Huanggang shi bowuguan 1999, p. 246). Another poorly preserved, but distinctive example of similar date was unearthed from Tomb 1 at Guo'erchong (see Huangzhou gumu fajue dui 1999, p. 193, fig. 12.3-4).[33] Found in an area to the side of the coffin, rather than at its head, this wooden sculpture has a squat oval head, reminiscent of a turtle or a snake, with a pair of beady eyes and a slight mouth. The figure lacks the characteristic tongue motif, and rather than a curved neck and a post-like body, the beast has a smooth, narrow neck that leads into a straight body decorated with a scale pattern.[34] Holes were carved into the head, presumably for the insertion of antlers or horns, although none were found in the tomb. Perhaps artisans in this region had a predilection for wooden antlers. The turtle-like bust is fitted into a disproportionately large and square carved base, which is painted with scroll patterns confined in nine square and rectangular units. An antlered sculpture with a similar carved base was found in the head end of Tomb 5 nearby at Caojiagang in Huanggang (see Huanggang shi bowuguan 1999, p. 233, fig. 20.3). Future excavations may show that this type of base was standard for this region. However, the Caojiagang beast has a unique feline-shaped head and a curved neck. The upright pointed ears and protruding tongue that droop naturalistically off to one side are also unusual in comparison to Hanxi prototypes.

5. The Upper Huai

To the north of sites in Eastern Hubei and east of the tombs at Yugang in Nanyang, large aristocratic tombs excavated at Changtaiguan in Xinyang, Henan province (see Appendix A) dated to the early fourth century BCE yielded some of the most graphic examples of antlered tomb sculptures discovered to date (for the full excavation report see Henan sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 1986). The Changtaiguan tombs were equipped with wooden burial structures oriented roughly east-west and divided into seven to eight compartments. Tomb 1 had a central main coffin chamber with a large head compartment in the east, three rear compartments in the west, and two side compartments in the north and south. Tomb 2 had a central coffin chamber with two head compartments, three rear, and two side. The best preserved of the antlered tomb sculptures was excavated from Tomb 1 and measures a little over 4 feet tall (Figure 10). The sculpture, carved from one piece of wood, is in the form of a kneeling feline with antlers on its head and ears tucked back in agitation. It grasps a snake in its clawed forelegs and between its rapacious fanged teeth. The Changtaiguan sculpture shares the same basic facial features with antlered sculptures found in other regions of the Chu polity, but the features are far more exaggerated and detailed. The enormous eyes are bloodshot, and the long tongue is carved with repetitive grooves. A painted red and yellow scale pattern covers the surface of the body, and the creature's humped back is further accentuated with a carved pattern of volutes.[35] The sculpture was not placed in the head compartment of the tomb, as was common in most medium and large tombs in the Chu heartland during this period. It was discovered in a rear compartment to the west of the central main coffin chamber (see the fold out diagram of the tomb in Henan sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 1986, pp. 18–19).

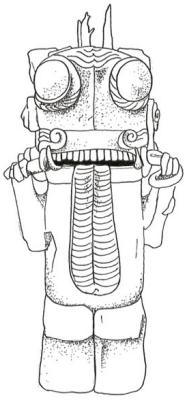


Figure 10. Line drawing of lacquered wood antlered kneeling sculpture from Tomb 1 at Changtaiguan, Xinyang, Henan. Adapted from Henan sheng wenwu yanjiusuo (1986, pl. 58) courtesy of Zay Olsen.

Graphic kneeling figures were not the only antlered objects made from lacquered wood found in the aristocratic tombs at Changtaiguan. The tombs were also provided with non-zoomorphic antler stands related to those found in the Hanxi region and Eastern Hubei. Tomb 1 contained one stand (Figure 11), in addition to the kneeling creature, while Tomb 2 contained two stands (see Henan sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 1986, pls. 70, 110-1, and 110-2).[36] Each was found in a side compartment of the tombs, separate from the kneeling figures. The stand in Tomb 1 was interred in a side compartment to the northwest of the coffin chamber, while those in Tomb 2 were in a side compartment north of the main chamber. Although each stand is unique, they share a general typology. They are composed of a square base, a collared body, rectangular head, and deer antlers all fitted together by mortise and tenon. The bodies of the sculptures consist of two truncated pyramids, inverted one over the other at the waist, such as the Baizifan antlered sculptures discussed above. This feature, along with the rectangular shape of the heads on the Changtaiguan sculptures, may indicate a cultural link between the Upper Huai and Eastern Hubei.

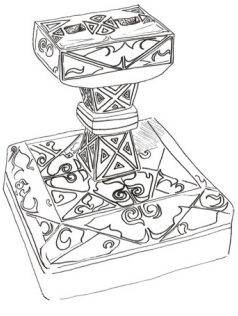


Figure 11. Line drawing of lacquered wood antler stand from Tomb 1 at Changtaiguan, Xinyang, Henan. Adapted from Henan sheng wenwu yanjiusuo (1986, pl. 70.1) courtesy of Zay Olsen.

The Changtaiguan stands were individually decorated with black and red lacquer. Two were painted with motifs shared by other lacquered wooden objects found in the tomb, including curvilinear tendrils, volutes, and triangular spirals reminiscent of those decorating the Yugang sculptures discussed earlier.[37] The third stand, from Tomb 2, includes carved decoration (Figure 12). Four separate square panels of decoration are rendered to each side of the square mortise used to secure the body of the stand to the base.

Each panel is carved with simple spirals above a pair of almond-shaped motifs below.[38] The almond-shaped motifs are repeated on the top of the rectangular head and might be interpreted as pairs of eyes. Regardless of the interpretation of the motifs, these decorative stands emphasize the importance of deer antlers in understanding the antlered tomb sculpture, as it did not always seem necessary to represent something zoomorphic, the antlers were sufficient.

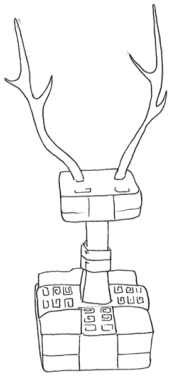


Figure 12. Line drawing of lacquered wood antler stand from Tomb 2 at Changtaiguan, Xinyang, Henan. Adapted from Henan sheng wenwu yanjiusuo (1986, pl. 110.2) courtesy of Zay Olsen.

Although the antlered kneeling figures and display stands found in the tombs at Changtaiguan are distinctive in comparison to Hanxi models, a fragment of a Hanxi style tomb sculpture (see Henan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2003, color plate 35.2) was found in the tomb of a vassal of the Chu state at Geling, in Xincai County, Henan (see Appendix A), northeast of Changtaiguan. The Geling tomb was plundered, and unfortunately, only the head of the sculpture in question remained, but it is strikingly similar to the carved figures found in the Chu heartland, especially Jiangling; it likely has its provenance there. The tomb is dated roughly to the fourth century BCE, contemporary with the flourishing of the Hanxi style sculptures in Jiangling County. The plan of the wooden structure of the Geling tomb is notably not Chu in design, as it has a ya-shaped (or ya-xing 亞形, "cross-shaped") plan (Henan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2003, p. 22). However, the head of a Hanxi style antlered sculpture was found in the head compartment, in accordance with common practice in the Chu heartland. To date, this is the northernmost example of a Hanxi style antlered sculpture.

6. Jiangnan

The head fragment discovered in the Geling tomb is not the only example suggesting that the influence of the Hanxi region was far-reaching during the fourth century BCE. Another Hanxi style sculpture (Figure 13) was discovered far to the south in Tomb 89 at Changsha, Hunan province (see Appendix A). Over 2000 tombs dated from the late Springs and Autumns period through the end of the Warring States period have been excavated in this region.[39] Notably, only eleven of these tombs yielded sculptures related to those found in other Chu regions, and unfortunately, only five sculptures of the eleven were preserved (Hunan sheng bowuguan et al. 2000a, p. 373 and Changsha shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2003, fig. 10).[40] All were carved from wood and were found in medium and large tombs with wooden burial structures dated from the fifth through the third centuries BCE. According to the excavation report, most of the Changsha antlered sculptures were found in the head compartments of tombs (Hunan sheng bowuguan et al. 2000a, p. 373). However, of the five preserved sculptures, only two were found at the head end of the tomb, the Hanxi style sculpture from Tomb 89 and an addorsed version in a local style

discovered in Tomb 1 at Maotingzi in Changsha (Changsha shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2003, fig. 2).[41]

Figure 13. Lacquered wood antlered and tongued sculpture excavated from Tomb 89 at Changsha. Hunan Provincial Museum. Note, the antlers and the original base, which were carved in the Hanxi style, are not pictured. Photo by the author.

With the exception of the Hanxi style sculpture from Tomb 89, the other preserved sculptures unearthed from tombs at Changsha represent local interpretations of the Hanxi style sculpture, and interestingly, they also share some similarities with the antlered kneeling figures found far to the north in the tombs at Changtaiguan in the Upper Huai.[42] Two versions of local Changsha style sculptures were discovered in the southern side compartments of Tombs 109 and 397, one with a single head and body (Figure 14) and one with addorsed heads and bodies (see Hunan sheng bowuguan et al. 2000a, p. 374, fig. 303.1-2). In addition to these, an addorsed version Changsha style sculpture was discovered in the head end of Tomb 1 at Maotingzi, in Changsha (see Changsha shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2003, fig. 2).[43] Situated on a smooth square base, the single-headed Changsha style sculpture from Tomb 109 dated from the late fifth to early fourth centuries BCE shares the common attributes of antlered sculptures found in other regions; namely, the round eyes, long extended tongue, and bent neck, but the head of the image is squat, and the figure has a broad arc-shaped jaw and lacks carved fangs.[44] The body of the figure is block-like, in contrast to the post-like body of the Hanxi style sculptures. Moreover, the sculpture has clawed arms, which are raised to the creature's mouth, such as the kneeling figures from Changtaiguan. However, with the absence of fangs and the reptilian prey, the figure lacks the menacing quality of the Changtaiguan sculptures. Unfortunately, only traces of paint remain on the sculpture, but the whole figure was originally covered with painted designs. The painted decoration may have been similar to the addorsed version from Tomb 397.

Figure 14. Line drawing of lacquered wood, single-headed Changsha style antlered tomb sculpture from Tomb 109 at Changsha, Hunan. Note, the antlers are not pictured. Adapted from Hunan sheng bowuguan et al. (2000b, 2: pl.121.2-3) courtesy of Zay Olsen.

The addorsed sculpture from Tomb 397 dated to the fourth century BCE is in the same style as the single-headed version but has a carved square base, such as those seen on Hanxi style figures. The sculpture is painted with a black lacquer background and is covered with a variety of patterns depicted in red. The base and part of the body of the figure are covered with scroll patterns, and the arms bear feather patterns. Scroll patterns are repeated on the sides of the twin heads, and the nose and eye area are embellished with repeating circles, giving the creature's face a scaly appearance. Although there are only two examples of Changsha style addorsed sculptures, it is significant that they were found in larger tombs. Future excavations in Changsha may reveal that addorsed sculptures were reserved for tombs belonging to the upper aristocracy, and thus a reflection of the tomb occupant's status, as seen in the Hanxi region.

Finally, the authors of the tomb report classified an anthropomorphic figure excavated from Tomb 569 at Changsha as an antlered sculpture (Hunan sheng bowuguan et al. 2000a, pp. 373–74), most likely since it can be compared to the one found at Yutaishan in Jiangling. However, the Changsha version lacks some important features, including the elongated post-like body, the long tongue, and the deer antlers, making it seem more similar to a human bust than a fantastical hybrid creature (see Hunan sheng bowuguan et al. 2000b, pl. 121.4). The Changsha figure has human-like ears and a smooth neck. Its human-like torso has rounded shoulders and is fitted into a truncated pyramidal base at the waist. The sculptor even noted the collarbones of the figure with two slight impressions below the shoulders. It may be significant that, in addition to this bust-type object, Tomb 569 contained nearly fifty tomb figurines.[45] The majority of these were stored in the northern side compartment of the eastern oriented tomb, while the bust was found in the southern side compartment among pottery and lacquer vessels (Hunan sheng bowuguan et al. 2000a, pp. 395–400). The placement of the tomb figurines and the bust-like sculpture in separate compartments of the tomb seems to distinguish them from one another, as does the use of the base to display the figure, but whether the bust should be categorized as an antlered sculpture is debatable.[46] The sculpture adopts the basic format of antlered sculptures in discussion; namely, a figure fitted into a truncated pyramidal base using joinery techniques, but the absence of antlers and a gruesome long tongue is significant. Tomb 569 is dated to the third century BCE, coinciding with the change in burial practices that occurred in Chu toward the end of the Warring States period.

In addition to the figures excavated in Changsha, a few other significant variations of antlered tomb sculptures have been discovered in the Jiangnan region. Four examples were unearthed from three tombs dated to the fourth century BCE excavated to the north of Changsha in Shiban Village, Cili County, Hunan (see Appendix A) (Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Cili xian wenwu baohu guanli yanjiusuo 1995, pp. 173–207). Of the four examples unearthed, all were found in a head compartment or head end of tombs consistent with practices in the Chu heartland, but only two were in good condition.[47] These were found side-by-side in Tomb 23, a rare find for a medium-sized Chu tomb.[48] Carved from wood and situated on painted square bases, the Shiban Village sculptures have straight bodies and dramatic C-shaped necks (see Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Cili xian wenwu baohu guanli yanjiusuo 1995, p. 198, fig. 27). They retain the long tongue, carved fangs, and antlers characteristic of this genre of figures, but have almond-shaped eyes carved in intaglio on top of distinctive serpentine heads. The Cili sculptures seem to be a cross between Hanxi style figures with curved necks and the zoomorphic sculptures found in tombs in Eastern Hubei. Future excavations in this region of Hunan province will hopefully further clarify these connections.

7. Conclusions

This regional survey of antlered sculptures made from lacquered wood and excavated from Chu tombs dated from the sixth through the fourth centuries BCE confirms the notion that Chu culture was a unique amalgam of regional cultures (Xu 1999, p. 26). Distinct cultural zones can be distinguished in Hanxi, the Nanyang Basin, Eastern Hubei, the Upper Huai, and Jiangnan. The Hanxi region was an artistic center, where antlered sculptures assembled from carved wood made their first appearance and then were refined over time to form the mature Hanxi style. As we saw with sculptures excavated from tombs in the Nanyang Basin and Jiangnan, the mature Hanxi style, which was likely transmitted along the Han River and its tributaries, was adapted and/or manipulated by regional artisans to suit local aesthetic tastes. Artisans in these two regions also diverged from the Hanxi style altogether to create unique local iterations of the antlered tomb sculpture. In the case of the local style sculptures excavated at Yugang in the Nanyang Basin, we also see evidence of artistic exchange with the Zeng state via the Suizao corridor. In the Upper Huai and Eastern Hubei, antlered sculptures are highly localized, suggesting that these micro-regions of the Chu polity received less influence from the Chu heartland.

Traditionally, scholars have associated these sculptures with images illustrated in the Chu Silk Manuscript or with horned mythological deities described in ancient texts, such as the *Chu ci* 楚辞 (Songs of Chu) or *Shanhaijing* 山海经 (Classic of Mountains and Seas) (for example, see Hayashi 1972, pp. 157–63; So 1999, pp. 44–45). The most popular interpretation is that these sculptures represent the Earth God Tu Bo, described in the *Chu ci* (Chen and Yuan 1983, p. 66; Strassberg 2002, p. 58; Yang 1999, p. 347). A more recent analysis by Lai (2015, pp. 122–29) posits they are images of a fecundity god.[49] Although this paper does not offer a new interpretation of the significance of Chu antlered sculptures, I believe this regional analysis raises an important question on the function and meaning of these sculptures for future research. Rather than interpreting these sculptures as one class of objects with a singular function and meaning, we should consider that the sculptures were multivalent, defined by regional and local populations across the Chu polity. In some regional contexts, the sculptures may have served multiple functions to benefit both the living and the dead.

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Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

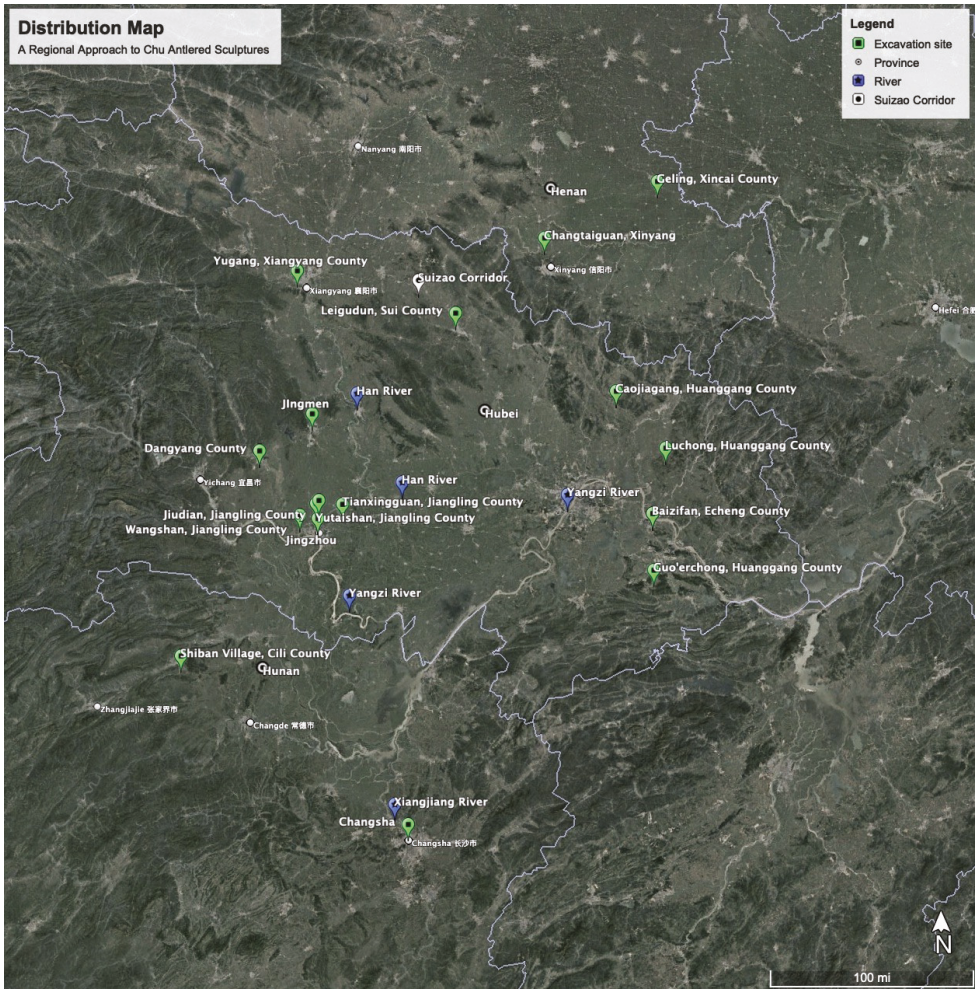

Figure A1. Distribution map showing sites that yielded antlered tomb sculptures discussed in this article. Map by author.

Notes

1 The term *zhenmushou* is frequently used in Chinese archaeological reports to refer to sculptures of long tongued hybrid beasts. It is also used to describe similarly grotesque anthropomorphic busts with lolling tongues and deer antlers, as well as simple antler stands. In scholarly literature in the West, the term "tomb guardian figure" is more commonly used to describe the sculptures.

2 For a selection of previous studies devoted to Chu *zhenmushou* see: Chaffin (2007), Chen and Yuan (1983), Dematté (1994), Ding (2012), Ding and Zhang (2015), Geng (2007), Huang (2011), and Salmony (1954).

3 I defined the Hanxi style in a paper presented at the International Conference on Chu Culture and Early Development of the Middle Reaches of the Yangzi River at Wuhan University in 2018 (Chaffin 2021, pp. 97–105).

4 The Hanxi region was part of the ancient Chu heartland, which also included Handong, the Dan valley, and the Nanyang Basin. See Blakeley (1999, p. 14).

5 For this analysis, I use the regional framework established by Xu (1999).

6 I exclude from this study a sculpture classified as a *zhenmushou* excavated from Tomb 5 at Caojiagang in Dangyang County, which is certainly related. The Caojiagang sculpture does not, however, include the mortises for deer antlers, a feature that characterizes this class of funerary sculpture. Fragments of deer antlers were discovered in the tomb, but their relationship to the wooden sculpture is unclear. Although dated slightly later than the Caojiagang sculpture to the early Warring States period, a sculpture of similar typology was discovered in a Chu tomb in Dangyang County, Tomb 239 at Jinjiashan. It included mortises for deer antlers. Despite the absence of holes for antlers on the Caojiagang sculpture, the similarities between the Caojiagang and Jinjiashan sculptures suggest that the Caojiagang figure may be an early wooden prototype of the antlered hybrid sculpture. For the Caojiagang sculpture see and Hubei sheng Yichang diqu bowuguan (1988, p. 488, fig. 36). For the Jinjiashan sculpture see Hubei sheng Yichang diqu bowuguan and Beijing daxue kaogu xi (1992, p. 157, fig. 114.1).

7 For the two sculptures from Tomb 6 see Qianjiang bowuguan (1988, p. 39, fig. 7).

8 Wooden burial structures, coffins, and furniture were also constructed using this joinery technique during the Eastern Zhou. Scholars have long acknowledged the sophisticated woodworking tradition of Chu as a distinctive feature of its culture. See Mackenzie (1987, pp. 82–102). On Chu woodworking techniques see Lin (1978).

9 For the full report see Qianjiang bowuguan (1988). On the different size classes of Chu tombs see Von Falkenhausen (2003).

10 For example, see the base on the sculpture excavated from Tomb 229 at Jinjiashan, in Dangyang County. Hubei sheng Yichang diqu bowuguan and Beijing daxue kaogu xi (1992, p. 157, fig. 114.2).

11 Two examples of this date were excavated from Tomb 2 at Yangjiashan and Tomb 230 at Jinjiashan, respectively. See Hubei sheng Yichang diqu bowuguan and Beijing daxue kaogu xi (1992, p. 157, figs. 114.3 and 114.4).

12 Jinancheng may have served as the Chu capital of Ying established in 690 BCE during the Springs and Autumns period. Barry Blakeley (1999), however, disputes this claim as Chu tombs excavated in Jiangling County mostly date to the Warring States period (Blakeley 1999, p. 12).

13 At Yutaishan, 156 antlered sculptures were unearthed from 156 tombs. At Jiudian, sixty-five examples were excavated from sixty-five tombs. In Jiangling, tombs with more than one antlered sculpture are rare. See Hubei sheng Jingzhou diqu bowuguan (1984, 107–8) and Hubei sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo (1995, pp. 298–304).

14 I refer to sculptures that lack apparent zoomorphic facial features as stands.

15 For example, see the sculpture excavated from Tomb 142 at Yutaishan, which is painted with geometric designs over a black-colored background (Hubei sheng Jingzhou diqu bowuguan 1984, p. 110, fig. 88.1).

16 Of the sixty-seven preserved examples (out of 156) excavated at the mortuary complex at Yutaishan between 1973 and 1976, thirty-nine (58%) are Hanxi style figures with carved facial features. See Hubei sheng Jingzhou diqu bowuguan (1984, pp. 107–8).

17 Single-headed antlered sculptures outnumber the addorsed versions. At Yutaishan, seven (10%) of the sixty-seven preserved examples were addorsed. At Jiudian, only three (5%) of sixty preserved examples were addorsed. See Chaffin (2007, pp. 167–73).

18 An unprovenanced example that can be compared to the Yutaishan sculpture is in the collection of the British Museum in London. The British Museum sculpture was important to Salmony's study of antlered tomb sculptures (Salmony 1954).

19 The interment of the anthropomorphic antlered sculpture in a side chamber may suggest that the function of antlered sculptures changed toward the end of the Warring States period in the third century BCE.

20 The wooden burial structure of Tomb 264 measures 2.8 × 1.08 × 1.18 meters; the wooden burial structure of Tomb 1 at Tianxingguan measures 8.20 × 7.50 × 3.16 meters. The sculpture from Tomb 264 measures 105.6 cm (3.46 feet), while the one from Tomb 1 at Tianxingguan measures 170 cm (5.57 feet). See Hubei sheng Jingzhou diqu bowuguan (1984, pp. 108, 169) and Hubei sheng Jingzhou diqu bowuguan (1982, pp. 74, 105).

21 Another example of a sculpture with the same formulaic painting program was excavated from Tomb 294 at Jiudian, in Jiangling County. See Hubei sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo (1995, p. 304, fig. 200).

22 For the full tomb report see Hubei sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo (1996). Additionally, see Hubei sheng wenhuaju wenwu gongzuo dui (1966, pp. 33–55). Tombs 1 and 2 at Wangshan are also known from Annette Juliano's preliminary article on the burials published in 1972. She also discusses the nearby Tomb 1 at Shazhong. See Juliano (1972).

23 The antlers from Tomb 2 were badly deteriorated but appear to have had twenty points per rack.

24 By modern standards an eight-point rack is considered impressive.

25 The writers of the archaeological report suggest that the antlers were made of wood, but there is no evidence of this.

26 Ten tombs excavated from 2004 to 2005 at Yugang yielded antlered sculptures.

27 For a study of networks on the Suizao corridor, see Chen (2019).

28 The other sculpture with a feline-shaped base and long, smooth neck in the local style was excavated from Tomb 222. Unfortunately, the head was damaged and all that remains are two pointed ears. See Xiangyang shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo (2011a, p. 76, fig. 48).

29 The tiger-shaped base on these images implies a potential for motion, in contrast to the stable form of a square base, perhaps symbolizing that these figures were seen as mobile in the tomb rather than fixed in space.

[30] It should also be noted that in addition to the main tomb occupant, Tombs 3 and 5 at Baizifan held the remains of individuals that presumably accompanied the tomb owner into the afterlife. Tomb 3 held the remains of one additional human, while Tomb 5 held two. Each was supplied with a wooden coffin and placed in a side compartment of the tomb. From the thousands of tombs excavated to date, human sacrifice was not commonly practiced in the Chu state in the fourth century BCE. These instances are rare and must reflect regional beliefs. Hubei sheng Echeng xian bowuguan (1983, p. 227).

[31] The authors of the report state that antlers were not found in the tomb. Hubei sheng Echeng xian bowuguan (1983, p. 248).

[32] For the full excavation report see Huanggang shi bowuguan (1999, pp. 220–50).

[33] For the full excavation report see Huangzhou gumu fajue dui (1999, pp. 187–96).

[34] The sculpture was found in the eastern side compartment. The authors of the tomb report hypothesize that the head resembles a dog. Huangzhou gumu fajue dui (1999, p. 195).

[35] The figure from Tomb 1 was painted reddish brown, and has red eyes and a red tongue, and the ears are yellow. The sculpture from Tomb 2 was painted black with red eyes, a yellow mouth and ears, and the body is embellished with running spirals in yellow (Henan sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 1986, pp. 60–61 and 114).

[36] The kneeling figure from Tomb 1 measures 4.2 feet (without antlers), and the one from Tomb 2 measures 4.98 feet. The stand from Tomb 1 measures 1.31 feet (without antlers) and the two from Tomb 2 measure 3.60 and 2.84 feet (with antlers) (Henan sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 1986, pp. 60–61 and 114–116).

[37] Geometric triangular patterns are repeated on many other artifacts in the Xinyang tombs. For example, they appear on a table from Tomb 1, and the *bianzhong* bell stand and the chime stand from Tomb 2. See Henan sheng wenwu yanjiusuo (1986, p. 38, fig. 27 and pp. 88–89, figs. 59 and 60).

[38] The writers of the report describe the designs as zoomorphic. Henan sheng wenwu yanjiusuo (1986, p. 115).

[39] Changsha tombs are reported in Hunan sheng bowuguan et al. (2000a, 2000b). Also see Changsha shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo (2003).

[40] The 2048 tombs excavated at Changsha and reported in Hunan sheng bowuguan et al. (2000a) were in poor condition at the time of excavation; only fifty-nine tombs had remnants of wooden burial structures and/or coffins. Ten of these fifty-nine were furnished with antlered sculptures (Hunan sheng bowuguan et al. 2000a, p. 10). Tomb 1 at Maotingzi reported in Changsha shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo (2003, fig. 10) accounts for the additional sculpture discussed in this paper.

[41] Changsha tombs differ from tombs in the Chu heartland in that there are not any tombs where burial furnishings are exclusively buried at the head end, or exclusively in an enclosed head compartment.

[42] I refer to these as Changsha style sculptures.

[43] For a full color image of the sculpture see Changsha shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo (2003, color plate tuban lu 4).

[44] The antlers are no longer preserved. According to the report, the sculpture has only one hole carved into its head for the insertion of a deer antler, but from the photograph in the tomb report, it appears that the sculpture has two holes (Hunan sheng bowuguan et al. 2000a, p. 373).

[45] According to the report, the tomb occupant was a 30-something female (Hunan sheng bowuguan et al. 2000a, p. 57).

[46] If the sculpture is indeed a bust, it is the only one known of its kind.

[47] The sculptures were found in Tombs 23, 33, and 36. See Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Cili xian wenwu baohu guanli yanjiusuo (1995, pp. 173–207).

[48] The wooden structure of Tomb 23 measures 3.2 × 1.52 × 1.42 meters (Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Cili xian wenwu baohu guanli yanjiusuo 1995, p. 182).

[49] They have also been identified as tomb guardians, spirit guides, demons, demon quellers, and spirits of transformation. See Cook (2006, pp. 137–42) for a summary of previous research on the meaning of antlered and tongued tomb sculptures of Chu.

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Article

Xianbei Zoomorphic Plaques: Art, Migration, and Human-Environment Entanglement

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Abstract: This paper adopts an ecological perspective to investigate the visual and material remains associated with the Xianbei people, a nomadic group active in Northeast Asia from the turn of the common era to the early medieval period. Through the study of metal plaques bearing animal motifs and the environmental contexts of these artworks, I articulate the entangled relationship between humans, animals, and nature. More specifically, this research highlights three groups of zoomorphic designs, including the deer, the horse, and the human–animal juxtaposition. By investigating the stylistic changes and geographical distributions of these three types of zoomorphic metal plaques, I analyze the various roles that animals played in the Xianbei society and the different ways in which the Xianbei people engaged with animals. The shifting relationship between humans and animals as reflected in the zoomorphic metal plaques, I argue, likely resulted from the changing environment of the Xianbei people as they migrated from the Greater Khingan Range to the southern Mongolian Steppe and, finally, to North China. At various stages of their migration, the Xianbei people conducted different modes of living, ranging from hunting, pastoral nomadism, to a sedentary lifestyle, which significantly shaped the design of their zoomorphic metal plaques.

Keywords: animal art; human–animal relations; migration; ecological perspective; Xianbei; Northern Wei; Northeast Asia

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1. Introduction

The Xianbei 鮮卑 people were a non-Chinese group that was active in Northeast Asia from the turn of the common era to the early medieval period[1]. Being the major player on the Mongolian-Manchurian steppe after the fall of the Xiongnu 匈奴 Empire, the Xianbei people significantly shaped the political, cultural, and artistic landscape of ancient eastern Eurasia (Ma 1962; Holcombe 2013). The Xianbei people led a hunting-gathering and pastoral way of life before they became more sedentary in North China during the fourth century (Kang 1995, pp. 6–10). They heavily depended on animals to obtain subsistence for their livelihood, to organize their social structure, and to construct the symbolism of their belief systems. The consistent interaction between humans and non-human animals inspired a variety of zoomorphic designs in Xianbei visual culture that include both real beasts and mythical creatures. This paper investigates Xianbei animal art, particularly zoomorphic motifs on gold and bronze plaques, to better understand the human–animal–environment engagement in the eastern Eurasian steppe from the first to the fifth century CE.

The visual representation of animals offers a non-anthropocentric lens to study the relationship between humans and animals. For a long time, animals have been regarded as passive beings, subjective to the dominance of humans. However, within the framework of Human-Animal Studies, which emphasizes a balanced dynamism between the two, animals are autonomous entities with an active agency, more than passive economic resources to be exploited (Marvin and McHugh 2014). Along with the "animal turn" in recent scholarship, scholars challenge anthropocentricity by not only acknowledging the agency of animals but also proposing interspecies engagement that bypasses the nature–culture divide

(Overton and Hamilakis 2014). While animal remains, such as bones, afford archaeologists evidence to explore the interface between humans and animals (Armstrong Oma and Birke 2013), image-bearing objects, including zoomorphic metal plaques, provide art historians with a valuable set of materials to investigate the functional and symbolic significance of animals to human beings.

Over the past decades, an increasing number of metal plaques labeled as Xianbei were published in both archaeological reports and exhibition catalogues. These plaques include belt buckles, ornamental pendants, clothes attachments, etc. The complexity of Xianbei metalworks is related to the mixed nature of the Xianbei population and the cultural-political diversity within the Xianbei society. After a brief unified period under its leader Tanshihuai 檀石槐 in the second century CE, the Xianbei confederation broke into various groups, including Tuoba 拓跋, Murong 慕容, Tuyuhun 吐谷渾, etc., who created multi-ethnic polities along the frontiers across North China (Holcombe 2013, pp. 8–9). This research focuses on excavated artifacts from Xianbei archaeological sites, especially those associated with the Tuoba clan. According to the preface to *Wei shu*, the Tuoba clan of the Xianbei people originated from the mountainous region near the modern-day border between China, Mongolia, and Russia. They eventually settled in North China, where they established the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534 CE) after migrating via the southern Mongolian Plateau (Wei 1974, p. 1; Holmgren 1982). While the majority of excavated zoomorphic plaques were discovered from burials, they were not exclusively produced for the funerary purpose. Crafted from precious metals, including gold and gilt bronze, the zoomorphic plaques were likely used by their owners during their lifetime and later buried in tombs. By mapping out the distribution of the precious metal objects, it is possible to trace the movement of the Xianbei people. This study also pays attention to the use-context of the metal plaques, which sheds light on the interaction among the objects, the animals they portray, and the users of the plaques. Adorning the human body or man-made structures, the metal plaques with animal motifs act as the nexus of the human and natural worlds.

This article adopts an ecological perspective to examine visual representations of animals on metal plaques associated with the Xianbei people, especially the Tuoba clan. To unpack the various roles that animals played in the Xianbei society and the human-environment entanglement, I highlight three major motifs on the Xianbei zoomorphic metal plaques: the deer, the horse, and the human–animal juxtaposition. Each motif experienced a change in design over time and was distributed across the Mongolian-Manchurian steppe and North China. An investigation of the evolving designs of animal motifs and the geographical distribution of the zoomorphic plaques will contribute to our knowledge of the possible migration routes of the Xianbei people. As mentioned earlier, there are various groups within the Xianbei community who went through divergent trajectories of migration and interacted with their neighbors of Eastern Han and Xiongnu differently (Fan 1965, p. 2986). Therefore, the path of movement proposed in this paper is one of the many possible routes taken by the Xianbei people. The aim of this paper is not to create a linear narrative of the migration history of Xianbei; rather, I aim to offer an ecological perspective of Xianbei material remains, which enables a discussion on a potential migration pattern. Moving across a vast land encompassing diverse ecological zones, the Xianbei people were engaged with local flora and fauna in different ways, which is reflected in the design and usage of metal plaques featuring animal motifs.

2. Deer Plaques: From Mountains to Steppes

The deer motif was one of the most iconic designs of Xianbei metalworks (Table 1). Zoomorphic plaques featuring deer motifs are widely distributed across current-day Inner Mongolia from the first to the third century (Scheme 1). Among a dozen deer plaques discovered from Xianbei archaeological sites, I distinguish two major groups: the first group depicts three deer standing in a row, and the second group is decorated with two deer facing each other. In what follows, I will first offer a detailed visual analysis of each group

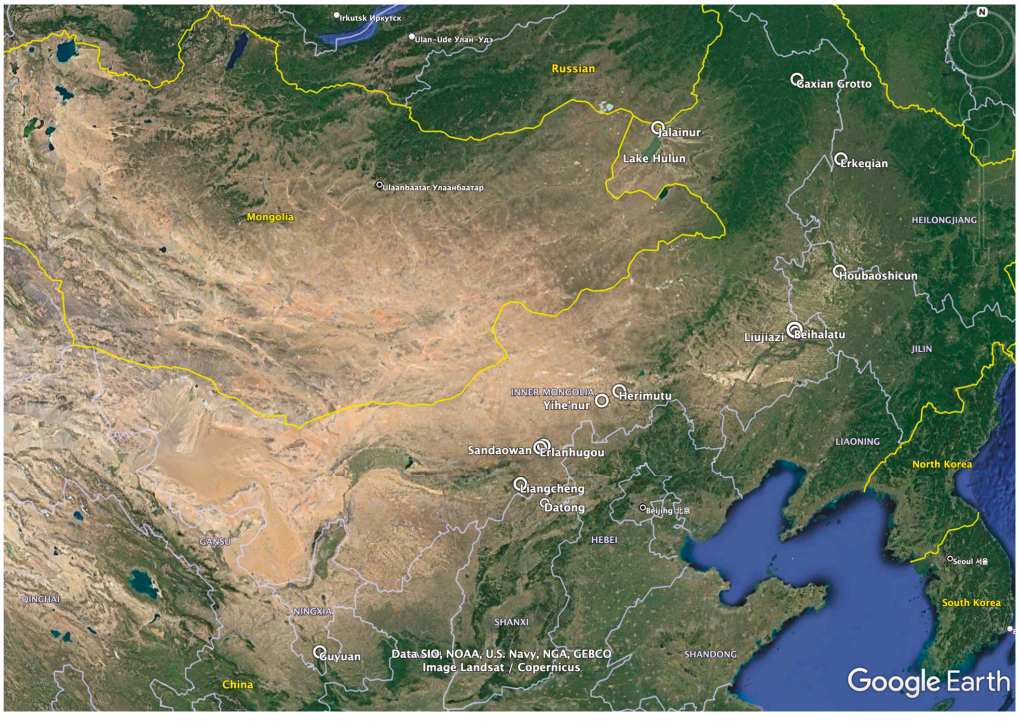
and then contextualize these two designs against changing environments where the Xianbei tribesmen lived.

Table 1. Excavated Xianbei Zoomorphic Metal Plaques.

	Site	Material	Number	Condition	Size (Length × width; cm)	Date	Reference
Deer Plague							
Type 1-three deer	Jalainur	bronze	4	Broken		1st and 2nd century	Zheng (1961)
	Jalainur	gold	1	Only half remains			Wang (1987)
	Jalainur	Gild bronze	1		6.6 × 4.1		Neimenggu Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo (1994)
	Erkeqian	Bronze with gold	1		7 × 4.5	2nd–3rd century	Heilongjiangsheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo (2003)
	Herimutu	Gild bronze	1		8 × 5.2	2nd Century	Wei (2004)
	Sandaowan	gold	1	Half fragment	4.5 (remain) × 5	Late 2nd Century	Wei (2004)
	Erlanhugou	bronze	1		7.3 × 4.7		Zheng and Li (1964)
	Jingtancun	gold	1		6.8 × 4.5		Zhang (1995)
Type 2-twin deer	Erlanghugou	bronze	1		7.5 × 5.7		Zheng and Li (1964)
	Sandaowan	gold	1		7.1 × 5.3	Late 2nd Century	Wei (2004)
Horse Palque							
Type 1-galloping horse	Jalainur	bronze	2		10 × 6.5	1st–2nd Centuries	Zheng (1961)
		bronze	1		8.5 × 5		Zheng (1961)
Type 2 crouching horse	Liujiazi	gold	1		8	Late 2nd–3rd Century	Zhang (1989)
		gold	1	Lower half damaged	8.5		
	Sandaowan	gold	1		6.5 × 5		
		Gilt bronze	1	Partially damaged	6.5 × 3.5	Late 2nd Century	Wei (2004)
	Houbaoshi	bronze	3		5.7 × 4.4; 5.6 × 3.7; 5.7		Wei (2004)
						Han Dynasty	Guo (1997)
Human-animal juxtaposition							
Type 1-pendant	Beihalatu	gold	1		10 × 5.8		
Type 2-pushou	Yihe'nur M1	Gilt bronze	14		16.5 × 16	3rd–4th Century	Shanghai Bowuguan (2000)
	Guyuan	bronze	2		11.2 × 10.5	5th Century	Chen et al. (2016)
	Datong	Gilt bronze	10		13.1 × 13.3	486 CE	Ningxia Guyuan Bowuguan (1988); Juliano et al. (2001)
						5th Century	Datongshi Bowuguan (1983)

The first group of deer plaques features three identical deer standing in a row amid a patterned background of abstract foliage (Figure 1). Up to the present, there are at least eight examples of the three-deer plaques retrieved from both archaeological excavations and through chance finds across the Mongolia-Manchurian grassland. The animal and foliage are framed within a rectangular square measuring 6.8 by 4.5 cm, a relatively standardized size for belt plaques. Each of the deer turns its head back toward the capsule-shaped body supported by four cylindrical legs. The foliage background is highly abstract, representing leaves through circular openwork. As pointed out by previous scholarship, the design of both the deer and the leaves are geometricized and stylized, characteristic of Xian-

bei metalwork (Watt et al. 2004, p. 126). It is also worth noting that the animal body and the natural vegetation are organically intertwined—the slightly curved necks and backward-turning heads of the deer are connected to the leaves; the legs of the animal, occupying the lower half of the composition, can also be interpreted as tree trunks from which the foliage grows.



Scheme 1. Distribution of the sites mentioned in the article.

The earliest examples of three-deer plaques were found in Xianbei burials at the Jalainur 扎賚諾爾 cemetery in Inner Mongolia, and were dated to the first and second centuries CE (Zheng 1961; Wang 1987; Neimenggu Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1994). Located near the present-day border of China, Russia, and Mongolia, the Jalainur cemetery is one of the many Xianbei burial remains scattered around Lake Hulun 呼倫湖.[2] Lake Hulun, a freshwater lake covering approximately 900 square miles (2331 km^2) and only 13 miles (21 km) south of the cemetery, is regarded by many scholars as the *da ze* 大澤, or the "Grand Marsh", to which the Xianbei tribes migrated around the turn of the common era.[3] The giant lake opens to the Greater Khingan Range in the east and pastoral grasslands in the west. The meandering hills of the Great Khingan Range are identified by scholars as the Great Xianbei Mountain 大鮮卑山, the homeland of the Tuoba Xianbei recorded in *Wei shu*, the official dynastic history of the Northern Wei.[4]

Having access to mountains and grasslands, the Xianbei people who settled around Lake Hulun practiced both hunting-gathering and pastoral nomadism. Textual records concerning the early history of the Tuoba Xianbei state that their ancestors conducted animal husbandry, migrated, and engaged in hunting 畜牧遷徙, 射獵為業 (Wei 1974, p.1). Archaeological evidence further attests to hunting activities among the Xianbei tribesmen in this region. A plaque made of animal bones was excavated from the Jalainur cemetery in 1960 (Gai 1964). Within a narrow space of 15 cm long and 2.5 cm wide, it depicts a

hunter shooting a deer with a bow and arrows (Figure 2). The Greater Khingan Range has long been the main habitat for various species of deer, including elk, reindeer, sika deer, and so forth. Prehistoric rock paintings hidden in the wild forests along Jiaolaokedao River 交嘮呵道河 in the Hulunbuir region depict four different species of deer (Zhao 1987), showing humans' insightful understanding of the animals. The three-deer motif on Xianbei metal plaques, featuring the organic integration of deer and lush vegetal background, likely reflects the natural environment of the Greater Khingan Range.

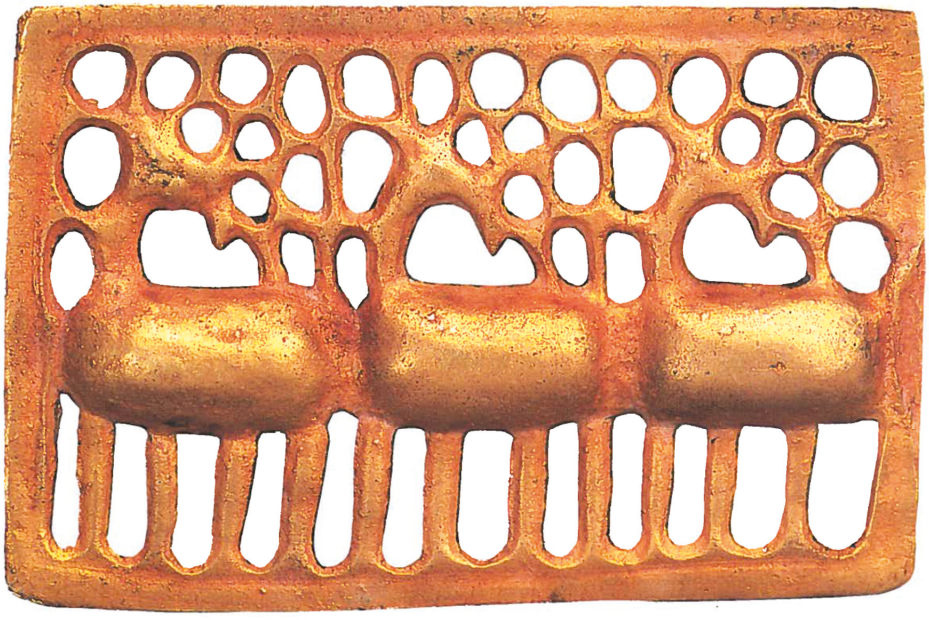


Figure 1. Three-deer plaque, gold, 6.8 × 4.5 cm, excavated from Jingtancun, Qahar Right Rear Banner, Inner Mongolia; after (Zhang 1995, p. 79).

However, deer were not merely humans' hunting targets. As Esther Jacobson articulated in her study of Scytho-Siberian deer images, deer played a symbolic role as the Mother Goddess affording a source of life and death in ancient Siberian cultures during the first millennium BCE (Jacobson 1993). Rane Willerslev's study of Yukaghris, indigenous hunters in northeastern Siberia, demonstrates that animals could be perceived as animated beings in the hunter community (Willerslev 2004, pp. 633–34). Ethnographical studies of the Evenks, who dwelled in northeastern Siberia and the Greater Khingan Range of northeast China today, suggest a co-dependent relationship between humans and reindeer. The animal not only acted an instrumental role in Evenks' seasonal migration but also assumed the magic power of facilitating a soul-journey (Vitebsky 2005). It is not farfetched to propose that deer might have assumed a similar part in the Xianbei society. According to *Wei shu*, the Xianbei people intended to move further south after residing around the Grand Marsh for generations (Wei 1974, p. 1). However, their journey was hindered by dangerous mountains and valleys. It was under the guidance of a magic animal that the Xianbei people were able to navigate the labyrinthic landscape and eventually settled in the former Xiongnu territory. The magical animal was recorded to have the form of a horse and the voice of a bull 有神獸, 其形似馬, 其聲類牛. Scholars have proposed different interpretations regarding which animal the spirit beast was. Some claim it could be a kind of cervid (Sun 2007, p. 73; Chen 2012, pp. 50–54). The deer continued to maintain a symbolic significance even after the Tuoba Xianbei settled in North China. They were regarded as an

auspicious omen and their miraculous appearances were documented in the *Treaties on Spirited Manifestation* 靈徵志 of *Wei shu* (Wei 1974, p. 2930). Even the reign title of Emperor Taiwu 太武 (408–452) was changed to *shenjia* 神麚 (spirited stag) after white stags were spotted at Dingzhou 定州and Laoling 樂陵 on the Yellow River plains in 428 CE.

Figure 2. Bone plaque with hunting scene, 15 × 2.5 cm, excavated from Jalainur Cemetery, Inner Mongolia. From first to third century CE. After (Shanghai Bowuguan 2000, p. 137).

The three-deer plaques, first found at Jalainur cemetery, continued to be part of the Xianbei burial assemblage of a later date around the late second and third centuries as the people migrated southwards. Xianbei sites located in modern-day Qahar Right Rear Banner 察哈爾右翼後旗, occupying southern Inner Mongolia, uncovered at least three examples with the three-deer motif, respectively, from Sandaowan 三道灣, Erlanhugou 二蘭虎溝, and Jingtancun 井灘村 (Wei 2004, pp. 16–54; Zheng and Li 1964; Zhang 1995, p. 79). The three-deer plaques from Qahar Right Rear Banner exhibit similar composition and stylistic features to those discovered in Jalainur, showing the continuity of Xianbei visual culture.

In addition to the three-deer plaque, archaeological sites in the Qahar Right Rear Banner of the southern Mongolian steppe revealed a new design of deer plaques that arrange two deer symmetrically within the rectangular frame. Two examples were discovered and published, one from Sandaowan, and the other from Erlanhugou (Wei 2004, pp. 16–54; Zheng and Li 1964)[5]. Unlike the three-deer plaque depicting deer striding in the same direction, the more recently-developed plaque design features two deer standing facing each other toward the center (Figure 3). The pair of deer are on two sides of a tree whose trunk serves as the central axis of the symmetrical design. Tree branches and leaves also grow symmetrically over the two facing deer. While the new design inherited the geometricized treatment of the animal and the plants, it gives more attention to the anatomy of the deer, creating a more naturalistic representation of the animal. The body of the deer is no longer a capsule-like tube but differentiates the forequarter and hindquarter. The legs are not represented as cylindrical trunks, as those in the three-deer plaque are. Instead, artisans made efforts to reveal joints. The varied positions of the four legs also create a sense of motion, in contrast to the static pose of the three deer standing rigidly upright.

The development of the symmetrical composition in the twin-deer plaque is likely inspired by the artistic tradition of the Xiongnu Empire, a formidable nomadic regime dominating the Mongolian Steppe from the third century BCE to the first century CE. Located north of the Yinshan 陰山 Mountain, the burial sites of Sandaowan and Erlanhugou open toward a vast stretch of pastoral land. This region used to be "the old lands of the Xiongnu" 匈奴之故地 (Wei 1974, p. 2). After the power of the Xiongnu declined toward the end of the first century, Xianbei groups seized a large portion of the former Xiongnu territory. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of Xiongnu horsemen who remained in the area all proclaimed themselves as Xianbei (Fan 1965, p. 2986).[6] Inheriting the land of Xiongnu and integrating people who used to live under the regime of Xiongnu enabled the immigrant Xianbei people to absorb their predecessor's visual culture.[7] The symmetrical design is

prominent in Xiongnu animal art, as shown in mirror-image motifs on its metal belt buckles (Bunker 1997, p. 256). The bilateral symmetry along the vertical axis, as Andreeva pointed out, owed largely to the Chinese visual vocabulary and was found across the Ordos region as well as North China (Andreeva 2022, pp. 20–27). Take the decorative gold foil from Xigoupan 西溝畔 cemetery in south Inner Mongolia for example; it portrays two confronting horses facing each other (Yikezhaomeng Wenwu Gongzuodui and Neimenggu Wenwu Gongzuodui 1980). A bronze plaque depicting two wrestlers and their horses under trees in a symmetrical manner along the central axis offers a visual parallel to the Xianbei twin-deer design against the vegetal background (Zhongguo Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1962, pp. 138–39) (Figure 4). It is possible that when the Xianbei people took control of the land of Xiongnu, the remaining Xiongnu zoomorphic design sparked the creation of the new symmetrical arrangement of deer underneath the tree.

Figure 3. Twin-deer plaque, gold, 7.1 × 5.3, excavated from Sandaowan Cemetery, Qahar Right Rear Banner, Inner Mongolia; after (Wei 2004), plate 4.3.

The evolving patterns of the metal plaques from the three-deer motif to the twin-deer design correspond to the migration of the Xianbei people from the Greater Khingan Mountain to the Mongolian Steppes. As their living environment changed, the Xianbei people engaged with nature and animals differently. Around Lake Hulun, the Xianbei people were actively involved in hunting and animal husbandry. The deer depicted against the foresty background captures the key elements of the ecological system along the Greater Khingan Range. When the Xianbei tribesmen moved to the former territory of the Xiongnu in the southern part of the Mongolian Steppe, their design of deer plaques gained a new taste inspired by the Xiongnu visual culture. The following section, focusing on the horse motif, will further shed light on the evolving human–animal relationship as the Xianbei people migrated from the mountains to the steppes.

Figure 4. Plaque with wrestling scene, bronze, 13.8 × 7.1 cm, excavated from Kexingzhuang Tomb No.140, Shaanxi Province; after (So and Bunker 1995, p. 22).

3. Horse Plaque: From Divine to Domestic

The second group of animal plaques associated with the Xianbei people is dedicated to the depiction of the horse, a socially-significant animal for the nomadic community (Müller 2009). The images of horses not only appear on metal plaques, but also on ceramic vessels (Zhang 1989, p. 431). The skulls of horses placed next to the heads of the deceased in Xianbei tombs prove that the animal was used as a sacrifice in burial rituals (Wei 2004, pp. 212–35). In comparison to deer motifs, horses depicted on the Xianbei metal plaques show a greater variety of designs, which I categorize into two major groups— the galloping horse and the crouching horse. I argue that these two distinctive visual representations of horses embody different relationships between humans and animals as the Xianbei people migrated to the steppes and adopted a new way of living.

Up to the present, the majority of galloping horse plaques have been discovered in the Lake Hulun region (Zheng 1961). These plaques feature a horseshoe shape; perforations on the two ends indicate that they were likely attached to other organic materials to be used as belt buckles (Figure 5). The motif of galloping horses is cast in relief by bronze with traces of a gilding layer. The horse extends the forelegs, moving toward the rounded side of the plaque; the hind legs are bent to fit the narrower end. Its flank is muscular. Thick manes grow along the neck. Among the three pieces retrieved from the Jalainur cemetery, two depict galloping horses with wings. The pair of wings growing from the shoulder are represented with great detail, showing arrays of feathers. The galloping horse is portrayed as a divine being rather than a terrestrial animal, conveying its power independent of human intervention.

The rationale behind the design of the heavenly appearance of horses can be found in a *Wei shu* entry regarding a mythical beast. As mentioned earlier, scholars have proposed different interpretations of the mythical animal that played an instrumental role in the migration history of Tuoba Xianbei. Some claim it could be deer; some scholars refute this hypothesis by citing textual sources linking spirited beast to ox (Yang 2007, p. 212); and some believe that the sacred animal could be a horse. I suggest that the exact identification might not be essential, since the spirited beast might not even be found on earth. It is the supernatural power of the animal that matters. What is emphasized in the text is the critical role played by the mythological animal and its capability of leading the Xianbei people to travel through the precipitous mountains and deep valleys.[8] The perception of an animal as an active agent with supernatural power explains the celestial representation of galloping horses with wings, a visual image imbued with miraculousness.

Figure 5. A pair of plaques of galloping horses with wings, bronze, 10 × 6.5 cm, excavated from Jalainur Cemetery, Inner Mongolia. From first to third century CE; after (Zhalainuoer 2018).

In comparison to the powerful depiction of the galloping horse, the crouching horse appears to be ordinary, earthly, and tamable. Metalworks decorated with crouching horse motifs are not cast in relief on the horseshoe-shaped plaque. Instead, they show the contour of the animal in openwork. The horse plaque from a late second and early third century site in Liujiazi 六家子, Horqin Left Middle Banner 科爾沁左翼中旗, Inner Mongolia, depicts a horse crouching on the ground with its legs bent (Zhang 1989) (Figure 6). The head of the horse is facing down; his mouth is elongated, touching the ground. The mane along the neck is given excessive attention with hair being meticulously articulated. The horse plaque is attached to a chain made with interlocking rings, indicating it was hung on human bodies rather than attached to other materials. The second horse plaque from the same site arranges two horses symmetrically with their heads facing outward (Zhang 1989) (Figure 7). The depiction of the horses shares stylistic features with the single-horse pendant. Two holes were found right behind the ears, indicating that the plaque could be hung in a similar manner to the crouching horse pendant.

The crouching horse pendant might have served as a prototype for an abstract design known as the "beast-shaped" motif (Figure 8). The beast-shaped plaques, also discovered in Liujiazi cemetery, are highly stylized, depicting an animal with a twisted torso (Zhang 1989; Watt et al. 2004, p. 127). Despite its abstract rendition, the beast-shaped plaque reveals a similar configuration to the horse plaque: a profile of the animal with bending legs, a prominent eye with pupil, and a carefully depicted mane. The beast, however, features powerful claws rather than hoofs. Enclosures formed by raised lines on the surface accentuate parts of the body. This design can multiply to generate a more complex composition. The gold animal plaque excavated from Liangcheng 凉城, Inner Mongolia was made of four units of the beast-shape motif, aligned symmetrically along a vertical axis and facing outwards (Zhang 2002; Watt et al. 2004, pp. 127–28) (Figure 9). The back of the plaque is inscribed with three characters, *Yituo jin*, 猗包金, or Gold of Yituo, indicating that it was associated with one of three leaders in charge of the tripartite Xianbei confederation in the late third and early fourth century.

Figure 6. Plaque of a crouching horse, gold, excavated from Liujiazi, Horqin Left Middle Banner Banner, Inner Mongolia. Late second–third century; after (Watt et al. 2004, p. 127).

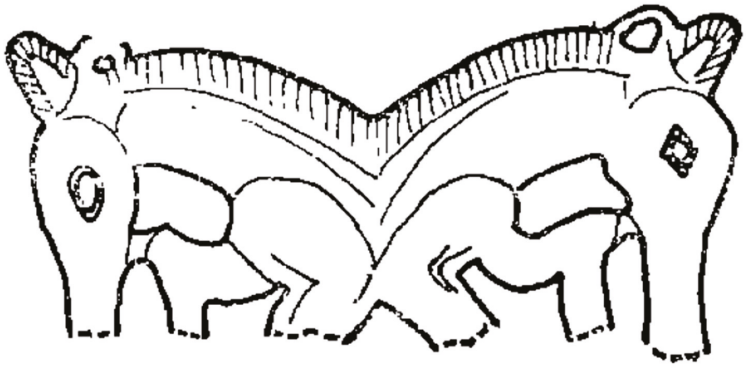


Figure 7. Plaque of double-horse, gold, excavated from Liujiazi, Horqin Left Middle Banner Banner, Inner Mongolia; after (Zhang 1989, p. 435).

The image of a crouching horse is also found on a group of plaques that feature a small creature on the back of a larger horse (Figure 10). Five specimens of this type have been unearthed from the Sandaowan cemetery in Inner Mongolia and the Houbaoshi 后寶石 cemetery in Jilin Province. Previous studies identify the small-sized creature on the top as a baby horse (Bunker 1997, p. 283). However, due to the abbreviated form, we could not rule out the possibility that the smaller figure could be a horse rider. In either scenario, the larger horse is portrayed in a static pose with forelegs and hind legs bending on the floor, thus in sharp contrast to the galloping horse in motion. The size of these plaques is relatively small compared to all examples above (see Table 1). Tiny holes penetrating the surface suggest that the plaques were originally attached to textiles or other fabrics.

Figure 8. Beast-shaped plaque, gold, 9.5 cm, excavated from Liujiazi, Horqin Left Middle Banner Banner, Inner Mongolia; after (Watt et al. 2004, p. 127).

Figure 9. Plaque with four animals and inscription "Yituo Gold", gold, excavated from Liangcheng, Inner Mongolia; after (Watt et al. 2004, p. 127).

Figure 10. Plaque of a crouching horse topped by a smaller creature, gold, 7.1 × 5.3, excavated from Sandaowan Cemetery, Inner Mongolia; after (Wei 2004), plate 4.1.

An investigation into the spatial distribution of the horse plaques demonstrates the two types of horse plaques were from two regions with distinctive ecological environments. While metal plaques featuring winged horses were found around Lake Hulun, the crouching horse motifs spread across the southern part of the Mongolian-Manchurian steppe. According to the typological study of Xianbei archaeological remains by Ni Run'an, the wide distribution of the crouching horse plaques constitutes part of the burial assemblage that corresponds to the cultural sphere of the Xianbei confederation founded by Tanshihuai in the second half of the second century CE (Ni 2010, p. 109). Tanshihuai allegedly ruled a vast land measuring 4000 *li* east–west bound and 7000 *li* north–south bound. He defeated Dingling 丁零 in the north, suppressed Fuyu 扶餘 in the east, attacked Wusun 烏孫 in the west, and completely occupied the land of Xiongnu (Fan 1965, p. 2989).

In his seminal paper "From Trust to Domination," Tim Ingold proposes a changing pattern of engagement between humans and animals with the shift from hunter-gatherer cultures to agro-pastoral societies (Ingold 2000). Since hunter-gatherer groups inhabit the same environment as animals do, they build up trust and reciprocity with non-human animals. Whereas, in an agro-pastoral society, animals became subject to the dominance of humans, losing their autonomy. Ingold's hypothesis can perhaps be used to explain the changing designs of the horse plaques. Around Lake Hulun, the Xianbei tribesmen were engaged in hunting and gathering; the horses were depicted as winged creatures rather than a domesticated stock. The legend of the horse-shaped magic beast helping Xianbei with their journey testifies to the supernatural power of animals and the trust humans put in animals. As the Xianbei people relocated to the Mongolian Steppes, horses were more involved in the human society, frequently used as transportation vehicles and employed as symbols of social status (Müller 2009). They were no longer divine beings but were represented instead as tamable animals with legs bending down. Horse harnesses, saddles, and stirrups associated with the Yan states founded by the Murong 慕容 clan of Xianbei are emblematic of the domestication of horses (Liaoningsheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2002, pp. 3–26). The horses were transformed from divine to domestic.

4. Human-Animal Juxtaposition: From Mobile to Sedentary

The last group of Xianbei zoomorphic plaques features a figure in the center flanked by two beasts on two sides. One of the earliest examples that showcase the dynamic interaction between humans and animals is the gold plaque excavated from Beihalatu 北哈拉圖, Horqin Left Middle Banner 科爾沁左翼中旗, Inner Mongolia (Shanghai Bowuguan 2000,

p. 143; Watt et al. 2004, p. 129). Dated to the third or fourth century, this gold plaque is cast in relief (Figure 11). A human figure stands in the center with two animals approaching symmetrically from the sides.[9] The central human figure is portrayed in an abbreviated manner. Minimal facial features of eyes, nose, and mouth are simply articulated through lines and reliefs.[10] The upper body is abstracted into a raised vertical line and is mingled with the heads of the animals. The legs, perhaps wearing bell-shaped trousers, are widely open, stepping on the claws of the flanking animals. This figure carries a peculiar headdress—a twisted topknot and an upside-down triangle on the forehead.[11] The two flanking animals are clearly depicted as quadruped beasts. The faces of the animals are presented in a frontal view, showing prominent eyes and noses. Long manes arranged into three lines grow from the foreheads. Their bodies are in profile with muscular forelimbs and hindlimbs bent to frame the central figure. The animals also grow powerful claws and a tail, which turns into an S-shape.

Figure 11. Human–animal juxtaposition plaque, gold, 10 × 5.8 cm, excavated from Beihalatu, Horqin Left Middle Banner, Inner Mongolia. From third to fourth century; after (Shanghai Bowuguan 2000, p. 143).

More human–animal juxtaposition plaques were discovered in fifth-century Northern Wei tombs located in North China and the buffer zone between the nomadic steppes and the agricultural farmlands. The Northern Wei human–animal juxtaposition plaques are usually incorporated into a monster mask holding a ring, known as *pushou* 鋪首 in Chinese (Figure 12). Take the discovery from the tomb No.1 at Yihe'nur 伊和淖爾 cemetery in Inner Mongolia for example (Chen et al. 2016; Zhongguo Renming Daxue Lishi Xueyuan Kaogu Wenboxi et al. 2017); the motif of human–animal juxtaposition is set between two horns of a *pushou* monster mask. I will elaborate on the function of the *pushou* monster mask later; for now, I focus on the motif situated on top of the monster's head. The central figure is depicted in a full-frontal view. His arms stretch out, touching the widely-opened mouths of the two animals on the sides. He has a bare chest with a narrow waist. Wearing a *dhoti*, his legs are in a squat position standing on the intertwined tails of the animals. Flying ribbons around his body further interconnect the human with the animals. Compared to

the animals on the Beihalatu plaque, the Yihe'nur animal features a more attenuated body. The animals no longer grow heavy manes; instead, they have two horns. Their tails are twisted together underneath the squatting human. The animals turn their bodies outward with the heads looking back at the central figure.

Figure 12. *Pushou* with human–animal juxtaposition, gilt bronze, excavated from Yihe'nur M1, Inner Mongolia, fifth century; after (Chen et al. 2016), Figure 13.

The morphology of the animals flanking the central figure continued to evolve and eventually became the form of a dragon, as shown by the discovery from Norther Wei tomb of Feng Shigong 馮始公 in Guyuan 固原, Ningxia dated to 486 CE (Ningxia Guyuan Bowuguan 1988; Luo 2019). The Guyuan plaque is more complex, both the monster mask and the ring it holds are decorated with the human–animal juxtaposition motif (Figure 13). The bodies of the animals become slenderer and curvier, merging with the tail. The vestigial limbs are less angular and powerful. In other words, the animal is transformed from a quadruped into a dragon. The central figure of the Guyuan has a topknot, which some scholars interpret as an *ushnisha*, and therefore identify him as the infant Buddha (Juliano et al. 2001, pp. 83). However, this hypothesis does not explain his co-existence with dragons. Based on the interpretation of the animals as dragons, some scholars identify the human in the center as Huan Long Shi 豢龍氏, a legendary enthusiast and breeder of dragons, as recorded in *Chunqiu* 春秋, the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (Wu 1986, pp. 269–70; Juliano et al. 2001, pp. 83–84). However, we should be cautious about using textual sources compiled during the Eastern Zhou (475–221 BCE) to interpret a fifth-century image. More importantly, as discussed above, the human–animal juxtaposition motif underwent a change from quadrupeds to dragons. The dragon-tamer theory could not explain the earlier phase of the design.[12]

It is also to be noted that, when the form of the dragon was incorporated into the animal–human juxtaposition motif by the fifth century, the quadrupeds continued to exist in various forms. The bronze plaque in the collection of Kyoto University shows the multiplication of the quadrupeds (Figure 14). Four rather than two animals were entangled with the human—two animals facing outward, flanking the central figure, and the other two at the feet of the figure, facing toward each other. In other cases, the shape of the animals becomes dissolved (Figure 15). Their attenuated bodies and vestigial limbs were abstracted

into curvy lines that altogether generate a web-like background that even absorbs the form of the central human figure.

Figure 13. *Pushou* with human–animal juxtaposition, gilt bronze, excavated from Tomb of Feng Shigong, Guyuan, Ningxia Autonomous Region. 486 CE; after (Juliano et al. 2001, cat. 17).

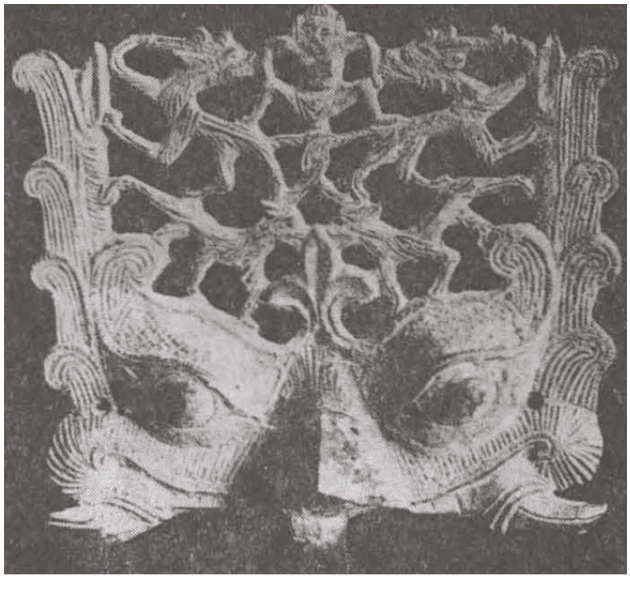


Figure 14. *Pushou* with human–animal juxtaposition, gilt bronze, Collection of Kyoto University; after (Hayashi 1985, Figure 38).

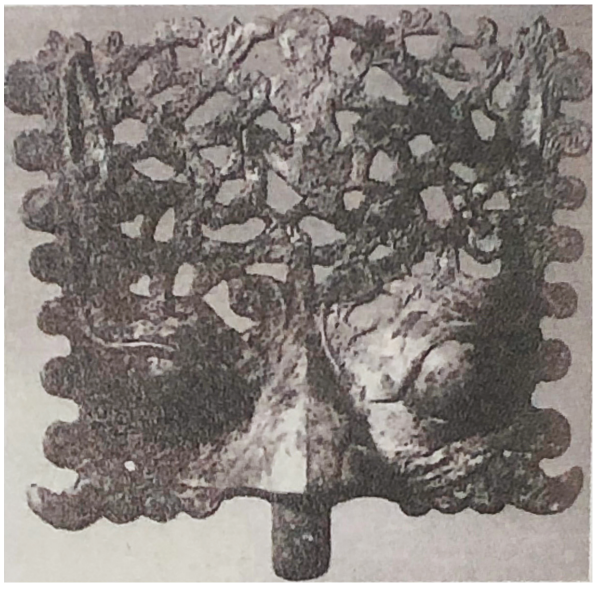


Figure 15. *Pushou* with dissolved human-animal juxtaposition motif, gilt bronze, excavated from Datong, Shanxi Province; after (Datongshi Bowuguan 1983, plate 4.3).

After delineating the changing form of human–animal juxtaposition plaques, I now turn to their use-contexts and functions. The Beihalatu plaque features a row of circles on its top, allowing chains to be inserted. Therefore, we can infer that this object used to be hung on the human body as a decoration. As a body adornment, the plaque is highly portable, moving along with the people who would have worn it. The Northern Wei plaques, however, were not meant to be worn or hung on the human body. Instead, they were incorporated into the traditional Chinese objects of the *pushou* monster mask, decorating both aboveground architectures and underground funerary structures. *Pushou* monster masks, serving as both functional devices and decorative attachments, can be traced back to the Warring States Period (Miao 2006). While our current examples are all from tombs, *pushou* were also used on above-ground architecture. In *Luoyang Qielan ji*, Yang Xuanzhi recalled that the door of the Yongning-si temple 永寧寺 had *pushou* doorknockers with golden rings (Yang 1984, p. 16). In the burial context, monster masks with rings were fastened to coffins and could serve a double function: pragmatically, rings could be used for lifting and carrying coffins; symbolically, the intimidating monstrous faces were apotropaic, shedding away evil spirits. Once the metal *pushou* plaques were fastened to either aboveground architectures or underground funerary equipment, they would become part of the permanent structure, stable and fixed.

The changing function of the human–animal juxtaposition plaques from adornments of a moving human body to attachments to permanent structures is again afforded by the change in living environments and lifestyle of the Xianbei people. On the steppes, the Xianbei tribesmen were highly mobile. Their wealth and social status were manifested through personal adornments made of precious metal. Attached to the body, the metal plaques were as mobile as their owners. When the Xianbei people migrated further southward, they had closer contact with the sedentary population. The settled way of life inspired the Xianbei people to be actively engaged in the construction of permanent forms of settlement: cities with walls, timber-framed architectures, and tombs with burial mounds. These sedentary buildings provided a new context for the human–animal juxtaposition

motif. It no longer swung with the movable human body and was instead fastened to a motionless structure.

5. Conclusions

Through an investigation of three types of metal plaques decorated with different animal motifs, this research investigates the human–animal relationship and possible routes of the Xianbei people's long-distance migration across Northeast Asia. The changing designs of both deer and horse motifs are related to the relocation of Tuoba Xianbei from the hilly area around Lake Hulun to the southern Mongolian Steppes. The evolving pattern of the deer plaques from the three deer in a row to a symmetrical arrangement of two deer was inspired by the Xiongnu animal art tradition, and therefore, signifies the migration of the Tuoba Xianbei from the Great Khing'an Mountain to territories that used to be controlled by the Xiongnu people on the steppe. The depiction of horses changing from a winged galloping beast to a crouching position signified the shifting perception of the animal from divine beings to tamable creatures as the Xianbei people moved to the southern Mongolia Steppe and engaged more in pastoral nomadism. An examination of the human–animal juxtaposition plaques reveals an evolving morphology of the animals from quadrupeds to dragons, thus challenging the previous scholarship that associate this motif with the "dragon tamer". Originally decorating the human body, the plaques were later fixed onto more permanent structures, in line with the sedentary process of the Xianbei people as they moved from the Mongolian plateau to North China. In different landscapes, the Xianbei people engaged with the environment and its fauna and flora accordingly. They were able to adjust their way of living depending on the ecological zones that they inhabited, recalibrate their relationship with animals, and modify the design of zoomorphic motifs. The zoomorphic plaques, therefore, served as material documentation of the natural environment and as an embodiment of the human–animal relationship.

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Notes

1 The term "Xianbei" is a Chinese pronunciation, rather than the original name used by the Xianbei people themselves, see (Holcombe 2013, p. 3). Some scholars propose the original name in the Xianbei language can be transcribed as *Särbi, see (Pulleyblank 1983, pp. 452–54).

2 For an overview of the archaeological remains around Lake Hulun and their relationship with the Xianbei people, see (Ni 2010).

3 According to *Wei shu*, during the reign of Emperor Xuan, the Tuoba Xianbei people migrated southward to the Grand Marsh that occupied a space of thousands of miles (南遷大澤, 方千餘里), see (Wei 1974, p. 2). The precise time of the migration cannot be pinpointed down accurately, for the hypothesis of the turn of the common era, see (Lin 1989).

4 Wei (1974, p. 1). *Wei shu* recorded that Emperor Taiwu sent out officials to its ancestor cave and carved inscriptions, see (Wei 1974, p. 2738); (Wei 1974, p. 2224). In 1980, archaeologists discovered Tuoba Xianbei's ancestor cave named Gaxian Grotto, where dedicative texts were inscribed on the wall, see (Mi 1981). While this discovery led to the hypothesis of the northern sector of the Greater Khingan Range as the birthplace of Tuoba Xianbei, scholars question this interpretation by arguing that the inscriptions were carved during the 5th century and therefore only testifies to the 5th-century view of this cave as the ancestor cave; whether it was the original inhabit of the Xianbei ancestors is debatable, see Luo (2013).

5 At the Sandaowan cemetery, where 50 tombs were excavated, the three-deer plaque and the twin-deer plaque were excavated from different burials, M2 and M20 respectively. The archaeological records of the Erlanhugou cemetery were less well documented. We do not know the exact tombs that reveal deer plaques at Erlanghugou. Based on the overall burial assemblage at the site, archaeologists proposed that the Sandaowan cemetery is dated slightly later than the Jalainur relatively but earlier than Erlanhugou, roughly corresponding to the time period of Tanshihuai in the late second century CE, see (Wei 2004, pp. 43–46).

6 The mingling of Xiongnu and Xianbei created confusion among Han Chinese historians in the Southern Dynasties. *Song shu* 宋書 claimed that Tuoba was another group (別種) of Xiongnu (Shen 1974, p. 2321). *Nan qi shu* followed this narrative, stating that the Tuoba clan of Xianbei was Xiongnu descendants (Xiao 1972, p. 983).

[7] Funerary objects from Erlanhugou exhibit a strong resemblance with Xiongnu material culture, which even lead scholars to label it as a Xiongnu site when the cemetery was first excavated, see (Zheng and Li 1964).

[8] Lin Sheng-chih in his discussion of the Northern Wei mythological beast also notes another textual record concerning Longxi Xianbei that highlights the role of spirited animal during the process of migration, See (Lin 2012).

[9] Shanghai bowuguan interprets the human figure as a warrior and the animals as a lion; Watt identifies the central figure as a woman. This author disagrees with either hypothesis since there are no clear visual clues supporting these readings.

[10] Similar treatment of the human head is visible on bronze face masks discovered from Maoershan belonging to the ancient Puyo site, see (Byington 2016, p. 121).

[11] Textual records mention that people of Yuwen, another group of Xianbei, shaved their heads expect for the hair on top of the head and regarded it as headdress, see (Li 1974, p. 3267).

[12] Some scholars also linked the Guyuan motif to the golden pendant depicting a figure flanked by two dragons from Tillya Tepa, Afghanistan, see (Watt et al. 2004, p. 129). This author remains cautious of this hypothesis considering he vast chronological and spatial gap between the Bactrian and Xianbei remains. Moreover, as explained above, the design of animals went through a change from quadrupeds to dragons in eastern Eurasia, which was not found in Bactria.

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