

**Cultural Diffusion and Identity: Material Culture in
Northwest China –II and I millennia BCE**

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Abstract

Chinese North-western Zone designates the border areas of Northern China, including Xinjiang, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, Inner Mongolia, Shaanxi and Shanxi, inhabited by semi-nomadic and nomadic groups in prehistoric times. The term denotes a broad geographic horizon conceivable as a multitude of cultural phenomena sharing a common material 'language', yet inferences on ethnic affiliation have been hitherto poorly grounded and difficult to ascertain. This work attempts to clarify some of the cultural phenomena occurred in the area, through a contextualised analysis of the available archaeological material. A methodological framework placing proto-historical material culture into 'context' is first enunciated and then employed in the investigation of various aspects of material expression belonging to different 'cultural horizons', from Siba-Huoshagou, Yanbulake, Zhukaigou, Shajing and Chawuhu, to Alagou, Yanglang and Ordos.

The data thus exposed provide clues on funerary behaviour, on patterns of consumption and social constructs, on stylistic and typological variation in ceramic productions, on metals and their social role, on craft specialisations and artistic expressions. Not only bronze and pottery objects are analysed from the stylistic and - when possible - the technological point of view, but also their relationship with 'alternative' types of material evidence (such as various perishable media) and with the contingent space are considered. Attention is further devoted to artefactual productions, ranging from bronze and iron casting to gold and silver metal-smithing.

In the absence of contemporary written sources, the bulk of information comes primarily from archaeological reports. Yet manifold are the lines of evidence gathered. All these elements eventually contribute not only to discriminate similar modes of social negotiation such as gender and authority, indirectly reflecting expressions of ethnical affiliation, but also to assess both the degree of conscious cultural interaction and the extent of demic diffusion between Central Asia, Southern Siberia and China during the 2nd and 1st millennia BCE.

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Finally, I wish to dedicate this work to my family. To my husband Osquel, who so well understands what it means, and my son Daniel for they both - more than anybody else - had to endure my stormy moods.

Peace at last!!

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Chapter 1

Data, context and methodological framework

Chinese Northern Zone: previous Western and Eastern epistemologies

Chinese Northern Zone (*beifang diqu*) is a term generally used by scholars when referring to the border areas of northern China, stretching from Liaoning, Hebei, Shanxi, Shaanxi, to Ningxia, Gansu and Xinjiang to the west, which were inhabited by semi-nomadic and nomadic groups during the 2nd and the 1st millennia BCE. Indeed it denotes a rather broad geographic area, including diverse archaeological cultures, which emerged, developed and faded over a large span of time. For many years, this geographic belt-area has been either neglected or poorly investigated. Historical and political reasons impinged on the interpretation of the material remains, most of the times conceived within a strongly biased epistemological framework of both the Chinese and Western acculturative milieus. It was only recently, with the outpouring of objects in the art market and the ever-increasing interest encouraged by different international exhibitions, that scholars around the world felt the urge to provide alternative interpretative tools to better understand this archaeological phenomenon.

In the recent past, several scholars, mainly from the United States and China, have expressed their own view regarding the archaeology of the border areas of northern China, concentrating their investigation on different aspects of research and testing the validity of different methodological frameworks. In the "Archaeological Overview" presented in the volume *Ancient Bronzes of the Eurasian Steppes from the Arthur M. Sackler Collections*, co-written by two American scholars, Katheryn Linduff and Emma Bunker, and by the Chinese archaeologist Wu En, the Washington DC collection provides just the initial ground for an archaeological survey of the region.¹ In their discourse, the recovered data are used to define life-ways, attitudes towards death, symbolic and aesthetic systems, as well as to provide a means of deciphering media for modes of cultural interchange between this area and the 'outside' world, i.e. China in the east and Central Asia (comprising Southern Siberia) in the west. The authors identify distinctive regional patterns of burials and ceramic types, attempting to classify different archaeological cultures, which apparently match variations in ecological conditions. What is important is that it is not assumed in absolute terms

¹ Bunker et al., 1997.

that these archaeological entities could refer to specific ethnic or political identities, although a certain level of commonality in cultural expression and life-style has been detected throughout the Northern Zone. Such commonality has been extrapolated from the analysis of artefactual remains. Consequently, artefactual typologies and chronologies have been used to suggest geographical and temporal boundaries, although the dating framework suggested by the authors is still imperfect. Type-sites have been taken as representative examples for rather large areas, which have been often labelled after them. In their analysis border areas are no more conceived according to the Chinese traditional biased perspective of the diffusionist trend, imposing the constraints of a 'core-periphery' model. Archaeological cultures scattered along the Chinese Northern Zone are studied in terms of their own prehistory, on the basis of their material remains either newly discovered or revisited in the light of recent theoretical trends. Yet, the authors have chosen to limit their investigation of the early Bronze Age period to three main archaeological cultures: Zhukaigou, Lijiaya and Lower Xiajiadian, referring only briefly to other complexes further to the west, such as the Siba-Huoshagou and Yanbulake, thus leaving out the investigation beyond Gansu province. Nevertheless attention is given to the role played by southern Siberia during the 2nd millennium BCE, especially in connection with the cultures of Transbaikalia in Buryatia and Karasuk of the Minusinsk basin and their interaction with northern, rather than western China. This cultural link is suggested by the affinities in bronze and ceramic inventories (i.e. bronze pommelied daggers and snake- and flower- rimmed pottery // jars). Altogether, the analysis of archaeological material dated prior to the 1st millennium BCE proves to be rather scant if compared to the investigation of the archaeological material recovered from sites of a later date.

In a previous work on the Ordos culture, Bunker's periodisation was based on criteria – i.e. object typologies, material and decorative style - not entirely consistent within the proposed chronological framework.² This study is exclusively construed on the analysis of the artefactual material, leaving aside socio-economic and environmental considerations that may help to construct a better picture of the evolutionary process in these areas. Besides, her tripartite division of the Ordos culture starts with the early Spring and Autumn period (8th- 5th centuries BCE) excluding artefacts contemporary to the Shang and Western Zhou periods (c. 13th century- 8th century BCE).³ Her study further delineates two subsequent stages dating roughly from the

² Bunker 1990.

³ According to Bunker, the Ordos Culture would include not only the proper Ordos region, but it would expand westwards and eastwards to coincide roughly with the entire Northern Zone.

mid Warring States period (4th-3rd centuries BCE) to the Western Han period (3rd century BCE-1st century CE). This analysis proves to be rather insufficient and poorly contextualised. The parameters chosen should be taken separately and diachronically in order to understand significant variations in time.

A better contextualised approach is proposed in another joint effort by So and Bunker, in which greater emphasis is laid on the commercial networks of trade exchange between the Northern Zone and metropolitan China.⁴ Periodisation in this work includes four successive phases beginning in the 2nd millennium BCE, and ending in the 1st century CE. A distinction is stressed between cultural complexes situated on either side of the Taihang Mountains, along the Shanxi-Hebei borderline, on the basis of their bronze artefacts and metal accessories which to the west of this mountain range come primarily from burials, and to the east from hoards or caches, during the 2nd millennium BCE. Indeed, according to So, the hoard finds of non-Chinese artefacts to the east of the Taihang Mountains would mark temporary settlements for people seasonally migrating from the west of this mountain range.⁵

William Watson in fact already in 1971 distinguished this incipient fracture delimited by the Taihang mountain range, which – according to him - marked the eastern limit of the so-called Scythic influence into metropolitan China.⁶ In this respect he attempted to investigate the archaeological cultures of the Chinese Northern Zone, emphasising their homogeneity in artistic expression (what he called 'animal art') and economic strategy. He further laid the stress on the investigation of the phenomenon of nomadic pastoralism and its emergence during the 1st millennium BCE. However, the scanty material evidence available at that time did prevent him from deepening his investigation and expanding the scope of his research. His analysis almost entirely relies on purely stylistic elements that are featured in the nomadic bronze artistic repertoire and suffers from the constraints imposed by the non-availability of alternative kinds of material evidence. Consequently his chronological cleavage into pre-Scythic and Scythic cultures seems today too broad to be a valid definition.

In a more recent study, Di Cosmo proposes a much-sophisticated picture. In his view, from the late Yinxu phase of the Shang period a cultural fracture between the so-called Northern Zone and the Central Plain was already incipient.⁷ The author further conceived this area, not as a monolithic cultural entity, but as a multitude of cultural phenomena sharing a 'common' material 'language' represented by a similar

⁴ So and Bunker 1995.

⁵ So and Bunker 1995: 38.

⁶ Watson 1971: 96-124.

⁷ Di Cosmo in Loewe and Shaughnessy 1998.

bronze inventory.⁸ He attempted to define the economic conditions and environmental contingencies, being particularly interested in the economic strategies that seem to have regulated these archaeological complexes, further named by him as 'agro-pastorals'. In fact, he detected the first symptoms of the phenomenon of pastoralism in the Shang dynasty (1500-1045 BCE). Within this long period, he then distinguished the Northern Zone into three geo-cultural areas featuring several proto-pastoralist cultures: Lower Xiajiadian and Heilongjiang cultures to the east, Zhukaigou and Chaodaogou cultures in the Ordos desert, Shanxi and Shaanxi provinces, and Xindian and Siwa cultures to the west. However, the criteria he used to select these latter Neolithic- early Bronze Age cultures seem rather arbitrary. Although conscious of the limitations of previous archaeological interpretations based exclusively on the comparative analysis of bronze inventories, he nevertheless grounded his discourse on a similar line of investigation. He justifies his choice by stating that in the majority of the tombs dated from this period no alternative kind of material evidence was consistently recovered. This is only partially true, since pottery has been rather consistently discovered in burial assemblages dated to the 2nd millennium BCE, thus representing an alternative parameter of archaeological investigation. He further implies the prestige value of bronze weapons solely from the fact that they were consistently present in burials. Consequently, no further investigation is made of other significant archaeological parameters, such as burial types and structures, site location and organisation, funerary assemblages comprising ceramics, metal artefacts, stone tools, fabrics and various types of ornaments and their mode of display within the tomb context. In his most recent publication, Di Cosmo tries to define yet another different approach, by analysing the patterns of interaction along Chinese northern frontiers through the combined investigation of archaeological data and literary sources, thus grounding his analysis on ancient Chinese historiography.⁹

In all these analyses though, the westernmost portion of the Northern Zone has been only slightly touched upon, but never really incorporated into the larger picture. In the last five years or so, many new studies have been based on recent (or much forgotten) archaeological discoveries in Xinjiang.¹⁰ Whilst providing new grounds for investigation and proposing different investigative approaches (from linguistics to textile analysis), these new findings have often been studied in regional terms or associated with macro-cultures to the west, but seldom thoroughly compared with

⁸ An idea also shared by the compilers of the volume on the Arthur M. Sackler collection.

⁹ Di Cosmo 2002.

¹⁰ Mair 1998, Barber 1999, Mair and Mallory 2000, Mei 2000.

groups further to the East.

On the other side of the interpretations suggested by western scholars, lies traditional Chinese epistemology. For many Chinese archaeologists, the ethno-genealogy of the nomadic peoples that inhabited the Northern Zone from the 2nd Millennium BCE onwards is almost exclusively based on historical chronicles such as Sima Qian's *Shi Ji* (c. 145 - 86 BCE). Their perspective thus emphasises aspects of continuity and a gradual autochthonous evolutionary path over abrupt 'ex-temporary' demographic or/and cultural influxes from Central Asia or Southern Siberia. However, this perspective is partially confuted by the archaeological evidence, as it appears that the Northern Zone did not constitute an isolated cultural phenomenon, but was linked to other cultural complexes further west throughout the Eurasian steppes, although the nature and extent of this connection are yet to be fully pictured archaeologically. The internal coherence of the evolution of the so-called 'Ordos' culture, based on Chinese traditional archaeological epistemology, consists of a general chronology of development for the whole Northern Zone. This chronology proposes three evolutionary stages, starting with the Bronze Age (Shang, Western Zhou, and Spring and Autumn periods), followed by the early Iron Age (Warring States period), to finish with the Iron Age (coinciding with the dynastic Han period). Within this extremely broad temporal framework, all the archaeological cultures dated prior to the late Warring States period are usually referred to as "early" or "proto" Xiongnu.¹¹ The broad nature of this periodisation does not entail to internal variations and cultural, economic and social complexities within each phase especially when considering the large chronological span covered by the Bronze Age (15th to 5th centuries BCE).

In one of his early work, Wu En has taken stylistic variation within bronze inventories as the key factor for his four-phased periodisation.¹² The scanty material evidence consisting of bronze weapons such as short swords and daggers, with zoomorphic designs concentrated on the hilt and finial pommel characterises the first phase (late Shang –Yinxu- to early Western Zhou periods c. 1300 - 900 BCE). The second phase, dated from the late Western Zhou to the early Spring and Autumn periods (900 - 700 BCE), is based solely on the analysis of material culture from the north-eastern (*Dongbei*) area, characterised by the Upper Xiajiadian cultural remains, without considering complexes situated further to the west. The third stage (late Spring and Autumn - late Warring States periods, 700 - 300 BCE) is defined by the so-called "early Xiongnu" culture of the Ordos steppe and adjacent zones, whereas

¹¹ Especially in Tian 1983.

¹² Wu En 1981.

the last phase, during the early imperial period (Western and Eastern Han 200 BCE – 200 CE), features a bronze artistic repertoire proper to the Xiongnu and the Xianbei.

When looking farther to the west in Xinjiang, Chinese investigation has been deeply affected by the problem of a definite periodisation. Chronology has been mostly based on typological seriation in ceramics, in some way neglecting alternative sources of evidence represented by the large amount of perishable materials, preserved almost intact.¹³ Yet recently, a greater emphasis has been laid on textile findings although investigation once again has been narrowed down to regional boundaries.¹⁴ Later combined efforts indeed present a less drastic approach, as mentioned above.¹⁵

Chinese North-western Zone: a new framework

The decision to focus on the northwestern section of the Chinese Northern Zone derives in part from the observation –through the archaeological material-, of a 'cultural' partition between the eastern and western sectors of the frontier zone already apparent by the mid 2nd millennium BCE. Such geo-cultural division has been primarily based on diachronic analysis of funerary vestiges coming from both sides of the Taihang Mountains, which are variously dated between the late 2nd – early 1st millennia BCE. In order to assess and better understand the extent of cross-cultural fertilisation amongst the various archaeological 'cultures' identified in the area, the investigation has been narrowed down to one geo-cultural section only. It is within the boundaries of Xinjiang, Gansu, Ningxia, Shaanxi, Shanxi and western Inner Mongolia that this research will focus.

A brief outline can be suggested here: most of the Bronze Age and early Iron Age sites belonging to different cultural spheres (or 'horizons') throughout Northwestern China, from the Ordos plateau including Inner Mongolia, Shaanxi, Shanxi and a small part of Hebei, to Gansu-Ningxia and Xinjiang will be taken into consideration and their material culture better contextualised. First, groups will be analysed and their possible social constructs inferred through their burial structure and their attitudes towards death, and then in a second step, comparative analyses of ceramics, metals, wood, bone, leather and textiles assemblages will be carried out. The general frame of reference is maintained throughout the study by a formal chronological partition comprising three main phases: 2nd Millennium, Early 1st Millennium, Mid-to-late 1st millennium BCE [Appendix 1, table1]. To the first time-span belong Zhukaigou,

¹³ An Zhimin in Mair 1998.

¹⁴ Wang and Xiao in Keller and Shorta (eds) 2001.

Lijiaya (Shaanxi-Hebei), Siba-Huoshagou (Gansu) and Yanbulake (Xinjiang) cultural horizons [Appendix 2, map 1]; to the second, Changping Baifu (Hebei), Shajing and Xindian (Gansu) and Chawuhu-Qunbake (Xinjiang) [Appendix 2, map 2]; to the last phase Maoqinggou, Taohongbala, Xigoupan and Aluchaideng (Inner Mongolia, Shaanxi, Hebei), Yanglang group of sites (Gansu and Ningxia), and Alagou and Subeixi (Xinjiang). Besides these sites, other 'satellite' findings will be recognised as sharing certain cultural elements and are hence included in the discussion.

All these areas were apparently affected in various degrees and throughout the centuries by their geographical proximity (or better, collision) with the easternmost part of the Eurasian cultural world. Particularly important in the cultural and artistic development of the indigenous inhabitants of this region were the archaeological cultures of southern Siberia and eastern Kazakhstan. The extent of their impact beyond their own formal boundaries may be partially inferred from their archaeological remains, by discussing the extent of cultural diffusion and possible migratory routes from the west. It is through a contextualised analysis of the many different expressions implicit in the material culture of several areas in northwestern China that one may 'guesstimate' the kinds of cultural and economic network that emerged during the 2nd millennium BCE and developed throughout the 1st millennium BCE.

Material culture and *habitus*: a new approach

From the analysis of previous interpretative works by Western and Chinese archaeologists, it appears clear that a great deal of information has been extrapolated by the mere investigation of bronze material remains, and only on some occasions has this material been contextualised and discussed within a larger framework. It has nevertheless been observed that a certain commonality of cultural expression – especially as far as the metal inventory is concerned - seems to pervade most of the frontier area, suggesting some sort of cultural continuum over a large span of time. Unfortunately, the scanty material evidence recovered from controlled excavated sites has so far prevented a more exhaustive and thorough study of the peoples they refer to. But, as excavation projects progress and an even larger number of objects come to light, a better analysis of the cultural traits characterising the archaeological 'cultures' will soon become possible. The term 'culture' is here used for conventional purposes, as it seems more and more evident that this kind of traditional classification serves the only purpose to highlight

¹⁵ Linduff, Wu and Bunker in Bunker 1997.

differences rather than to give a sense of cultural overlapping and continuity to the entire area. Furthermore, the actual existence of archaeological cultures as traditionally conceived has been questioned, since in reality this ideal monothetical concept is never entirely fulfilled by the archaeological evidence.¹⁶ In the meantime, the material evidence must be considered as a whole and contextualised within the same frame of reference. Not only bronze objects are to be analysed from the stylistic and technological side, but their position in the tomb as well as their relationship with alternative type of material evidence ought to be considered. Gordon Childe, apart from recognising the invalidity of the 'culture' proposition at an early time, also advocated the importance of the repeated association of a number of objects rather than the simultaneous presence of all types of objects assigned to a given culture, in order to assess the ethnicity factor. The most common type of evidence would be pottery complemented by other less frequently found materials such as bone, stone and semi-precious stones.¹⁷ More adequate consideration of artefact production and exchange, and research on stylistic variations in more than one type of material or artefact and the study of variation over large geographical areas rather than at a few sites (such as the erroneously labelled 'type-sites') may help the investigation.

Style, function and ethnic affiliation

The same differentiation into classes of artefacts and assemblage variations, which has been mainly based on the marked distinction between 'functional' and 'stylistic' features promoted by the processual archaeology can be rejected in favour of less functionalist perspectives.¹⁸ For instance, it can be argued, following Sackett's remark on style that, what he considers as 'isochrestic variation' (i.e. style) resides in every aspect of artefact variability, including those which are explicitly functional.¹⁹ Consequently, both decorative and functional aspects of material culture can provide valuable information on the social context of a given cultural group. Stylistic elaboration can be described in terms of a number of different attributes ranging from the symmetrical arrangement of design patterns,²⁰ to the width of horizontal lines on pottery surfaces or the position of perforations on axe handles.²¹ Besides its

¹⁶ Clarke 1979.

¹⁷ Childe 1956.

¹⁸ The latter are seen as residual formal variations (i.e. in traditional normative terms), which can help to define ethnic indicators [Binford 1962:220].

¹⁹ Sackett 1977.

²⁰ Washburn 1977.

²¹ Whallon 1968: 223.

multidimensionality,²² style can also be arranged into a hierarchical structure, according to different factors: some stylistic attributes may reflect a variation in social interaction,²³ whilst other may have served to communicate social information (Wobst's *information exchange*).²⁴ Other possible factors include spatial distribution of exchange networks, patterns of production and consumption; all these elements must be considered in relation to each other and within a given socio-historical context. Consequently, different and alternative forms of material evidence must be gathered to test the extent of stylistic co-variation between them, accounting also for different modes of manufacture and decoration.

Furthermore, all these elements may contribute to the identification and recognition of expressions of ethnical affiliation. In current ethnographic research, material culture is often implicated in the recognition of ethnicity, since the former undoubtedly contributes to the formulation of the latter while being at the same time structured by it. It is generally assumed that certain typological and stylistic aspects of material culture are actively maintained and upheld in the process of self-conscious ethnic identification, whereas others tend to cross ethnic boundaries. The process of selection of these specific forms and styles signalling ethnicity is arguably a non-arbitrary one (at least, not completely) as it may in fact relate to the structural dispositions of the *habitus*, infused in all aspects of the cultural practices inherent in a certain *modus vivendi*. As Bourdieu argues:

"The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without in any way being the product of obedience to rules"²⁵

Yet the relationship between ethnicity and cultural *habitus* is not as clear as it may appear: ethnic consciousness is only *partially* based on the recognition of commonalities of cultural practices and historical experience, and its degree of infiltration within a pre-existing *habitus* would depend upon the cultural changes engendered by the processes of interaction and the nature of the power relations between the groups. Ethnicity may be defined as a multidimensional rather than a monothetical cultural entity, insofar its reflections may vary according to various social, historical and economic factors and may result in complex patterns of

²² This concept has been thoroughly investigated by Stephen Plog [1983: 125-42].

²³ For instance, stylistic variation on pottery may function as a symbol of social group identity for members of a community. [Plog *ibidem*].

²⁴ Wobst 1977: 317-42.

²⁵ Bourdieu 1977.

overlapping material culture distributions. This polyvalent nature must be always contextualised in order to be understood.

Against the processual concept of style as a 'passive' product of the acculturation, recent theories incorporate the idea of an 'active' style both in its functional and adaptive valence, as it facilitates the exchange of information concerning social and religious identification, group affiliation and status.²⁶ Recent anthropological studies prove in fact that style variation is actively produced, maintained and manipulated in the process of communication and the mediation of social relations. Such strategic manipulation of material culture is often reflected in discontinuous non-random distribution patterns.²⁷ Therefore the degree of similarity and difference in material culture cannot be considered a straightforward index of group interaction. In this respect, when approaching archaeological material, it is clear that the relationship between material culture (remains) and ethnicity is rather problematic, as it is impossible to access directly to past people's motivations and perceptions. And yet, the analysis of contextual realisations of ethnicity is fairly possible, provided a link exists between historically constituted dispositions that inform people's practices and the expression of ethnicity. Ethnic symbolism is generated in various degrees from existing cultural practices and modes of differentiation within specific social domains ranging from gender to status, to the organisation of domestic space. Consequently it is important to investigate both modes of social interaction and the distribution of material and symbolic power between the groups. This analysis must take into consideration also the role of historical processes in the generation of ethnicity since:

"ethnicity is a product of the intersection of similarities and differences in people's habitus and the conditions characterising any given historical situation".²⁸

And with the adoption of a historical approach, within a contextual diachronic framework, some of the transformations of habitual material variation into active self-conscious symbolism may be pointed out, on the basis of the changes in the nature and distribution of the styles involved.

Burial attitudes and their reflection of social constructs

The emphasis on contextualisation and search for 'alternative' *foci* of archaeological evidence may be considered a useful ground for our investigation. We can experimentally adopt this approach in the analysis of the archaeological remains scattered along the Chinese northern frontier. Until now, the picture that comes out

²⁶ See Conkey [1978, pp 61-85] and Wobst [1977, pp 317-42].

²⁷ Hodder 1982.

from the archaeological evidence is still blurred and based on rather speculative grounds. The ancient peoples who inhabited the Chinese Northern Zone have been known archaeologically through their funerary simulacra, since traces of their residential compounds have rarely come to light through excavation. The location and identification of habitation sites would certainly contribute to a better understanding of their cultural *habitus*, which is most of the times inferred on grounds which are biased by the archaeologist's perspective. The fact that most of the investigations carried out in the area by Chinese archaeologists are based on the comparative analysis of burial typologies, focusing on the burial behaviour (practice and inventory) rather than on belief and ritual connotations represents an epistemological limitation.

In general, archaeologists have followed closely Tainter's postulate that the higher the social rank of the deceased, the greater the expenditure of energy manifested in the complexity of the body treatment, the placement of internment facilities and the extent of the funerary rituals.²⁹ In particular, Chinese archaeologists examine different kinds of movable property and resources expended in burial, grounding their speculations concerning social differentiation primarily on quantitative analyses.³⁰ Yet in recent times, the assumption of a direct relationship between social structure and burial pattern has been questioned. It has been stated that the burial pattern is

"structured through symbolically meaningful codes, which can be manipulated in social strategies [...]. Excavated objects are immediately cultural, not social, and they can inform on society only through an adequate understanding of cultural context".³¹

Following the line traced by British symbolic archaeologists such as Ian Hodder, a major emphasis is laid on the social role played out by groups within the society to which the burial remains belong. The importance is further stressed on integrating the traditional archaeological investigation, based on typological seriation of burial inventories, with other cultural aspects such as modes of consumption and exchange, architecture and personal ornamentation. The feeling of inadequacy felt when inferring social information from burial remains has been variously approached in recent years. New archaeological interpretations have attempted to provide some epistemological guidelines that could challenge traditional assumptions on the links between society and mortuary practices. For instance, the traditional assumption that

²⁸ Jones 1997: 56.

²⁹ Tainter 1978.

³⁰ Quantitative analysis of burial inventories does not strictly imply a rich-poor differentiation, since in certain cultures most of the valuables belonging to the deceased are burnt before internment [Ucko 1968].

³¹ Hodder 1982.

the social role of the deceased in life is straightforwardly represented after death by means of funerary paraphernalia has been questioned: ethnographic studies have proved that in mortuary rituals the actual relations of power are only occasionally displayed. Therefore not always the most authoritative social groups are expressed in burial contexts.³² It is necessary to understand why certain roles are preferentially expressed in burials (as well as in other media of social life expression such as dress, display of material possessions, residential architecture etc), and the extent to which these roles are used as social advertisements between competing social groups. The past, especially through ritual communication, is often used to legitimate hierarchies of power and inequality which would otherwise be unstable: as such the dead are consequently susceptible to manipulation by certain groups to maintain or uphold their influence over others. It follows that in most cases burial rituals are susceptible to ideological manipulation within the construction of social strategies. Pearson advances a number of propositions, revealing that symbolism of ritual communication does not necessarily refer to the actual relations of power, but to an idealised expression of those relations.³³ Since the dead can be manipulated for socio-political reasons of aggrandisement, it follows that ideology as manifested in funerary contexts tends to mystify inequality relations within the groups, through the use of the past to legitimise the present. The context of death can be seen as a platform for a more or less overt social advertisement. This last remark is close to Childe's assumption that:

In a stable society the grave goods tend to grow relatively and even absolutely fewer and poorer as time goes on. In other words, less and less of the deceased's real wealth, fewer and fewer of the goods that he or she had used, worn, or habitually consumed in life were deposited in the tombs or consumed on the pyre. The stability of a society may be upset by invasion or immigration on a scale that requires a radical reorganisation or by contacts between barbarians and civilised societies so that, for instance, trade introduces new sorts of wealth, new opportunities for acquiring wealth and new classes (traders) who do not fit in at once into the kinship organization of a tribe.³⁴

Consequently, archaeological interpretation of funerary complexes must be integrated with the study of alternative forms of material remains, which may help to define a clearer social picture. In this way the social placing of the dead can be further investigated through the study of the archaeological material evidence, by constructing general principles relating material culture and society. Binford stressed this idea in his analysis of the function of archaeological assemblages within a differentiated social system.³⁵ One function of burials and their rituals outlined by

³² Pearson 1984.

³³ Pearson *Ibidem* : 112.

³⁴ Childe 1968.

³⁵ Binford 1962:217-25.

Hodder as also by Pearson, is that of unifying the social framework according to a given ideology, creating an imaginary unity.³⁶ The more fragmented the quotidian activities are, the stronger the social effect played out by burials, and the more significant in terms of ethnic indicators are the rituals of death which are performed. Burial behaviour would coincide with Bourdieu's *habitus*: durable dispositions towards certain perceptions and practices, including for instance sexual division of labour, morality standards and tastes.³⁷ Consequently, burials and the ritual behaviour played out within this context are generally regarded as good indicators of ethnicity, expressing a specific choice of style.

Indeed burials together with artistic iconography, by providing indications on the possible social construct, can also provide the most eloquent type of evidence on the extent and nature of gender roles in a given society. Gender represents the social correlate of sex, as certain roles, activities or behaviours are culturally assigned to a particular set of persons, classified as gender; hence, even if gender is related to sex, it may vary from one culture to another.³⁸ Information about sex is provided by biological analysis of the skeletal remains (when available),³⁹ whilst any funerary item, from personal ornaments to clothing, interred with the deceased allows a glimpse of social differentiation in gender terms. Yet until recently archaeologists have unconsciously tended to interpret gender arrangements of the past according to present time gender constructions, presuming the universal value of contemporary tenets. But to better interpret the role of women in the past, biological 'universality' should be refuted, and 'variability' considered instead.⁴⁰ Also, division of labour should not be considered a *conditio sine qua non* pertinent to all societies, but it should be proved for any specific cultural area whether all activities were allocated to a particular gender or gender roles could overlap in certain cases, as we will encounter in the course of this study.

However, one should bear in mind that such investigative perspective may in some cases turn out to be unsatisfactory. For instance, Ucko managed to identify so many variables in burial behaviours through ethnographic comparisons,⁴¹ that one is left doubting both the usefulness of burial customs to identify different groups of people,

³⁶ Hodder 1990.

³⁷ Bourdieu 1990.

³⁸ Gero and Conkey 1991.

³⁹ A reliable method of sex identification is based on the amplification of single-copy amelogenin-encoding gene (AMG) [Faerman 1995].

⁴⁰ Davis-Kimball has favoured a similar approach in her analysis of female social status among the Sauro-Sarmatian nomadic societies. She selected specific grave good items, leaving aside pottery, faunal materials and iron knives due to their high frequency in the burial contexts [Davis-Kimball 1998].

⁴¹ Ucko 1968: 262-79.

and the general assumption that burial practices are diagnostic of different cultural expressions and contacts. Many are the social processes that usually impinge on the creation and transformation of burials and funerary structures. Consequently, attention must be paid to the social framework surrounding the creation of certain attitudes towards death and their material expression. It is within this perspective, that one should investigate the relationship between different archaeological cultures along the north-western border of China, which are currently identified solely by the remains of their burial monuments.

Tracing the Invisible: cultural diffusion and migration in the archaeological record

One of the most important issues emerging from the study of material cultures of North-western China is represented by the concept of cultural diffusion.⁴² The model is generally defined as the processes by which new ideas or cultural traits spread over the long distance. Diffusion can proceed through different ways, i.e. trade, warfare and demic migrations of entire or part of a community. Diffusion in recent works appears little studied as a component of cultural development, and such attitude has been strongly influenced by processual and evolutionary archaeologists who by decriing it as descriptive, preferred to place their emphasis on local adaptive sequences. Current archaeological work on diffusion stems from pioneer studies by anthropologists Franz Boas, Alfred Kroeber, Gustaf Kossina and their contemporaries, who were interested in diffusion but argued that symbolic value or prestige would also be diffused to other societies. Archaeologists borrowed some of this thinking in the 1930s, but found it impossible to establish the social context of cultural traits from the archaeological record alone. They hence quite simply assumed that acceptance of cultural traits was directly proportional to the frequency with which people learned about an innovation, an assumption eventually confuted by later ethno-archaeological studies. Nowadays, several criteria must be satisfied for diffusion to be correctly identified. Objects must be sufficiently similar in design and typological attributes and they must be shown to result not from a convergent evolution, but also their distribution on the territory must be carefully plotted and dated in order to exhibit continuity over space and time. Much of the unpopularity of diffusionist theory stems from archaeologists using it incorrectly. Indeed diffusion itself is not the cause of the spread or adoption of cultural elements; it is a way to refer to a set of phenomena that have been caused by a wide range of cultural factors, most of which are often difficult or impossible to ascertain.

Yet the concept of diffusion may help to explain a particular cultural matrix, as in the instance of the 'animal art' phenomenon.⁴³ Objects and styles derived from other cultural entities may be given new meaning in their new context, but these meanings may be based on, or originated from past intrinsic meanings. The new traits are selected and placed in the new conceptual system, encouraging changes within it. Hence stimulus diffusion could be defined as an active social process working on and within systems of meanings, which develop over the long term.⁴⁴ The north-western Chinese archaeological complex may represent one of the best examples of such phenomenon over a large span of time.

Related to cultural diffusion is the also largely ignored process of migration.⁴⁵ Traditional archaeological approaches to migration seem inadequate as they lack a methodology for examining pre- and proto-historic migrations based on an understanding of the general structure of migration as a patterned human behaviour.⁴⁶ It is an essential concern of archaeological investigation on migration to provide evidence of this process. Yet the archaeological evidence may not really allow this by being too ambiguous to distinguish the transfer of cultural traits resulting from migration from other mechanisms of dispersion such as trade or diffusion. A procedure with which a specific migration can be reliably diagnosed using archaeological evidence is unfortunately unavailable. Yet recently it has been suggested that attention should be laid on detecting what Burmeister calls 'internal culture sphere', the intimate, private sphere of social life where the *habitus* is more likely to persist.⁴⁷ This sphere would consist on practices –such as the social system of the family and the household and the organisation of private life- that are not directly connected to external conditions, hence less adaptable. Stylistic traits and ritual practices, as they are reflected for instance in burial attitudes, communicate specific symbolic meanings that make them susceptible to unconscious as well as deliberate changes. Hence technological and functional aspects in material culture, relatively free of symbolic meaning, have been deemed more resistant to change and more suitable to indicate signs of actual migration. Metallurgical artefacts and domestic pottery may sometimes be considered culturally conservative in the analysis of Chinese north-western sites; especially considering that the conservative parameter of residential architectural elements and domestic interior arrangement

⁴² Clarke 1979, Kehoe 1979.

⁴³ The general term 'Animal Art' refers to the iconographic repertoire of a large number of nomadic groups from Central Asia and China during the 1st Millennium BCE.

⁴⁴ Hodder 1986.

⁴⁵ For a detailed account of migrationist theories and their historical contexts see Harke 1998.

⁴⁶ Anthony 1990 and 1997.

⁴⁷ Burmeister 2000.

would prove inconclusive,⁴⁸ given the paucity of archaeological evidence for architectural structures in this area. Traditional habits may also be reflected by furnishings in burials of socially marginal persons such as small children, as it will be seen in the context of Zhukaigou and Lijiaya. All these '*habitus*' factors are indeed material culture signatures of ethnicity; hence multifaceted evidence for ethnicity would seem to correspond to evidence for migration, whereby ethnicity is conceived as an inalienable connotation of a given human group, which cannot be transferred to others through trade or cultural diffusion. The identification of migration is in most cases inextricably linked with the definition of ethnic groups in the past, which in turn is based on the always-problematic assumption that distinct groups have identifiable material culture traits. Indeed such assumption may prove unsuitable in the light of the archaeological evidence in north-west China, where certain aspects of material culture sometimes seem to overlap, whilst other may not. Hence there seems to be no direct relation between ethnic consciousness and the use of material culture and therefore ethnicity is elusive not only in the archaeological interpretation, but also and even more in the case of migration. Yet again, the best available epistemological method seems to me represented by a processual approach investigating the given social context though the analysis of as many aspects as possible of its material culture.

⁴⁸ The proposition offered by Stark, Clark and Elson [1995] would nevertheless go against Sackett's remarks that style in the sense of cultural tradition is often expressed in functional attributes [1990].

Chapter 2

Burials, economy and social complexity

2nd Millennium BCE

During the 2nd millennium BCE, about a thousand years before the emergence of Scythian-Saka related groups on the historical scene, populations of diverse genetic origins inhabited the vast steppe land.¹ Nevertheless, the archaeological picture would already highlight an incipient phenomenon of homogenisation, sometimes referred to as the 'steppe continuum', that is, the emergence of an expanse cultural horizon linking distant regions as far as the Black Sea area to the plains of Mongolia and north-western China. Various parameters are shared by these archaeological cultures. The people involved in this phenomenon seemed to follow more or less similar mixed farming-pastoral economics and were engaged in hunting, gathering and sometimes, even river fishing. Animals such as goats and cows were already domesticated; in some places a primitive form of agriculture was achieved through a simplified system of irrigation. But all these activities seemed to be complementary to each other and seldom one particular economic strategy would prevail on the others. These similarities in economic strategies and the emergent commonality of cultural markers can be, at this particular chronological stage, partially ascribed to generally comparable ecological conditions and levels of economic development, combined with the absence of important geophysical obstacles that could impede direct interaction between neighbouring groups.² Hence, although a 'cultural horizon' can be perceived when observing the various groups inhabiting the steppes during the early Bronze Age period, various indicators of ethnic and cultural affiliation, such as ceramics and metal objects, everyday utensils and mortuary practises are shown to be often region-specific. For their explicit degree of stylistic heterogeneity or variability, these will be the parameters used as cultural and ethnic markers in the course of this investigation.

Siba-Huoshagou cultural horizon

Gansu province can be considered a crossroad in the cultural transmission between the Eurasian steppe world and metropolitan China. Archaeological evidence come primarily

¹Chernikh 1992.

²Bashilov and Yablonsky 2000: 9-12.

from the so-called Hexi Corridor (*Hexi zoulang*) where several sites culturally related to the Siba-Huoshagou cultural horizon have been discovered in the last forty years or so. Yet very few sites related to this cultural horizon have been analysed so far. Further investigation would shed some light on the connection between this culture and other ethnic groups to the west (in Xinjiang and further west in Central Asia) and to the north (Shaanxi, Shanxi provinces and southern Siberia) during the mid 2nd millennium BCE.

The first evidence of a unique cultural group came from the Siba site in Shandan xian, discovered in 1953 and later on investigated by An Zhimin.³ After its discovery, several other related sites were excavated, highlighting the vestiges of an ancient culture, (called Siba after the eponymous site), that apparently lasted from the 21st to the 16th century BCE, undergoing five subsequent phases of development. In 1960, five archaeological sites, featuring similar features were identified both in Shandan xian and Jiuquan xian. One of these, Jiuquan xian Xiaheqing yielded two different burial complexes in the same compound.⁴ One cemetery was characterised by typical Machang pottery and burial structure, whilst the other cemetery yielded similar Machang inventory on the lower stratum, but both Machang and Siba items on the upper stratum. The difference in burial typologies suggests that Siba culture must have been chronologically later than Machang culture⁵ and that the latter must have played an important role in the cultural development of the former.

In 1986 two other important burial complexes have been scientifically investigated: Jiuquan xian Ganguya and Minle xian Donghuishan.⁶ Other Siba-related sites are Yumen xian Shaguoliang, and Anxi xian Yinwoshu where seven bronzes datable a little later than Donghuishan and Ganguya have been brought to light, some forged and other cast.⁷

Huoshagou

Huoshagou culture takes its name from the eponymous site in Yumen xian, Gansu province, discovered in 1976.⁸ Huoshagou site (datable between 21st –18th century BCE non-calibrated) yielded 312 burial pits, one third of which included metal items. The large distribution of metal artefacts is a hallmark of Huoshagou site, when compared with affiliated sites. Five subsequent chronological strata have been detected (the fifth level is contemporary to the first level at Ganguya). Apart from a small number of tombs

³ An Zhimin 1959, Gansu sheng Bowuguan 1960 and Li Shuicheng 1993: 96-7.

⁴ Li Shuicheng 1993: 107-8.

⁵ Also proved by C14 calibration.

⁶ The latter was first identified in 1958 together with another site close by, Xihuishan [Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1998].

⁷ Li Shuicheng 1993: 97-99 and Sun and Han 1997.

⁸ Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1979: 142-3.

displaying a simple vertical structure sometimes provided with a double-tiered platform at the bottom, a large group features a vertical shafted entrance to a lateral chamber (a catacomb variant). This burial type also occurs in Qijia related sites in Gansu province, which are earlier in date, thus providing a possible inspiration for the Huoshaogou examples, although this type was found also in later Shajing and Xindian cultures.⁹ Pits are usually rectangular, hosting a single occupant lying supine with extended limbs and head oriented to the east, sometimes lying on a reed mat, or covered by a wooden board. Features such as reed mats, logs covers, adobe bricks, together with the presence of wheat and arsenic copper artefacts would find parallels in the Hami Basin of eastern Xinjiang in Yanbulake first strata, dated 18th-16th century BCE, suggesting a strong cultural contact between Yanbulake and Huoshaogou. Further links to the west could be found in the Sintashta I cemetery, where burials were also roofed with timber.¹⁰ More than twenty tombs in the cemetery bear marks of human sacrifices, whilst animal victims have been found in the majority of burials.

Huoshaogou culture could be related to a particular ethnic group mentioned in the ancient Chinese chronicles of the Han dynasty, wearing nose-rings.¹¹ The area of Huoshaogou culture is in fact mentioned in the *Hou Han Shu* (5th century CE) in connection with the Qiang, a bellicose nomadic tribe practising cremation rites, thought to have later migrated from Gansu to Sichuan during the 6th-5th centuries BCE.¹² Li Shuicheng further suggests that Huoshaogou people could have been genetically related to the eastern Mongoloid family.¹³ According to the anthropometrical analysis of skulls from Donghuishan site, Li's hypothesis would be confirmed¹⁴: most of the physical features match the Mongoloid of East Asia type, though some characteristics such as more tilted forehead, flattened upper face and lower nose show strong influence from Northern Asian Mongoloids.¹⁵ Western experience has taught that anthropometrics must be applied with caution when searching for ethnicity elements.¹⁶ The theory of the Qiang connection is further supported by the dominance of sheep herding in Siba, which would match with Chinese references to the Qiang people as the 'shepherds of the west'.¹⁷

⁹ This type in fact is rather widespread in Gansu, being also present in Qiayao, Xindian, Shajing and Majiayao cultures [An 1987: 133-151, Xu Xinguo 1986: 306-317 and Gansu sheng Bowuguan 1981].

¹⁰ Li 1993: 106, Dani and Masson 1992: 34.

¹¹ In *Hou Han Shu-Du du zhuan* [Li Shuicheng 1993: 119].

¹² Wang Mingke 1992 and Tong Enzheng 1982: 266-274.

¹³ Li Shuicheng 1993: 106.

¹⁴ Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1998.

¹⁵ During the 1st millennium BCE Northern Asian Mongoloid phenotypes will be encountered in Ningxia at Pengpu Yujiazhuang, confirming the eastward intrusion of people from Siberia.

¹⁶ Francalacci 1998.

¹⁷ Actually the same character for Qiang is composed by the two proto-characters for sheep and for man. In addition the metal nose ring would fit with the portrait of the Qiang.

Donghuishan

In 1987 at Minle xian Donghuishan archaeologists excavated an area approximately 400 m long (north south) and 150 m wide (east west).¹⁸ The site is located at the narrowest part of the Hexi corridor on the Zhangye-Gaotai-Jiuquan alluvial plain. The mound on which the site rests is 600 m x 400 m and composed by a central dwelling area with rammed earth wall and a northern cemetery.¹⁹ Exactly on the north-eastern corner of the residential area lies the cemetery over an area of 360 squared metres with 249 burial pits datable through C14 to 3770±145 BP (*circa* 18th century BCE). Although the high density of burials results in many pits being either disrupted or destroyed, tombs mostly feature a vertical earthen pit structure without coffin, with either a lateral, frontal or back niche where burial objects were stored. Plan may range from rectangular with rounded corners, to elliptical. On the other hand, tombs consistently follow a north-eastern orientation.²⁰ Most burials (150 clearly determined) feature the double male-female joint type (80%), with no apparent signs of either social or gender differentiation, but skeletal bones are generally (119) either incomplete or displaced. This apparent dislocation of bones may be the result of cremation and secondary interment. Among 249 tombs, 99 were left with no skeletons or just fragments. Only 221 individuals were identified in total, with only 17 determined as under 14 years of age. Archaeologists speculated that most of the infant deceased population might have been buried somewhere else, although they did not provide any further clue to the possible location. Quite a striking difference though is evinced between the sexes, as male occupants seem to prevail on female ones.²¹ Also, attention should be paid on the age of the deceased, where only 48 people lived up to 50 years of age, merely 23.6 % of the total number, and more women than men between 15 and 23 years of age were interred. Besides the most common joint male-female burial, a few tombs revealed a familiar composition: mother, father and one or more descendants, a burial feature which would indicate strong familial ties, probably a patriarchal society where monogamous family was considered the basic unit in kinship organisation.

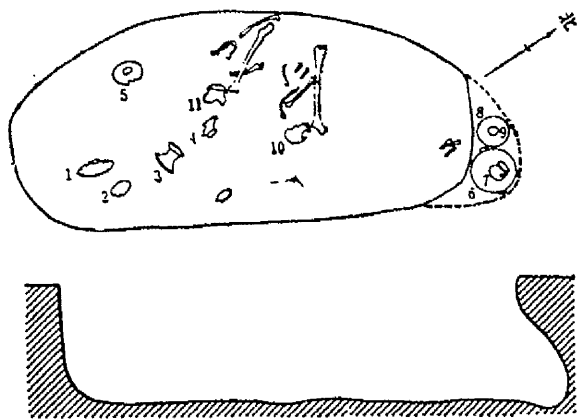
Inside grave M10 three pottery vessels were placed, together with a small number of arsenic copper metal artefacts (knives, earrings and small objects) [Fig.1]. Sometimes, the presence of decorative ornaments made of clam (*Corbicula nitens*) and cowry shells would suggest some kind of trading activity at infra-regional level.

¹⁸ The site was first discovered in 1958 [Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1995: 1057-63 and Xu Yongjie 1989: 246-7].

¹⁹ A structure comprising a citadel on a raised mound will be seen again in Shajing cultural contexts during the 1st millennium BCE, further stimulating the discussion on the origin of Shajing people, who may have been connected to people further to the north, rather than to the east.

²⁰ 219 tombs out of 249 are oriented to the northeast, 26 to northwest, 3 to the east and 1 to the north.

Fig. 1 Donghuishan pit with front niche (M10) [Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1995: pl. 2].



Apparently, differences in burial inventory, in terms of quantity and quality, and the absence of human sacrifices would distinguish Donghuishan from Huoshaogou, suggesting that, although culturally affiliated, the two sites presented a different level of social stratification, with Huoshaogou at a higher degree than Donghuishan.

Ganguya

In 1986 Jiuquan xian Ganguya site was excavated.²² In an area of approximately 300 squared metres 105 tombs were located spanning four chronological strata, yielding almost 500 burial objects related to Siba-Huoshaogou culture datable between the 19th and the 17th century BCE. In the first two phases tombs are placed in the northern part of the cemetery oriented to the east, southeast, their funerary assemblages mostly containing short and thick red pottery with geometric decoration and small metal artefacts. Conversely, tombs found in the last two phases are located in the southern sector of the burial compound and they are consistently oriented to the south or slightly to the west. Their funerary inventory comprises mostly grey and black pottery with motifs of animals and humans within triangular decorative bands, wooden items, and a limited number of small metal artefacts.

Tomb structure is yet quite different from the standard Huoshaogou type: although tombs display a standard vertical structure without niches, they also employed large fluvial pebble stones (somewhat reminiscent of certain Andronovo burials) to cover the skeletal remains. Burials are generally unmarked and of the joint multiple type. Often human bones are disarranged in an apparent confusion suggesting again the employment of the custom of secondary burial or some sort of human sacrificial practice.²³ Within the residential area, several pottery shards and stone implements have been unearthed, together with few piles of stones probably employed in the erection of domestic walls. A large number of ceramic (more than 240 pieces) and stone pieces have been brought to

²¹ Gansu sheng et al, 1998: 37.

²² Li 1987: 271 and Li 1993.

²³ Human phalanges have been found kept inside pottery *guan*-jars in the burials.

light together with remains of animal bones. Few animal bones have also been found within the funerary context, suggesting some animal sacrificial rite.

It is interesting to note that at Huoshaogou, according to the archaeological data published so far, infants have been buried with adults and to date, no cases of urn interment (like those found in the Ordos region at Zhukaigou and Lijiaya) have been reported. This phenomenon could be explained either by a general disinterest in gender and age stratification within Huoshaogou society, reflected by the high percentage of communal burials, or otherwise by a strong kinship societal structure, regulated by familiar consanguinity, as it has been suggested for Donghuishan.

On the other hand the limited number of burials bearing evidence of human sacrifices are also the ones with the richest burial inventories, thus implying that social differentiation was indeed upheld and justified in Huoshaogou social context. Yet, evidence of human immolation comes exclusively from twenty rich tombs at Huoshaogou, being absent in other Siba related cemeteries. Being a very limited phenomenon, it is impossible to generalise its impact on Siba-Huoshaogou social structure as a whole, but it can be seen as a change in the late social structure at Huoshaogou site. The picture that comes out from the analysis of the burial structures encountered at the three sites, would hint to a gradual complication of the social dynamics, with a much deeper social stratification negotiated in Huoshaogou. Siba people lived in settled villages with rammed earth walls, slightly raised from the plain beneath. Their residential compounds were clearly separated from the cemeteries and laid out according to a certain way.²⁴ However, Huoshaogou, Donghuishan and Ganguya show significant differences in terms of their economic strategies.²⁵ Huoshaogou is located in an arid spot where water supply is relatively deficient and their major source of sustenance must have come from animal husbandry, as reflected by the amount of animal sacrifices in the tombs (sheep, oxen, horses, dogs and pigs) and the presence of microlithic tools which would further suggest a rural society with a mixed economy of agriculture and animal husbandry. On the other end, both Donghuishan and Ganguya are located at the foot of the Qilian Mountains, above an alluvial plain rich of water sources. These ecological conditions would have encouraged a more settled agricultural society, relying more on wheat cultivation (carbonised wheat –*Triticum Aestivum*- was indeed discovered at Donghuishan) than animal herding. Fewer remains of animal sacrifices and microlithics at the two sites certainly pointed in that direction. Such differences in economic strategies would also explain the various degrees of social

²⁴ Li 1993: 118.

²⁵ Li 1993: 117.

stratification, especially in highly stratified Huoshaogou burials. In Huoshaogou, an economically less-stable society (based on livestock, rather than cultigens) would be reflected in burials with a higher degree of social stratification. This could be just the case of active manipulation of the dead for socio-political reasons of aggrandisement, as proposed by Parker Pearson²⁶ on the line of Childe's assumption that when the stability of a society is upset by external contacts, for example, grave goods tend to grow and differentiate in quantity and quality among the burials.²⁷

Yanbulake cultural horizon

Yanbulake (Yanbulaq) cultural sphere of influence covers roughly the geographical boundaries of the Hami (Qumul) region of eastern Xinjiang, close to the border with Gansu to the east and backed by the Altai mountain range to the north. Hami region is in fact located on a very strategic spot, at the natural end of the Hexi Corridor and in the proximity of the Qilian mountains passage, thus easily in contact with cultural influxes flowing from the East. The eponymous site, located in the mosaic of fertile oases in the eastern part of the Tarim Basin, represents one of the few sites that have been fully surveyed in the archaeological map of Xinjiang. To the same cultural context, featuring strong similarities in burial customs and pottery typologies may belong Xiaochengbao settlement,²⁸ which is unfortunately seriously disrupted, and Haladun site²⁹, Lafuqiao cemetery³⁰, Yamansukuang Yalinban (Tianshanbeilu)³¹ and the later burial complex of Wupushuiku.³²

Yanbulake

Yanbulake, the easternmost oasis assemblage, is situated on an earthen hill near Liushuquan (Willow Springs) in the Hami region, distributed in two long narrow oases bands. First discovered in 1958 by Huang Wenbi as a small habitation site and cemetery,³³ it was further excavated in 1986, bringing to light 76 tombs. The site dates from 1800 to 1100 BCE. Mortuary practice and artefacts assemblages are rather consistent throughout the site: tombs are usually unmarked on the surface (at least at present, although they may have been disturbed throughout the centuries by surface activities of various kind, both natural and man made). Pits are also rather shallow. Most of the chambers were built of mud bricks, without coffins. In particular, traces of secondary burial practice have been detected although some of the tombs are not easy

²⁶ Parker Pearson 1984.

²⁷ Childe 1968: 13-19.

²⁸ Huang Wenbi 1983.

²⁹ Chen and Hiebert 1995, fig. 4.

³⁰ Xinjiang kaogu yanjiusuo 1984.

³¹ Chang E.1989: 274-5.

³² Xinjiang Junge'er ziqu bowuguan 1979 (examined later on in this chapter).

to study, having been disturbed by later incursions. Apparently secondary interment practice would tend to decrease as time went on.

Three are the burial types encountered at Yanbulake site, distinguished on the basis of slight differences in the structure, rather than on inventories which instead are quite

uniform despite the considerable time depth and variation in mortuary practice [Fig.2].

These types underpin three subsequent chronological phases.

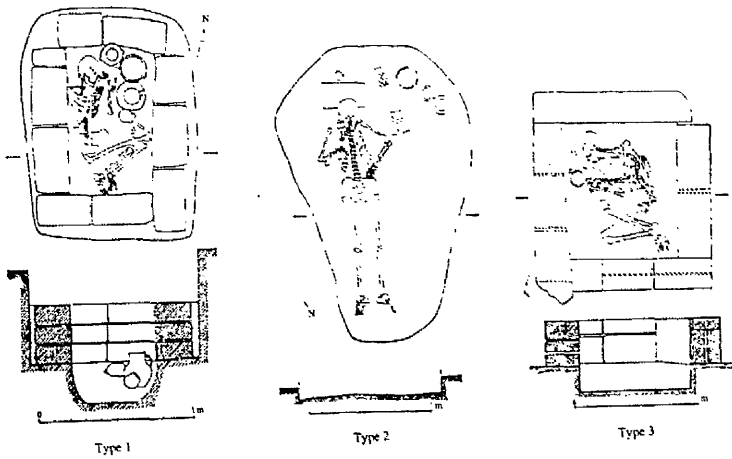


Fig. 2 Burial typologies from Yanbulake [Chen and Hiebert 1995: fig 7].

To the earliest type datable to the 18th-16th centuries BCE belong 26 tombs consisting of a large rectangular shaft pit grave with an internal platform panelled by sturdy mud bricks, usually hosting more than one individual (up to 9 bodies have been found at once). Logs or planks were usually placed on the internal platform together with reed mats. The deceased, mostly belonging to the Mongoloid family, were usually placed lying on one side with flexed limbs facing either the northwest or the southeast.³⁴ During this period, burials were furnished with a large number of painted potteries, especially in the form of *bo*-bowls and *dou*-pedestals.

To the second intermediary phase (15th -14th centuries BCE) would belong another group of 24 small vertical shaft rounded pits without an internal platform, including logs or reed mats on the floor, mostly with a single occupant lying on his left side with legs bent and the head facing any direction. During this phase, the presence of Europoid individuals began to increment consistently. At the same time tomb furnishings (especially ceramic artefacts) started to impoverish although *guan*-jars and *bei*-cups were still the most used.

The last type of burial structure, of which 26 examples have been found, dates back to 13th-11th centuries BCE and consists of a structure built up on the original ground level with sun-dried mud brick walls, displaying rectangular or irregular plan. Sizes vary

³³Huang Wenbi 1983.

³⁴Han Kangxin 1998.

according to the occupant: for instance, some infants have been found buried within a small mud brick walled perimeter (42 x 24 cm the smallest one). During this period, individuals belonging to the Europoid family are the relative majority, with tomb inventories even more scarce, including *guan*-jars and articles made of wood and bronze.

The habitation site at Yanbulake was surrounded by a large rectangular exterior wall (60 x 50 m) made of stamped earth and mud bricks, with a corner tower and several rooms attached to the external side. Apparently the wall was rebuilt several times showing at least three different chronological layers, the lowest one being contemporary with Yanbulake culture. The residential compound yielded vestiges of domestic walls, bearing traces of wooden materials and reeds together with small, carved mud bricks placed on the original yellowish brown ground level. According to Huang these material remains would suggest architecture based on aboveground structures with sun dried mud brick, possibly with poles and thatched roofs.³⁵ Massive walled architectural features are also characteristic of the oasis architecture of the contemporary Oxus Civilisation of western Central Asia.³⁶ Also the flexed body posture and certain funerary items found in Yanbulake would find counterparts within the Bactrio-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC).³⁷

Tianshanbeilu

Aside stands another important archaeological site that may provide the evidence of cultural contact between Xinjiang region and Gansu province in the latter part of the 2nd millennium BCE: Yamansukuang Linchangban otherwise known as Yalinban or Tianshanbeilu, dated slightly earlier than Yanbulake.³⁸ Discovered at the end of the 1980s the site yielded 35 burials including two different sets of funerary assemblages, one very close to the late Siba-Huoshagou pottery production in manufacture (circa 1700 BCE) and stylistic features, the other bearing similarities with northern Xinjiang pottery production of the Jungar-Altai region with strong Afanasievo (3rd – 2nd millennia BCE) and Andronovo influences.³⁹ Furthermore, these cultures apparently shared similar economic strategies, developing a heavy dependence on pastoralism and animal

³⁵Huang Wenbi 1983:3.

³⁶[Hiebert 1994]. An intermediary link could be provided by the Dashly oasis burials in the Amu Darya region of Bactria [P'yankova 1994: 355-372].

³⁷Sarianidi 1990

³⁸Chang E 1989:274-5.

³⁹[Li Shuicheng 1998]. By the first millennium CE, these areas were often mentioned in the historical sources as linked with Gansu and Central China in the East, and to the Junge'er basin and the highlands to the north [Di Cosmo 1994: 1092-1126]. The historical evidence may suggest the pre-existence of such link back in time, during the first and perhaps the second millennia BCE.

husbandry.⁴⁰ Perhaps, the presence of stylistic elements showing strong BMAC affinities could be explained as indirectly carried by Andronovo people into Xinjiang from further west. On the other hand, burial customs do conform to the standard Yanbulake norm, with corpses in flexed posture buried in chambers built with sun-dried mud-bricks. The presence of Siba-related painted pottery in such an early site would demonstrate a direct migration trajectory of Eastern Mongoloid groups coming from the Hexi corridor in Gansu province and directed westwards, through the Gobi Desert, towards the Hami grassland, in an ecological habitat similar to the one they left behind that could be suitable to their traditional way of subsistence.

Zhukaigou cultural horizon

In 1974 the archaeological site of Zhukaigou was identified at some 10 km north of Yijinhuoluo Qi in central south-western Inner Mongolia. From 1977 onwards the site has undergone various excavation projects, the most important led by Tian in 1984.⁴¹ Chinese archaeologists have marked the site as 'type-site' for its archaeological relevance.⁴² In fact, it seems that the cultural sphere of influence of Zhukaigou spread out over a rather vast area in central south-western Inner Mongolia, with sites scattered to the east and to the north along the large bent of the Yellow River. Several related sites have been identified especially in Jungar Qi area, such as Dakou, Zhangjialuo, Chenjialiang and Zhangjialiang.⁴³ In Jingshuihe county, Heidaigou, Ashan near Baotou⁴⁴, Huangtupi near Hohhot and other minor sites in Liangcheng county such as Maoqinggou, Shuanggucheng, Bancheng and Xingshubei have all been related to the Zhukaigou cultural horizon. Thus, it would appear that the overall distribution of Zhukaigou culture would cover northern Shaanxi, central and northern Shanxi, extending eastwards to northern Hebei (Zhangjiakou site) and westwards to the Helanshan Mountains. From the archaeological survey it appears that the majority of the villages were situated on slopes above the water sources, indicating a preferential economic relationship with water (used for transportation and daily food supply).

Zhukaigou site is distributed within an area of approximately 2 squared kilometres divided into seven different sections, whilst stratigraphic analysis revealed five chronological stages, dating from the late Longshan period (ca. 2000 BCE) to the mid Shang dynasty period (1200 BCE) [Fig.3].

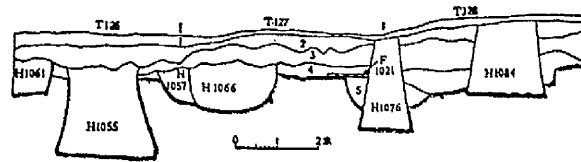
⁴⁰Chen and Hiebert 1995: 243-300.

⁴¹ The archaeological report of this type-site has been published in Tian 1988. Cfr. Linduff 1995.

⁴² The site was further considered as the source for later 'Ordos bronze culture' [Tian and Guo 1988: 257-74].

⁴³ Described in Nei Menggu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1983.

⁴⁴ Nei Menggu Shehui Kexueyuan 1984.



图二 T126—128 北盘地层剖面图
1. 黄土 2. 黑灰土 3. 黄花土 4. 灰黄土 5. 黄砂土

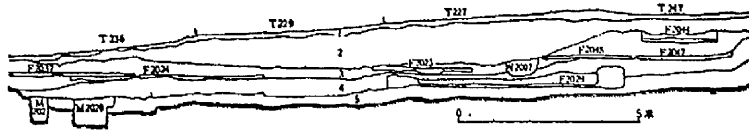


Fig. 3 Zhukaigou levels [Nei Menggu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1988: pl.2]

The depth of strata signals a long-term residency *in situ*, whilst the hybrid nature of its material culture points out to connections with other cultures of the Northern Zone, with southern Siberia and metropolitan China. From the analysis of the archaeological material unearthed so far, Zhukaigou cultural development bespeaks of an early Longshanoid origin linked to western Henan and southern Shanxi. Then during the mid 2nd millennium BCE (2nd and 3rd strata), Qijia inputs from the Gansu - Qinghai area reached the zone, probably via the Yellow River, shaping the artistic production of pottery jars and of the first small bronze utensils. The adoption of alien (from Qijia) technologies (bronze metallurgy and possibly wheel-thrown pottery) and styles could signal the pacific arrival of a new ethnic group on the scene. From the 14th century onwards (4th and 5th strata), Shang influence crept in, first with Erlitou-related architectural features of the residential space, then with the emergence of Erligang ritual bronze vessels in local elite tombs. Dog sacrifice and scapulomancy were also incorporated into the pre-existing burial rituals, signalling the strong influence exerted by Shang ideology on Zhukaigou social dynamics.⁴⁵

The large distribution of storage pits for different goods (of cylindrical and round-angled square shape) and the lesser number of household units would suggest a small but formalised social structure composed by familial groups who developed a sedentary economy based on grain cultivation. In particular these environmental conditions would have been suitable for 'sedentism',⁴⁶ rather than sedentarism. The former term has been used by Stephen Plog to refer to groups in which the majority of the population uses facilities and structures within a village all year long, without necessarily residing in it.⁴⁷ Sedentism appears to be closely related to agricultural dependency. It is partly

⁴⁵ Although an incipient form of scapulomancy already emerged in the 1st and 3rd strata at Zhukaigou, independently from Shang custom, where different animal bones were used.

⁴⁶ Linduff 1995.

characterised by the increase of volume of storage facilities (to lessen the risk of surplus failure dependent on meteorological hazards) and by their increased association with individual residences rather than communal areas, as part of formalised village plans. This phenomenon reflects the shift from the concept of communal ownership of resources to belief in more circumscribed ownership. Excavated material from the oldest level (late Longshan horizon) further highlights a partial activity of animal husbandry (pigs, oxen and sheep bones have been located within the refusal area inside the residential compound) and a complementary use of hunting (inferred by the recovery of arrows). Environmental context should also be considered: Zhukaigou is situated in the loess highland south of the Yinshan and north of the Gansu corridor. At that time, the natural vegetation ranged from loess covered by grass and shrubs, to xerophytic vegetation to steppes and prairies. It was not an ideal agricultural area for the sustenance of a large number of persons, let alone an entire people, and did not encourage the introduction of farming techniques. On the other hand, the fertile plains in the surrounding hills would have been suitable for pasturing large and small hoofed animals.⁴⁸

Mortuary practices at Zhukaigou seem to be fairly homogeneous throughout the centuries. The most observed burial typology comprises of a vertical pit of rectangular plan, generally hosting a single occupant (sometimes a couple in multiple burials⁴⁹) buried supine with extended limbs and the head facing north. The only variant is constituted by the steady increase of pottery vessels in the inventory and the later inclusion of small bronze artefacts and then vessels. The pots, including grey, brown and polished black tripods (*li*), jars (*guan*) pedestal cups (*dou*) were consistently placed closely around the body of the deceased, a space confinement, which could help to define the meaning of such objects, probably artefacts used by the dead in his/her lifetime. The lack of internal horizontal variability in burial structure could indicate a rather homogeneous social construct with no explicit frictions and possibly deficient of complex societal hierarchies, a status quo that went on for several centuries until the abrupt contact with the Shang state-based society changed the socio-economic relationships.

By analysing the burial behaviour then, such social construct seemed not to have considered even gender-sex categorisations, but only age differentiation, at least between adults and children, which seems to have been acknowledged and presumably conceptualised into a formalised rite of passage. Furthermore, the presence of human

⁴⁷ Plog 1990: 177-99.

⁴⁸ Cribb 1991.

⁴⁹ In this case, usually the female body is stretched on a side facing the male, expressing a specific gender relationship.

immolation would signal the formation of some sort of slaves system in phase three (17th-16th c. BCE), which apparently did not last long since in the following phase (15th c. BCE) being replaced by another alien practice: the sacrifice of dogs. Such ritual was a common activity among Shang elite, and its appearance in Zhukaigou further highlights the strong link bounding the two cultures.

Graveyards are usually separated from the residential compound, where, instead, only few children buried in urns have been found. These children found within the communal area were placed in the proximity of household units (suggesting their familiar appurtenance). The presence of children mortuary urns is quite unique and distinctive of Zhukaigou, as in most of the other prehistoric cultures of the 2nd millennium BCE investigated in this chapter there is scarce if none archaeological evidence of such practice [Fig.4]. Yet their presence is also circumscribed, given the limited number of them discovered, when compared with adult burials in the cemetery.⁵⁰ This phenomenon could be ascribed to the lack of sufficient archaeological evidence (as most of the residential compounds have not survived up to the present), yet the percentage and proportion between the number of residential units and baby urns would otherwise signal a specific practice related to a particular social group (displaying a distinctive status or a specific ethnic appurtenance). On the basis of the archaeological data extrapolated so far, it is indeed difficult to trace. Moreover, it should be pointed out that often past mortuary complexes do not reflect the totality of the respected culture, but only the customs of a selected sub-group of the population that had direct access to resources and authority within the social setting. This attitude is well reflected in the penury of children burials, notwithstanding the considerable evidence that in prehistoric times at least half of the living individuals in any given community were indeed children, and of these almost 50% would have died prematurely for contingent natural causes.⁵¹ So it seems that in the case of Zhukaigou, only selected children were buried in this particular way, whilst the large majority of the infant population simply would not be afforded burial interment. The practise of cremate the body further impairs the analysis as it is impossible to determine whether the children were perinatal infants or elder children. Comparable examples of perinatal infants burials accompanied by ceramic vessels are found in Hungary,⁵² where neonates were recovered from habitation contexts (underneath domestic floor), but in this case the author suggested a phenomenon of tacit sex-biased male infanticide and neglect, which cannot be substantiated in Zhukaigou, in the absence of alternative kinds of children burials.

⁵⁰ 19 infant urns discovered so far, against more than 300 adult tombs [Tian 1988].

⁵¹ Chamberlain 1997: 248-250.

⁵² Rega 1997: 229-247.

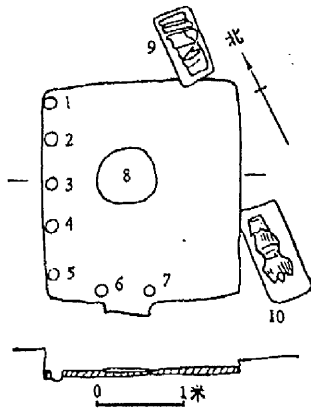


Fig. 4 Location of *wengguan*-type children urns [Nei Menggu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1988: fig 14, p.312]

The presence of some infant burials in an off-burial area would bespeak of a codified rite of passage, demarcating the different social roles of children and adults within Zhukaigou culture. The early integration of children into the social context may reflect a number of factors relating to the society itself. In general group mobility, economic stress, workloads and the regulation of family size are cited

among the reasons for the lack of consideration of young children in a wide range of societies.⁵³ In Zhukaigou, stratigraphic data would suggest a long residency *in situ*, reflecting a quite stable subsistence program based on a mixed economic strategy that could afford the burial expression to children.⁵⁴

Associated artefacts generally comprise ceramic vessels; what is worth noticing is the earlier appearance of snake-patterned *li* tripods in these urn-pits (*weng guan*) meant for infant interment in level 3, (where the largest incidence of baby urns - 7- has been detected), and their later emergence as adult burial items in level 5.⁵⁵ The same phenomenon also occurs with another pottery typology, the button-banded *guan* jar. Thus it seems that comparable ceramic objects found in adult graves could be two phases later than their counterparts in children urn-pits. This shift of location from infant urn-pits to adult interments may reflect a change in the meaning attached to these items. Their conceptual shift is exemplified by inclusion in tombs of level 5 dated to the early Shang period, and by their complete absence in children urn-pits from the same stratum. Vertical (through time) burial variability is defined by the progressive inclusion of pottery typologies from alien sources (Qijia culture), which would suggest a non-conflicting situation, rather than a social differentiation based on ethnic grounds.⁵⁶ The inventory also comprises polished oracle bones and remains of jawbones of sacrificed domestic animals such as sheep and pigs. Their increased occurrence in tombs attests the intensification of the ritual practice of sacrifice, sometimes even including human victims, perhaps used as a means to ritualise the control of the social setting (which appears to be very stratified during this period).

Social differentiation can be extrapolated from difference in burial dimensions and

⁵³ Mays 1995.

⁵⁴ Lillie 1997: 212-228.

⁵⁵ Tian and Guo 1988.

⁵⁶ Linduff 1995: 140.

inventory (quantitatively) especially from phase IV onwards.⁵⁷ Infiltration or replacement of previous autochthonous ethnic groups may have happened later on during the mid 2nd millennium BCE. The occurrence of Shang weapons and ritual vessels in Zhukaigou tombs of the elite dated approximately to that period may indicate a process of implantation and acculturation of Shang social structuring rules through persistent contact. The nature of this contact is yet to be fully understood. Archaeological evidence excludes the hypothesis of a direct rule strategic relationship, since in Zhukaigou there is no trace of important administrative architectural features that might recall Shang models of the Zhengzhou-Erligang period. The occurrence of well-known ritual items of the Shang elite in a limited number of tombs in Zhukaigou and, particularly, the synchronous presence of ritual vessels and weapons may signify a specific type of social inequality within this context. Michael Rowland's revision of Wallerstein's concept of 'core-periphery' employed in a Neolithic historical context may provide interesting hints to the understanding of this socio-political phenomenon.⁵⁸ In fact, Chinese Northern Zone provides a fine example of what Rowland defines as a 'multiple cores' socio-economic interaction system, characterised by overlapping geographically-disparate core regions (*foci* of cultural development), each of which exploited local immediate resources. Local exploitation in Zhukaigou is manifest for instance in the use of a specific metallurgy rarely encountered in metropolitan China: in fact the edges of most of the weapons and tools from the site were either annealed after casting or finished by hot hammering.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the composition of the bronze alloy in *ding* and *jue* vessels (which does not follow Shang criteria) and the discovery of a vessel ceramic mould *in situ* would signal the existence of a local independent manufacturing centre, exploiting local metal resources.

Relations between a dynastic centre and a frontier area can range from direct control (through the establishment of colonial sovereigns), to indirect rule through state patronage of the local elite (clienteles) to simple trade exchange. In the case of Zhukaigou it seems reasonable to think of indirect (rather than direct) strategy of pervasive ideological control by the dynastic centre, constituting a rather ambiguous relationship. Katheryn Linduff has proposed a model of interaction between multiple cores, whereby small local communities such as Zhukaigou, would compete by way of trade for dealings with the Central Plain state, through non-hierarchical or hegemonic control.⁶⁰ In this individualistic strategic system, alliances and intercultural exchanges

⁵⁷ Linduff 1995: 140.

⁵⁸ Rowland 1987.

⁵⁹ Han Rubin has extrapolated a major consistency in manufacturing technique in the 15 bronze objects from the site [Han Rubin 1992].

⁶⁰ Linduff 1995:133-145.

would be fluid and rather ephemeral in nature, consequently very difficult to detect in the archaeological reconstruction. According to this theory, the limited number of elite tombs yielding exceptional items of prestige could be interpreted as the burials of the newly established social class of trans-border dealers who monopolised the trading network. At the same time the presence of bronze and pottery items of various provenience (China and southern Siberian steppes) could signal the acquisition of prestige not from a single source (China), but both at an infra-regional and inter-regional level. It is however surprising the total absence of hoards or deposits with Shang prestige objects within Zhukaigou area.⁶¹ Wealth distributions implied by hoarding differ in an important respect from those implied by grave goods and offerings. The latter represent public rituals, conveying public messages regardless the size of the targeted recipient. In contrast, hoarding is a private and secular manifestation of non-display: there is nothing ideological about it, and it consequently provides an objective indicator of value distribution. This situation can be compared to that occurred along the northern Roman frontier in the first half of the 1st millennium CE.⁶² In the Germanic territory free from direct Roman jurisdiction archaeological evidence consist of the most luxurious Roman artefacts (bronze, glass and silver vessels) in a larger number than within the Roman political sphere of influence (*limes*). Germanic tribes were principally concerned with the acquisition of Roman luxury goods, which together with weapons represented important status symbols within their social context. Social implications of these Roman artefacts are better expressed in the inventories of rich male and female graves within this territory.⁶³ Local Germanic tribes were not directly engaged with the Romans, but were greatly affected by their seducing policy of 'diplomatic gifts' (bribery). Apparently, indigenous peoples conducted a more peaceful life than that experienced by their neighbours in the buffer area closer to the Roman territory. The interesting absence of signs of capital accumulation (in the form of hoards or deposits) may signify that the alien objects placed in the elite tombs lacked purchasing value. On the other hand, it has been variously stressed that material culture, as represented in burials, is generally manipulated by dominant social groups in the quest for political legitimacy.⁶⁴ Following Giddens and Bourdieu ideological manipulation of the material world is seen as misrepresenting hegemonic social relations in a number of ways that include attempts to conceal domination.⁶⁵ In this respect, alien prestige items may represent the tangible symbolic expression of alliance, both social and political, the significance of which was

⁶¹ No such remains have been reported in the archaeological records so far.

⁶² Hedeager 1987.

⁶³ This area is also archaeologically known as the 'horizon of the princely graves' for these astonishingly furbished tombs.

⁶⁴ Renfrew and Shennan 1982.

personally linked to an oligarchy of entrepreneurs. Therefore they did not circulate as part of a thriving trading network, marking material wealth of the owners. On the contrary they signalled the role played out in political alliances with the larger agrarian-based state and were indicative of some knowledge of an alternative way of life. Their introduction in the graves may indicate that their distribution was under the control of a limited number of families. According to Hedeager, these may have been the actual terms of the relationship between the small Germanic tribal units and the large Roman Empire, played out as a diplomatic strategic policy with the intentional scope of expanding the Roman cultural sphere of interest into the free Germanic land.

In Zhukaigou, the limited number of elite graves yielding alien 'prestige' objects (ritual vessels and weapons), the absence of hoards and deposits containing such items and the relative peaceful conditions could provide interesting elements of similarity with the Princely Graves horizon situation, although historical and political contexts are different.⁶⁶ This comparative analysis may suggest that the relationship between Zhukaigou and the Shang involved more than a simple trading agreement, expressing a rather politically oriented strategy of subtle acculturation.

Lijiaya cultural horizon

Although very few excavations have been carried out scientifically up to the present, the cultural influence of the Lijiaya complex, from the material evidence gathered so far from occasional findings, would have stretched from northern Shaanxi province to north-western Shanxi province, along both banks of the Yellow River, lasting for approximately four hundred years, from the 14th to the 11th century BCE, synchronous to the Shang apogee of the Yinxu phase. Beyond the most clearly and closely affiliated sites discovered in these adjacent areas,⁶⁷ Lijiaya influence was also felt in Inner Mongolia, in the Ordos region of the Zhukaigou culture (Jungar Qi area),⁶⁸ and further to the east in Hebei at the famous site of Chaodaogou in Qinglong xian,⁶⁹ and in Liaoning province. Given the extent of its territorial boundaries, it is safe to assume that Lijiaya culture must have played a salient role along both banks of the Yellow River during the latter part of

⁶⁵ Bourdieu 1975: 77-85 and Giddens 1979.

⁶⁶ For instance no traces of fortifications surrounding the residential compound have been discovered.

⁶⁷ For a list of sites see Lu 1987: 214-225.

⁶⁸ Tian 1983.

⁶⁹ According to Nicola Di Cosmo [1986] and Hollman [1992] the sites of Chaodaogou (Hebei) and Linzheyu in Baode xian (Shanxi) would constitute a unique independent cultural entity known as Chaodaogou culture. In this study they have been associated with Lijiaya sphere for their evident material affinity [Hebei Kaogu Yanjusuo 1962, Hebei Bowuguan 1980].

the 2nd millennium BCE, permeating and overlapping contemporary cultural groups to the east and to the north-west.

The ancient settlement (citadel) of Lijiaya type-site in Qingjian County has been first excavated in 1982.⁷⁰ The site stands on steep terraces forming a natural barrier at the intersection of the Wuding River with the Yellow River. Watercourses have deeply affected the extent of natural erosion on the geophysical landscape, causing a serious disruption of the four archaeological strata. However, the morphology of the site shows apparent similarities with Zhukaigou sites, as both cultural complexes seem to privilege proximity to watercourses for their proto-urban development. Its roughly rectangular plan measures circa half a kilometre from east to west and circa 200 metres from north to south. Walls of rammed earth delineate the eastern, north-eastern and south-eastern sides, which are the only ones survived to the present. Their construction technique seems to have been derived from late Neolithic Longshan and Shang prototypes. This architectural similarity would point to some sort of connection with Shang centres to the south and would further suggest some kind of administrative centre. Remains of walls have also been detected, suggesting a defensive strategy. Within the citadel, residential units display a square plan with a lateral hearth usually placed by the back wall.⁷¹ Inside the domestic perimeter different types of utilitarian pottery have been unearthed, pointing to a sedentary economy. Animal bones, evidence of a meat diet, too have been discovered adjacent to the residential walls, probably conceived as some kind of discharge area. In this respect, the spatial differentiation may witness a rather high level of social organisation within the village.

As already pointed out, most of the material evidence of Lijiaya cultural horizon came from sporadic surface recognitions and very rarely undisturbed tombs have been detected. Burial typologies generally include vertical pits with a single or two occupants lying in supine position with both arms and legs extended, and head oriented to the north.

At Jixian, Shangdoncun in Shanxi province one isolated rectangular vertical tomb oriented to the north-east has yielded a single male occupant buried supine with limbs extended furnished with a simple attire of four bronze objects [Fig.5].⁷² A *guan qiong fu* battle-axe was placed on the left side of his skull, whilst a jingle-pommelled dagger was discovered on the right side, and two spoons on the left side of his waist.

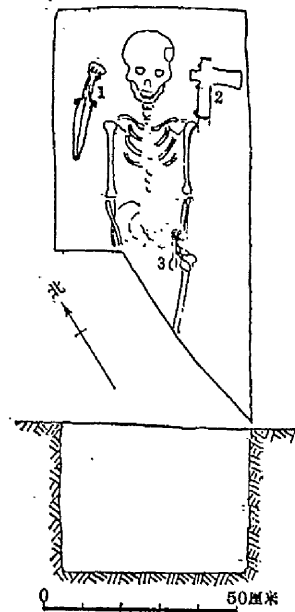
⁷⁰ Qingjian xian Wenwuguan 1983.

⁷¹ Traces of fire roasting have been detected.

⁷² Jixian Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1985: 848.

Fig. 5 Jixian Shangdongcun tomb [Jixian kaogu yanjiusuo 1985: pl 2].

This tomb represents just an example of the sort of funerary assemblage one may expect to find in Lijiaya cultural horizon; typical Shang socketed *fu*-axes are found together with pommel daggers of local nomadic flavour, especially in Shanxi province. Apart from the stylistic implications that one may infer (we will talk later about this aspect of material culture in burial contexts), the important fact is that funerary inventories in Lijiaya tombs are constituted by bronze items only, and for the majority, weapons, especially daggers, knives and battle axes. From the analysis of the placement of such objects within



the tomb at Shangdongcun, it seems clear that they reflect their proper function in life, as they have been put at easy grasp for the dead warrior and do not seem to emphasise a purely ritualistic connotation, like a placement above the head or underneath the feet would instead do. The issue of the deposition of grave goods within the burial is an important aspect in the acknowledgement of the active human agency in the organisation of burial attitudes. Grave goods have various roles pertaining to the living (e.g. gifts to the deceased, sacrifices and sentimental tokens) as well as the dead (providing entrance to the afterlife),⁷³ and these are rendered explicit by the way they are placed within the burial context. Thus one would infer that for Lijiaya people, weapons and consequently military prowess played an important role in constructing social networks, enhanced by the events occurring in their historical frame.

Furthermore, it appears that pottery vessels were all recovered from within the domestic enclosures and none of them featured in connection with burial inventories. This neat space demarcation may in fact reflect a strict codified rule, whereby only bronzes and other metal ornaments would be considered worthy funerary paraphernalia, whilst ceramic containers would be confined to the utilitarian sphere. Lijiaya-related sites indeed represent the only case of clear role demarcation for different materials along the western section of Chinese Northern Zone in the 2nd millennium BCE. Within the domestic enclosures of Lijiaya citadel 3 children funerary urns have been excavated.⁷⁴ Large pottery tripods hosting single individuals between 3 and 5 years of age were placed in vertical pits. This practice recalls infant interments in Zhukaigou, although in

⁷³ Dark 1995.

⁷⁴ Zhang and Lu 1988: 50

these cases skeleton remains have been found in pieces and not cremated, thus allowing the age of the young occupants to be determined. However, at Lijiaya, no cemetery has been identified so far in the proximity, leaving questions on age discrimination unanswered. The co-occurrence of similar burial behaviours for infants in Zhukaigou and Lijiaya could hint to a cultural connection between the two entities. As mentioned in the introduction, children interments may sometimes yield specific evidence for demic migrations and cultural diffusion.⁷⁵ Yet in this case a contextualised analysis of various elements of their material culture would seem to exclude that.

The prevalence of battle-related paraphernalia may have partially reflected the tense relationship between this ethnic group and the Shang, who resided close by. This complex relationship is also suggested by the synchronous presence of large Shang ritual vessels, which accompanied the weapons in the tomb. Their presence, however, could be explained as some sort of war-booty taken from the Shang enemy on the battleground. It is significant that Lijiaya territory has been traditionally reputed the homeland of some of Shang's most troublesome neighbours.⁷⁶ Shang oracle bones and other written sources dated to the Zhou period provide a considerable amount of information regarding the names of the people who inhabited the steppe land area to the north-west of the Central Plain and frequently interacted with the Shang. These peoples are usually referred to as *fang*, a term signifying both 'region' and 'people' or 'tribe', accompanied by a prefix probably indicating their ethnic appurtenance. The historical documentation is however too fragmentary to allow a definite identification of each groups. It is likely that the definition given by the Chinese chronicles indicates groups that may have been ethnically affiliated. Most of them, such as the Gong fang, the Gui fang and the Tu fang were located between northern Shaanxi and northern Shanxi, within the Lijiaya cultural horizon.⁷⁷ In particular, Lu indicates the Gui fang as the most suitable group responsible for Lijiaya archaeological relics.⁷⁸ From the analysis of oracle bones and Shang-related bronze inscriptions, Li Boqian argues that sites (more than 30, scattered over the Jin-Shan plateau) belonging to a common cultural horizon (Lijiaya) would have indeed played out their relationship with Shang differently.⁷⁹ In fact, Lingshi xian Jingjie site on the northern side of the Huoshan mountains yielded bronzes belonging both to the classic Shang repertoire and affined to Lijiaya inventory, but inscriptions on the former group bespeak of friendly rather than hostile relationships.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Burmeister 2000.

⁷⁶ Prusek 1971:31-46.

⁷⁷ Chang 1986: 249.

⁷⁸ Lu 1987: 221.

⁷⁹ Li Boqian 1998b.

⁸⁰ Shanxi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1986: 1-18.

Burial structure and patterns bear similarities with metropolitan Shang: dog sacrificial pits have been found adjacent to the tombs, whilst a bronze *gui* had a horse depicted on the cavetto, a motif drawn from the northern repertoire.⁸¹

Differences in strategic policies would suggest a network of *fang* polities adhering to a common cultural substratum, but carrying out specific relationships with the Shang. Although it is difficult at present to further identify each single group, it is clear that in the majority of cases their relationship with the Shang was not played out in friendly terms. Therefore, it seems likely that the relationship between Lijiaya and the state-level Shang dynasty was conceived and played out differently from the relationship between Zhukaigou and the Shang. The Shang apparently fought many battles in the north and west frontier area, especially during the Yinxu period (13th-12th centuries BCE). In this respect, Lijiaya may have acted as a sort of buffer zone between the Central Plains and Zhukaigou during the 14th and 13th century BCE, halting the aggressive Shang policy at the middle reach of the Yellow River.

⁸¹ See Fig. 5, Chapter 6 [Shanxi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1986: fig 8.2].

1st millennium BCE

The archaeological remains from sites of the north-western frontier areas of China dated to the 1st millennium BCE witness important changes from the previous period in both economic and social strategies. The archaeological scenario is now characterised by a greater number of horse fittings and weapons, and by societies practising a mixed economy increasingly dominated by animal husbandry that will eventually lead them into full nomadic pastoralism. Residential sites are fewer than earlier, often represented by fortified citadels with no traces of proper house foundations, possibly reflecting a more mobile lifestyle; burials and funerary rituals instead become an important (if not unique) means of social advertisement, and the only parameter in the archaeological investigation.

During the second half of the millennium, clear signs of the emergence of Scythian-related cultures are found among the burial inventories: weapons, horse gear and personal ornaments decorated with specific zoomorphic motifs are found throughout the north-western frontier area, from Xinjiang to Gansu, Ningxia and Ordos areas. Together with horse riding equipment, also come various innovative metallurgical techniques, including iron casting and different gold and silver metal-smithing practises, further suggesting an increased level of cultural contact with the west. This period is mainly characterised by the increasingly important role played out by steppe people of western origin, through trade, migrations and subtle cultural diffusion in the transmission of information between the East and the West.

Xindian cultural horizon

Xindian culture has been named after the type-site discovered in 1924 in Lintao xian, Gansu province. Geographically it is distributed on the lower reaches of the Tao, Daxia and Huangshui rivers, all tributaries of the Huang He.⁸² It extends westward to the east of Ledu xian in Qinghai province and its remains are also found in Weiyuan xian and Longxi xian along the upper reaches of the Wei River.⁸³ Systematic excavations have been conducted at Jijiachuan and Zhangjiiazui in Yongjing xian.⁸⁴ Recent analysis based prevalently on pottery comparative studies speculated that Xindian culture must have undergone three subsequent phases of development, further subdivided into 7 different

⁸² Xu Yongjie 1993.

⁸³ An Zhimin 1959b: 379.

⁸⁴ Xie Duanjiu 1962 and 1980.



cultural layers, covering a span of time of almost 600 years, from 1400 to 800 BCE.⁸⁵ The Shanjiatou site in Minhe xian, which yielded two cultural strata, represents the first phase (1400 BCE). Jijiachuan residential site yielded further two cultural layers and represents the second phase between 1400 and 1100 BCE, whilst Zhangjiazui residential site and its three cultural strata belong to the third phase (1100-800 BCE). As it appears clear from the classification, the type-sites for each phase are prevalently residential in nature, yielding different types of pottery vessels, presumably utilitarian in scope. The entire chronological sequence has been based on typological seriation of ceramic vessels and burial complexes identified so far have been dated accordingly, often placing tombs from the same site into different chronological phases.⁸⁶

Shanjiatou phase

Shanjiatou site, datable to the first phase of development, located in Qinghai province, Minhe county, was first excavated in 1980 and 33 tombs were brought to light.⁸⁷ Its cultural affiliation is still debated, as some scholars would consider it belonging to Xindian, some to the transitional phase between Qijia and Xindian, whilst others would relate it to the early Kayue culture. As in fact two different sets of ceramic inventories have been unearthed from different tombs: one associated with Qijia culture, comprising stylistic features such as flat bottom, double large handles and cord impression pattern, the other, quite distinctively, including round bottomed, bulbous bodied, vessels with cord impressions and painted decoration. The latter inventory, associated with Xindian culture, is also found in other sites in eastern Qinghai, namely Liuwan (on top of Qijia strata), Minhe Hetaozhuang Xiaohan and Minhe Bianqiang, as well as in more than 10 other sites, including Linxia Lianhuatai and Longjiasi, Yongjing Yanchang, and Heitouzui sites.⁸⁸

Burials feature a rectangular vertical earthen pit structure, sometimes with rounded corners or elliptical in plan. Most of the times the occupant was placed supine with legs extended (19 tombs) but there are cases in which the deceased was laid on one side in crouched position (1), or faced down (2), although consistently oriented to the northeast. In few tombs (4) evidence of secondary interment practice has also been found (M23). The dead were usually accompanied by a small number of funerary items, either placed behind the head or by the flanks or legs or even below the feet [Fig.6]. Inventory often comprised double-handled *guan*-jars and *pan*-vessels in coarse red pottery, with beater

⁸⁵ Zhang Xuezheng et al 1993.

⁸⁶ Zhang Xuezheng et al 1993: 135, tab. 3.

⁸⁷ Ge Sangben and Chen Honghai 1988.

⁸⁸ Qinghai sheng wenwu guanlichu 1992 and Zhang Xuezheng et al 1993.

marks. Other personal accessories and ornaments were usually placed on the body or at its close proximity. Bone items such as awls, needles, tubular fittings and curved pendants were brought to light together with one jade *kuang* pendant and one decayed bronze object identified by the excavators as a primeval belt-hook (M31).⁸⁹

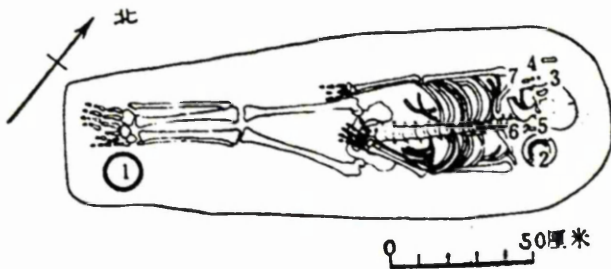


Fig. 6 Shanjiatou vertical pit (M3) [Qinghai sheng wenwu guanlichu 1992, fig 4, p.27]

Some scholars believe that the first phase at Shanjiatou could be actually ascribed totally to Qijia,⁹⁰ whilst others, like An Zhimin, would consider it as an incipient Xindian culture. Judging from pottery comparative analysis, the influence of Qijia on Xindian pottery inventory seems quite strong in the first phases, while it diluted its presence as time went by.

Jijiachuan phase

The second phase also referred to as the Jijiachuan phase,⁹¹ is the classical Xindian phase recognised by Andersson represented by dwelling sites at Huizuishan [Fig.7], in Taosha xian and Jijiachuan in Linxia xian, along the Tao He river valley and by the cemetery at Xindian (Xindian locality A)⁹² and Linxia Lianhuatai.⁹³

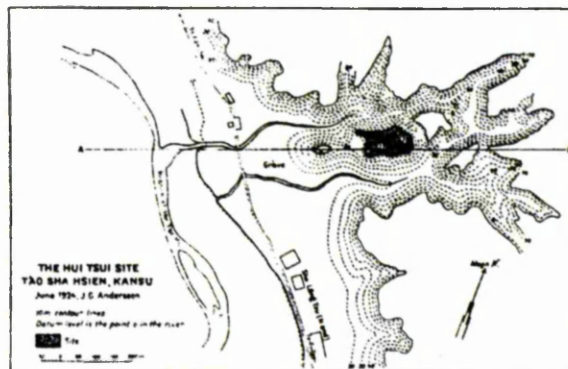


Fig.7 Huizuishan map drawn by Andersson [Andersson 1943: fig 49, p.168].

⁸⁹ Should this artefact be conclusively identified as a belt-hook, it would probably also be considered the earliest one found so far in China.

⁹⁰ Ibidem: 166 ff.

⁹¹ Su Bingqi 1993.

⁹² Burial sites belonging to this ceramic phase have been located in Lintao, Linxia and other places in Taosha such as the Sishiding site [Andersson 1943: 167-79; Xie Duanjiu 1962]. But also in Yongjing xian at Heitouzui, tombs datable to this phase have been found in sites already inhabited during the first phase (as well as at Minhe Hetao), suggesting a well-established long-lasting cultural tradition.

⁹³ Kaogu sheng wenwu gongzuodui et al 1988.

The Huizuishan dwelling site is located on a high terrace surrounded by deep ravines in a convenient location.⁹⁴ It is situated just above the Tao River plain in one of the several steep sloped terrace islands, which formed a natural fortress in ancient times. This elevated location, inconvenient for carrying water and other supplies from the plain underneath, suggests that the people of Xindian were probably induced to settle there for defensive purposes. The site yielded pottery, stone and bone implements, and turquoise and blue glass paste beads, half of a cowry shell, a bronze knife, and some bronze buttons. The bronze knife in particular has similar counterparts among the Shang knives, whilst pottery decoration of meander designs is reminiscent of Northern Zone bronze patterns.⁹⁵ No mention is made to house foundation recovery of any kind.

At Jijiachuan site two habitation units have been discovered (F1 and F2).⁹⁶ Their structure features an almost square plan, sunken floor with a round earthen stove (in the form of a cauldron) in the middle and a western entrance [Fig.8]. The remains suggest a wooden structured building with earthen walls spread with a grass-clay mixture coat. House foundations in Jijiachuan represent an important discovery: their structure is not seen elsewhere within the same archaeological horizon. Earlier Qijia dwellings feature a different plan, no use of flattened white-coated walls and a differently shaped cooking stove. Therefore Jijiachuan dwelling structure was not apparently derived from earlier local solutions, but either invented *ex-novo* or imported from somewhere else.

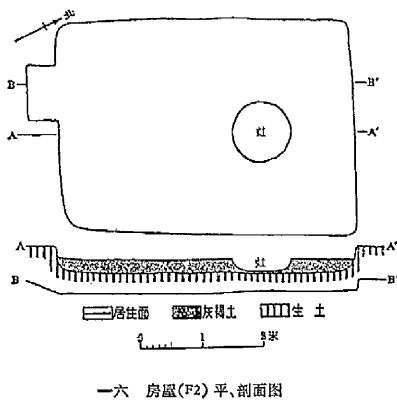


Fig. 8 House plan, Xindian type, Jijiachuan (F2) [Xie Duanjiu 1980: fig 16]

An incredibly high number of storage pits (41) have instead been unearthed from the site, of large, small round or rectangular sizes, yielding stone items and ceramic shards. Within the residential compound, rests of animal bones belonging to sheep, oxen, pigs, deer and mice (*muridae sp.*) were found either between the layers or inside the storage pits. The

majority of bones are from either sheep or pigs, suggesting the economic pre-eminence of these animal species. Animal husbandry must have been practised. The recovery of several bone and stone utilitarian tools used for cultivation also reflects the importance of agriculture in the Jijiachuan phase economic system. To the south-east of Jijiachuan residential site, a single rectangular vertical pit occupied by a single male individual,

⁹⁴ Andersson 1943:168.

⁹⁵ Wu 1938: 106.

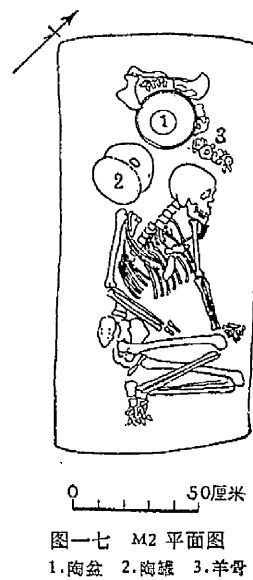
⁹⁶ Xie Duanjiu 1980.

buried on his left side, with bent knees and face to the north has been located [Fig.9].⁹⁷ In the pit, behind the occupant head, a pottery *guan*-jar, a tray and the skeleton of a sheep were found.

Fig. 9 Jijiachuan burial (M2) [Xie Duanjiu 1980: fig.17].

Crouched burial position represents quite a common feature along the Yellow River banks: Majiayao Banshan and Machang phases burials, Qijia, and some Shajing tombs as well, seem to follow the same funerary custom. This sequence somehow parallels the line of ceramic development from Majiayao pottery up to Xindian pottery, passing through Machang and Qijia. At Jijiachuan, in particular, legs were apparently tied up, the reason for such practice is unknown, although scholars speculate that it may symbolise the rebirth (foetus position) or to stop the danger of the dead soul from harming the living.⁹⁸ This inference would imply an already well-established concept of soul and transcendent power attached to human nature through death.

Xindian (A) in the Tao He valley is a burial site situated on the northern side of a big ravine close to the residential area. Its extension is of roughly 150 squared metres. Burials were of the vertical earthen pit type, oriented to the north, the body lying supine with legs extended. A small amount of burial paraphernalia was usually placed behind the head of the deceased. Not far from it, Andersson excavated another Xindian-related cemetery in the 1920s: Taosha Sishiding.⁹⁹ Burials from these two sites were quite poor in assemblage quantities. A very fine polished turquoise bead and one white bead are amongst the few remarkable objects brought to light. Interesting to notice is the practice of staining the deceased with red ochre, as part of a widespread funerary ritual, which is also encountered in neighbouring Shajing burial complexes. Linxia Lianhuatai burial complex yielded tombs datable to the Jijiachuan phase.¹⁰⁰ Three are the main typologies encountered: 1- the usual rectangular upright earthen pit, 2- an irregular shaped vertical earthen pit [Fig.10], 3- a rectangular vertical pit with recessed niche (catacomb style).



图一七 M2 平面图
1.陶盆 2.陶钵 3.羊骨

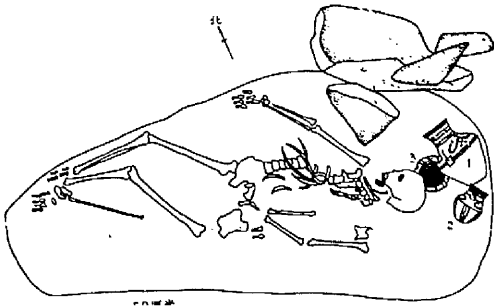
⁹⁷ Xie Duanjiu 1962.

⁹⁸ Xie Duanjiu 1980.

⁹⁹ Andersson 1943: 175.

¹⁰⁰ Gansu sheng wenwu gongzuodui et al 1988.

Fig. 10 Irregular vertical pit at Lianhuatai [Gansu sheng wenwu gongzuodui et al 1988: 8, fig 3].



From the quantitative analysis of the burial inventory of the three catacomb tombs found at the sites, one may suggest they were all relatively wealthy, comprising double handled *guan*-jars, globular looped *hu*-vases, bone tubules and beads, but overall they did not display any significant distinction from the group. The catacomb-style tomb represents the first and only instance within Xindian cultural horizon, suggesting an external origin. Mostly the individual occupant would lie supine with stretched limbs, although cases of scattered bones (signal of second interment practise or later sacrilege) and crouched positions are also encountered. The majority of the tombs yielded female individuals (11 out of 18 tombs). The inventory keeps being quite modest, with a few painted pottery vessels (*guan*-jars and *hu*-vases) placed, once again, behind the head, by the sides or, in the case of the catacomb-like tomb, placed inside the recessed hole dug out by the right side of the deceased. In just one single case, bronze (not only bone) roundels and tubular beads have been unearthed lying by the neck of the male deceased in M16,¹⁰¹ suggesting that personal ornamentation in the form of bronze necklaces might have been considered a privilege worn by the male population.

No apparent sex or age discrimination was certainly implied in the choice of the burial pottery, given its homogeneity in quantity and quality throughout the cemetery. A unique example of joint mother and child burial has been identified in a standard rectangular upright pit (M10): scattered bone fragments belonging to a female have been found together with the skull of a small baby. But apart from this exceptional discovery no signs of infant burials have been encountered throughout Xindian-related burial sites, and not even within domestic enclosures, as in the case of earlier Zhukaigou and Lijiaya cultural horizons.

¹⁰¹ An irregular vertical pit with signs of second interment.

Zhangjiazui phase

The third phase of cultural development is represented by three habitation sites located on the southern fringe of Yongjing county in Gansu province: Zhangjiazui, Hanjiazui, and Wanzhazui.¹⁰² No substantial burial complexes have been associated with this phase, so far. At Zhangjiazui, some storage pits belonging both to the Qijia and the Xindian periods have been found, although no residential units have been discovered. A total of 165 round and rectangular storage pits were found packed within a small area. They yielded various utilitarian tools, such as chipped stone axes with ground edges, stone spades, knives, spindle whorls, perforated disks, mortars and pestles, along with bone ornaments and a fragment of bronze vessel, a spearhead, three turquoise beads, and two pieces of bronze slugs. The high number of storage pits contrasts with the absolute absence of habitation remains within the residential enclosure. Certainly it speaks out of an intense and long-lasting 'storing' activity, probably linked to a sedentary economic strategy, yet the absence of dwellings foundations stands out as an archaeological conundrum.¹⁰³ The cultural layers further confirmed the long-lasting residency *in situ*, without solving the problem of the lack of architectural remains. Some animal bones were also discovered: according to the skeletal remains, cattle, sheep, horses, dogs, pigs and deer may have played an important role in the economic system of sustenance within Xindian-Zhangjiazui people. It is interesting to notice the appearance at this stage of horses in the domestic economy of the Xindian people. In the previous period, no equine skeletal remains were found amongst the animal bones discarded or placed inside the storage pits. From the scanty archaeological evidence at our disposal, it is clear that Zhangjiazui people engaged in agriculture (many lithic tools), animal husbandry (animal bones in discard areas and storage pits) and hunting activities (deer bones).

Shajing cultural horizon

J. Andersson first identified Shajing cultural remains in 1923-24 at Shajingcun in Minqin xian, two hundred kilometres north of Lanzhou, in Gansu province, where a cemetery and a fortress (the Liuhudong fort) were found.¹⁰⁴ Its cultural boundaries include Gulang, Minqin, Yongdeng, Yongchang and Zhangye counties in the Hexi corridor, in the arid land between the Huang He and the Qilian Mountains, drained by the Baiting River.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Chen Guoxian 1959, Xie Duanjiu 1980 and Su Bingqi 1993: 122-152.

¹⁰³ The pre-eminence of storage pits also occurred in the early stage of the Chust culture in ancient Ferghana Valley. Besides, the absence of formalised burial complexes would seem to parallel again some Chust settlements where the dead were buried outside the residential compound in the desert or in the ruins of a house but not in a formalised cemetery [Askharov 1992:447].

¹⁰⁴ Andersson, 1943: 197-215.

¹⁰⁵ An Zhimin 1956: 16. Gansu sheng Bowuguan 1981

While the Qijia culture in the Huanghe and Taohe valleys to the south gave way to the Xindian and Siwa cultures, the land in the north, on the border between the Huang He valley and the steppe, was occupied by a different cultural tradition, the Shajing. Remains and tombs are located in what is now desert. The environmental conditions have greatly affected the conservation of the sites, which are exposed above the ground and swept away by the constant wind. The relics are usually superimposed on those of the Machang type of the Majiayao culture.

Shajing and Liuhudong

Shajing site in Minqin xian is usually referred to as the type-site of the Shajing cultural horizon. It is a cemetery covering an area of approximately 19.500 square metres where forty-seven shaft-pit tombs have been brought to light.¹⁰⁶ Roughly half of the entire group of tombs have yielded complete skeletal remains: the occupants were placed supine with limbs extended or slightly flexed. In some case the bodies were lying on their sides with bent legs, but their heads were homogeneously oriented towards the north. Several skeletons show a reddish-brown stain, mostly on the skull, a practice reminiscent of Xindian ochre staining. Three children under 9 years of age have also been buried in the cemetery together with the adults. Gender differentiation is not yet clear from the archaeological evidence. Andersson referred to some of the tombs as certainly occupied by men or women and other tombs probably occupied by men, although he did not state whether his assumption was supported by physical anthropological data or by specific gender markers within the funerary inventory.

Sometimes pottery containers accompanied the deceased: *guan*-jars with round bottom, bulbous cups with single handle, with red slip of the lower part and triangular designs in white on red on the upper part are amongst the most commonly found vessels. Whilst red pottery is not found in great quantities, stone tools are more often found and are usually accompanied by bronzes. Some decayed bronze mirrors with handles, once wrapped in cloth were also excavated. In most cases, bronze knives and stone rings, turquoise pendants, carnelian beads, cowry shells (all ground flat and open at the back) and gold personal ornaments (rings and earrings made of wire) have been recovered from the graves. In one of the tombs a bronze arrowhead was found stuck into a vertebra of the buried body -possibly the cause of the death-.

At a distance of few yards from the main burial area, another graveyard (Shajing E) was found yielding similar funerary inventories. Close to the first cemetery (named by

¹⁰⁶ Andersson 1943: 203.

Andersson 'Shajing S'), 260 m to the northeast, at Liuhudong, a triangular citadel was erected within an area of 3.500 square metres (a rather small enclosure if compared with the extension of the cemetery).¹⁰⁷ Sandstone rocks were used for the foundation of the wall above which mud walls were built. The height of the surviving wall is 1.5 m. This structure points to a defensive role and suggests that the people of Shajing might have been sedentary agriculturists (an oblong perforated stone knife implies an agrarian economy), identified by the excavators as belonging to the Mongoloid family, who integrated their economic strategy with animal husbandry. Within the fortress enclosure, abundant finds were made inside close to the walls, whilst in the central part of the fortress digging yielded absolutely nothing.¹⁰⁸ However, this feature goes against the hypothesis of sedentary inhabitants, who would have instead left behind a relatively large array of discharged materials.

Sanjiaocheng and Hamadun

The sharp contrast between the bareness of the central part and the abundance of the interior area close to the walls occurs also at another fortress related to Shajing cultural horizon, Sanjiaocheng, 70 km west of Liuhudong. The reasons for such peculiar characteristic are still unknown. Between 1976 and 1981 Sanjiaocheng, in Yongchang xian, 20 km northeast from Jinchang city, was excavated revealing dwelling units and storage pits.¹⁰⁹ This area, located on a high plateau irrigated by several rivers coming from the Qilian Mountains to the north, is ecologically favourable for raising animals and provides fertile ground for agriculture. On the other end, the presence of several watercourses causes disruption with their frequent floods. Perhaps for this reason, the burial ground is situated on the top of a rather steep earth mound. The site not only yielded a residential site and a burial ground (Hamadun) associated with the Shajing culture, but remains of Majiayao foundations were also discovered. Sanjiaocheng and Hamadun sites can be roughly dated between the western Zhou period and the early Eastern Zhou period (Spring and Autumn phase), around the 9th and the 8th centuries BCE. The now triangular citadel has an original rectangular plan oriented to the south (154 x 132 m) with the entrance on the southern side. The latter displays two high poles (2.4 m), which were not made of stamped earth (neither were the foundations). The original entrance must have been rather small, measuring approx. 2.6 m. The walls must have been originally 6 to 8 metres wide and 4 metres high. The plan must have fit the

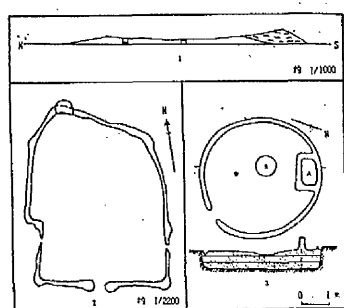
¹⁰⁷ According to Andersson report, the fort is described as "a circular construction, 50 m in diam. (...)", although the fragile mud walls crumbled down forming a gentle slope, "(...) which gives hardly the idea of the appearance of this fortification at the time when it was in use (...)" [Andersson 1943: 200].

¹⁰⁸ Andersson 1943: 201.

¹⁰⁹ Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1990.

natural environment with the walls built up by piling stones. Although three cultural strata have been identified, within the residential enclosure only 4 residential units have been detected [Fig.11]. They display a circular or elliptical plan, now marked by a narrow ditch, with the entrance to the south-east, internally provided with fire hearth (A) and circular cooking stove (B). Habitation F4 (illustrated) does not show any sign of post-holes. This would suggest a surface house conceived as a Mongolian *yurt*. Other units such as F1 and F2 on the other hand, still bear the marks of one or two post-holes, located close to the perimeter line.

Fig. 11 Plan of Sanjiaocheng citadel and residential unit F4 [Li Shuicheng 1994: fig 8, p. 520].



The site, although architecturally well developed and relatively well preserved, did not yield a vast array of artefacts. The majority of items recovered are represented by ceramic shards and uncompleted vessels. There are quite a large number of fragments, in comparison with the intact pieces. This idiosyncrasy could be related either to the difficult environmental conditions, or to a specific behavioural pattern associated with the Shajing people, who could have disposed of broken ceramic vessels in discard areas.

One km to the southwest stands the burial area of Hamadun. A total number of 20 graves have been discovered, all oriented to the north, scattered around without an apparent linear order.

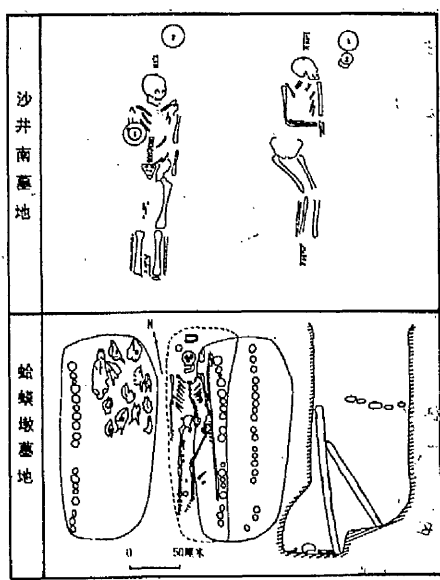
Two are the types of burial structure: either a tomb chamber with a lateral niche (catacomb style), or a rectangular vertical pit. In both cases they yielded a single occupant, with no apparent signs of second interment. 12 catacomb chambers have been brought to light.

They consist of a rectangular vertical pit (ca 220-cm x 105 cm, 230 cm deep) to which a lateral burial chamber has been added on the western wall. On the eastern part the vertical pit consists of two layers. On the lower platform lies the single occupant buried supine with extended limbs, the head towards the northeast.

Skeletons were covered all over with lime and mats made of reed and splendid *achnatherum*. The opening of M15 was originally blocked with piles of vertical and slanting thin wooden logs, covered with reeds, while bone remains of bovines, equine

and ovine heads (mostly goats and wool sheep) were placed in the soil filling the grave passage [Fig. 12]. The animal heads were also placed as if they were facing north. The heads of the animals still bore traces of their fur, suggesting that they were immolated for the occasion, thus revealing their specific sacrificial function within the burial context. Placed with the deceased were several bronze items:¹¹⁰ Multiple-convex ornaments made of either six or two beads joint together, balls, three different types of small bells, accessories for the waist belt, tubular ornaments (like the ones unearthed in Shajingcun), buttons, pendants and a knife.

Fig. 12 (bottom illustration) Catacomb tomb (M15) discovered at Hamadun site [Gansu sheng kaogu wenwu yanjiusuo 1990: fig 12, p 218].



In M18, the dead was instead accompanied by a large number of bone artefacts comprising arrowheads, plaques, a wand and a bow fragment, whilst small bronze balls represented the only metallic objects discovered within the grave. At the side of the skull, a sheep head has been recovered.

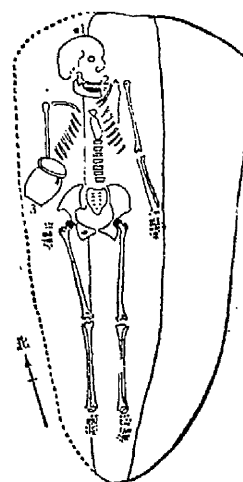


Fig. 13 Tomb M16 hosting a female skeleton at Hamadun [Gansu sheng kaogu wenwu yanjiusuo 1990: fig 14, p 220]

M16 represents a case of female interment [Fig.13]. The tomb yielded the skeleton of an 18ys old girl, with the head oriented to the north, lying supine with extended legs, with a turquoise stone inserted in the mouth. A matt of reed has been placed under the skull and under the body, although it has now decayed and carbonised. Below the skull, red ochre was found. At the right side of the body, a double loop handled red *guan*-jar was discovered. A small cooking stove containing meat was found under the right thighbone. Another female burial (M5) also yielded a pair of turquoise stone ear pendants. The waist of the deceased was embellished with a belt, 34 cm long, ornamented with 8 multiple-convex bronze plaques and one bronze small ball. In the left hand she was probably

¹¹⁰Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1984: 598-601.

holding a sort of hand guard made of several small bronze components, including two multiple-convex plaques. She was originally dressed with leather, linen and woollen clothes and had a turquoise stone inserted in her mouth.¹¹¹ An object resembling a whip, made of leather and bronze ornaments was found by her left leg.

Apparently, from the quantitative and qualitative analysis of burial repertoire, the occupants of the catacomb style tombs were buried with a wide range of adornment for eternity, comprising leather and bronze plaques, turquoise beads inserted in the mouth, earrings. The richest variety of object has been brought to light from M5, where also the long jointed whip-like object was found. This tomb hosted a young woman of the apparent age of 22ys, embellished with turquoise beads ear pendants, a turquoise bead in her mouth, on her right hand the remains of a sort of hand guard ornate with two multiple-convex bronze plaques. Such object could have been used for ritual purposes, being somewhat reminiscent of the hand-guard used by Central Asian falconers. In this respect, the woman could have played a distinctive role within her society, perhaps as a religious guide, although the exact nature of her qualifications is difficult to ascertain to the present. The presence of small tingling bells attached to the whip-like object may reinforce the hypothesis of some kind of shamanistic ritual beliefs system, which could have played a central role in Shajing semi-pastoral society. No animal bones have been found in the pit accompanying these two dead women. Whilst in male tombs often goat remains have been unearthed, it is rare to find such remains in female graves. M6 represents one of such cases: a 30ys old woman was buried with 7 goat skulls (three large ones and four smaller ones). Her attire included small bronze balls, turquoise stones, a tubular ornament and a bat-shaped plaque.

Human sacrifice is otherwise encountered in few vertical pit tombs, where dismembered bodies are sometimes found accompanied by other skeletal remains not belonging to the tomb owner. The presence of human sacrificial victims would suggest the existence of a slave-driven social system, similar to the one later found in the Xiongnu nomadic confederacy. It is also interesting to note the apparent importance of women in Shajing society. Individualism was certainly well developed, since no traces of multiple tombs have been found in the burial sites, and the specific role played by female members of this society is further evincible in the funerary attire yielded by M5.

Catacomb tombs (*biantong*) feature a long history of development. They are already encountered in the region, in Majiyao sites of the Banshan and Machang phases, dated

¹¹¹ The number of layers of fabric and their nature (leather, wool and linen) would suggest that she might have been buried in wintertime.

to the second millennium BCE.¹¹² Also in Qijia related sites, few catacomb tombs have been found, although they represent just a minority.¹¹³ At Huoshaogou instead the majority of the excavated tombs presents a catacomb structure.¹¹⁴ Both in Kayue and Xindian cultures¹¹⁵ similar types of burial structures have been encountered. It is interesting to notice a similarly conceived burial structure in Xinjiang, at Subeixi in Turfan basin.¹¹⁶ Although the site has been approximately dated to the beginning of the first millennium BCE, during the early Western Zhou period, the catacomb style tombs have been ascribed to the 4th century BCE.¹¹⁷ This type of tomb structure has also been detected in Shaanxi province: in 1981, 15 catacomb tombs were found at Lijiacun in Fufeng xian, from the Western Zhou period.¹¹⁸ Also in Ningxia, at Pengpu Yujiazhuang and Yanglang Mazhuang complexes catacomb tombs have been excavated, as we will see, and dated roughly to the 5th century BCE. From the chronological sequence of such discoveries, catacomb grave type may have originated in the northwest, in Xinjiang, and then spread eastwards through the Hexi corridor in Gansu, to reach the Central Plain by the first half of the first millennium BCE.

The other type of tomb structure in Shajing contexts consists in a vertical pit of rectangular plan with rounded corners. Eight are the pits discovered at Hamadun, six hosting single adult individuals, and the other two with children, always buried supine with limbs extended on a matt of reeds. The man in M13 holds in his mouth a turquoise stone (as in the case of female catacomb burials) and is wrapped in a reed mat. His eyes are covered by two leather eyeshades, on top of which two bronze spheres have been placed. He was originally wearing leather and linen clothes and honoured with the ritual sacrifice of four goats. Whilst children tombs did not yield any funerary item or sacrificial remains, bone remains of sacrificed goats accompanied adult burials. Sometimes, the upper part of the occupant's body has been scattered, whilst the lower limbs have been kept in the original disposition, with the thighs bones taken off. Some individuals have been buried with two skulls, while the skeletal remains of children skulls, legs and arms accompanied others. In certain cases, especially in burials of young individuals, children and young adults, the bodies were dismembered intentionally, leaving only the lower part of the skeleton intact. When the occupant of the tomb was older, no trace of this practice

¹¹² At Liuwan in Qinghai province, where 387 tombs of the catacomb type have been discovered [Gansu sheng bowuguan 1983, Qinghai sheng wenwuchu kaogudui et al 1984].

¹¹³ Qinghai sheng wenwuchu kaogudui et al 1984.

¹¹⁴ Li Shuicheng 1993.

¹¹⁵ Xie Duanjiu 1987: 1097-1104.

¹¹⁶ In addition, though, Subeixi burials yielded a sort of rectangular wooden bed frame [Tulufan diqu wenguansuo 1984].

¹¹⁷ An Zhimin 1998: 56.

¹¹⁸ The unique characteristics of the cultural relics unearthed at the site have prompted archaeologists to define the site as belonging to a new distinctive culture, named Lijiacun [Shaanxi Zhouyuan kaogudui 1984].

has been encountered. This represents an interesting burial custom, a distinctive feature of Hamadun burial site.

It is noteworthy the discrepancy between the residential area (Sanjiaocheng) and the burials (in Hamadun) in terms of energy expenditure.¹¹⁹ Whilst the fortress yielded scanty remains of proper house foundations, giving the impression that a sort of semi-permanent semi-mobile lifestyle was in fact preponderant within the walls enclosure, the amount of investment displayed in the graveyard suggests a great concern in the afterlife. The importance attached to tombs, especially when compared with the extreme volatility of cultural material related to everyday life, has always been a primary concern within a nomadic society. Furthermore, residential foundations often did not feature vestiges of post-holes or a clear floor demarcation, suggesting a type of dwelling close to a tent, but provided with a fixed cooking stove facility. In fact, although tent-poles leave only shallow depressions in the soil, they are often accompanied by more substantial features or *fixtures* that include mud or stone-lined hearths raised or levelled floors and sometimes even substantial walls.¹²⁰ Permanent structures are opposed to *portables* on the other (such as tent-cloths). On another dimension, nomadic material culture can be dichotomised into *durable* and *perishable*, according to the tendency to deteriorate of certain objects through time. In fact, this aspect greatly hampers the archaeological investigation in that highly perishable items are likely to be continually renewed rather than circulated but at the same time are less likely to be found in the archaeological record. A last dimension relates to the economic value attached to objects, thus defined as either *valuables* or *expendables*. Whilst the former are more likely to be preserved and transported within their social context (but not automatically tracked down by the archaeological record), the latter tend to be discarded on the site and, if *durable*, recorded in the archaeological investigation. Within this frame of reference, fixtures, which are both durable and expendable and of low intrinsic symbolic value (such as stone-hearth), are usually site-specific and easier to recover from the archaeological past. On the same line, expendables such as ceramic containers that are highly perishable in the sense that they can be easily broken would have been often discarded. However, the shards produced by the breakage are themselves highly durable, i.e. 'preservable' through time. In this respect, in nomadic camp-sites large items such as cooking pots, storage jars or bowls might be expected to remain as fixtures, broken or abandoned and further incorporated into archaeological context than other small portable

¹¹⁹ In nomadic contexts, less effort is spent on houses, due to the more autonomous and mobile nature of households. Such attitude is further attested by the archaeological record of excavated sites, especially in the north-eastern sector of Chinese Northern Zone [Shelach 1996].

¹²⁰ Cribb 1991:66. This concept corresponds closely with Binford's understanding of 'site furniture' [Binford

valuable items such as teapots, cups and jars. This could be the case with Shajing findings. From the archaeological analysis of material remains it is evident that pottery was here less intensively used than in settlers sites, its range of shapes and sizes being rather narrow. Large ceramic cooking pots (*li*-tripods) have been sometimes unearthed from within the residential enclosures (shards of large containers have also been found in discard areas close to the perimeter walls), whilst smaller sized vessels such as the *guan*-jars have been found buried with the dead, implying a symbolic value connotation. Furthermore, the multiplicity of cultural layers (more than twenty, one overlapping the other) encountered in Sanjiaocheng may suggest a long-term use of the site for temporary residential purposes by different waves of movable herders. These groups may have been ethnically affiliated, featuring a similar economic strategy, based on herding similar animal species, such as sheep, cows and horses. The site could have been a religion-significant place for these nomadic herders who would come here cyclically.

Many Chinese archaeologists believe that Shajing cultural remains could be related to the mysterious Yuezhi nomadic tribes, who are, according to the Chinese sources of the late Warring States and Han periods,¹²¹ the indigenous inhabitants of the region, at least by the 4th century BCE.¹²² If this speculation were confirmed, Sanjiaocheng would represent the ancient vestiges of this nomadic people coming from the west, whose origins are still veiled with uncertainty. Yet recently Li Shuicheng has purported the idea of a sub-branch of the Qiang and Rong people, who came from other early prehistoric sites in northwest China.¹²³ Whatever name Chinese historiography may attach to them, these same groups could have belonged to North-Asian groups who advanced from Siberia into Xinjiang and Gansu in the late 2nd millennium BCE, leaving traces in Siba-Huoshagou material culture. The cultural remains unearthed at Sanjiaocheng speak out of semi-sedentary movable herders, practising agriculture, animal husbandry (perhaps in transhumance), and distinctively specialised in crafts such as matting, weaving and leather tannery. It may have represented an intermediate mode of subsistence, a compromise between sedentism and nomadism.¹²⁴ Shajing people may have engaged in a mode of subsistence with an increased emphasis on pastoral production, accompanied by the rise in the number of animals herded, eventually requiring specialised forms of animal management and changes in household organisation, which

1978].

¹²¹ According to the *Han Shu (Xiyu zhuan)* and *Shi li (Zhengyi)*, the Yuezhi were inhabiting the eastern side of the Hexi corridor in Gansu province, in the area now inscribed by the Shajing cultural horizon.

¹²² Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1990: 230-234.

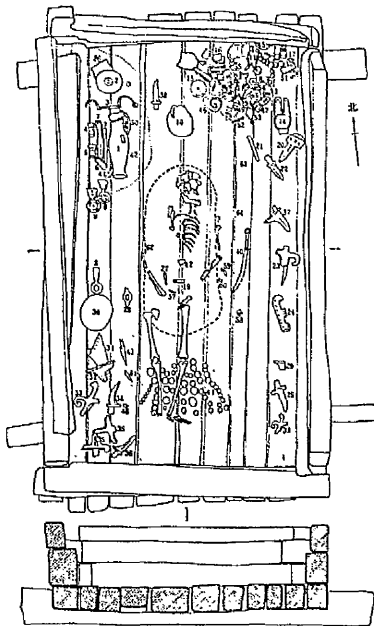
¹²³ Li Shuicheng 1994: 507.

¹²⁴ By 'mode of subsistence' it is meant: 'some configuration of productive forces and relations permitting the

ultimately involved logistic and social structures, definable as 'nomadic'. In this context, sites such as Lihudong and Sanjiaocheng might have represented the seasonal campsites of people practising a form of tethered nomadism, fixed to a well-worn migration track.¹²⁵ Long-distance trade must have also been practised, since fine grey-bodied ceramics similar in style to Qin pottery production have been found in the site.

Baifu

The site of Baifu is located in Changping county to the north of Beijing (Hebei), in a transitional zone between the steppes and the Central Plains. The excavation, started in 1975, yielded three wood-chambered vertical tombs: each rectangular pit-grave fitted with a log burial chamber oriented to the north and containing a single human body. Amongst the three tombs, M2 was the best preserved [Fig.14]. The compartment was



panelled in wood and the outside walls and base were lined with thick layers of kaolin, fine-grained clay that serves a sealant. The body interred in supine position was lying on rush matting, the head to the north. The presence of layers of black mineral cinnabar and rust colour on some skeletal remains inside the burial compartment in M3 would point to special rituals.

Fig. 14 Baifu tomb M2 [Beijing shi wenwu guanlichu 1976: 247].

To the upper right of the interred was a special group of artefacts, including a dagger with a face pommel and other items associated to the Northern Zone. Instead, most of the Chinese artefacts were distributed around the sides of the tomb. In the north-eastern corner a pile of bronzes included equestrian pieces that may have fallen down when the roof collapsed. A second level, a subterranean pit positioned directly under the interred contained the skeleton of a dog. Many of the bronze vessels and weapons are recognisably Chinese in style and distributed in a Chinese manner along the perimeter of the tomb. In addition, jade carvings, oracle bones and tomb features such as the subterranean dog pit would lead to conclude that the burials were Chinese.

However, burial structure and orientation at Baifu would point to northern prototypes rather than Chinese. According to Csorba, Lijiaya tombs such as the one from Jixian in

exploitation of natural resources and reproduction of the social groups involved' [Cribb 1991: 17-18].

Shanxi province could provide an example.¹²⁶ It consisted of a plain rectangular pit grave containing a single supine occupant oriented to the north, yet it did not yield any wooden structure, kaolin traces or rush matting. However the arrangement of burial items all around the body would match a key aspect of the Baifu graves: in fact, all the hilted daggers –including the specimen with the human face and a short wand with a jingle-headed pommel- were placed –similarly to Jixian- to the upper right of the deceased. Like the Jixian dagger, the daggers in M2 were placed with points down and carefully angled towards the deceased. The striking and consistent placement of daggers in Baifu burials would suggest a ritualised behaviour, a long-standing burial tradition found in Hebei, Shanxi and Shaanxi provinces that would at least date back to the 14th-13th centuries BCE.

An assortment of hafted implements was also recovered, with representative items in special clusters together with the daggers. A hafted axe and an adze were placed just below two daggers (in M2). In M3 a socketed battle-axe was placed over a tanged item, just above the daggers, whilst other tools, a chisel, a socketed hammer, a whetstone, a hafted axe and an adze were scattered around. All these implements are integral to survival along the northern frontier and can be often found in burials along the border. Associated with northern cultures are also the axle heads, a number of jingle-headed finials and a bow-shaped object, all of which are strongly reminiscent of Lijiaya metal inventory. M3 also contained numerous horse fittings, ornamental discs, and a plain mirror.¹²⁷ Bronze horse bit and psalias were also recovered amongst the horse harness.

On the basis of Western Zhou weapons derived from Shang prototypes, Baifu burials have been placed at the beginning of the Western Zhou period. Baifu may have represented the result of frequent contacts between the northern tribes and the southern Chinese. A long process of cultural syncretism that began during the 2nd millennium BCE, as witnessed in both Lijiaya and Zhukaigou, and lingered on into the early 1st millennium BCE when Baifu burials were probably made. The mixed inventory, comprising items from both the Chinese and the Northern traditions, can be considered diagnostic of a vertical continuum of a cultural tradition from the north, yet again encountered during the Warring States period at Liangcheng xian Maoqinggou. At the same time, the material evidence would point to a dynamic interaction between Northern and Chinese cultures based mainly on friendly trading exchanges. In particular, commercialism between the two sides was probably related to equestrian technology,

¹²⁵ Ingold 1980:184.

¹²⁶ Csorba 1996.

¹²⁷ Of similar shape and surface treatment to those found further to the west at the earlier sites of

whereby northerners would supply horses and grooms and related technologies to Chinese centres in exchange for other luxury items.

Chawuhu cultural horizon

The Chawuhu (*Charwighul*) ravine is located along the southern foot of the Tianshan mountain range, to the north of Jueluntuergen village, Haermodun xian, in the autonomous region of Xinjiang. Close to the ravine and scattered quite regularly over a large area in the Gobi plateau, five cemeteries have been excavated during a long archaeological campaign started in the early 1980s.¹²⁸ The tombs are located on the hills or terraces on either side of the Chawuhu gorge. Cemetery I is located on a rectangular plateau on the west bank, three km to the south of the mouth of the Chawuhu gorge and contains about 700 tombs. Cemetery II lies about one km south-east of I on the slopes and gravel banks on the east side of the gorge, and contains about 100 tombs. Cemetery III lies immediately to the south of Cemetery I. Cemetery IV contains about 270 tombs and is located on a hilly plateau in front of a mountain on the east bank of the mouth of the gorge, 5 km east of II. Cemetery V contains more than 150 tombs located to the north of the hinterland and 4 km north of the mouth of the gorge. Between 1986 and 1989, 448 tombs have been discovered and scientifically excavated, more than 4000 artefacts brought to light. Subsequent research suggested that all these tombs were actually part of one clan communal cemetery belonging to the same cultural group, named after the type-site "Chawuhu culture".¹²⁹ After more than a decade of painstaking ground study, the large number of tombs has been dated¹³⁰ and its cultural development divided into three subsequent phases, ranging from about 1000 and 500 BCE.¹³¹ Cultural boundaries extend also to the western county of Akesu and Wensu, where the sites of Kezier Reservoir and Baozidong seem to retain cultural features encountered at Chawuhu.¹³² Alagou site also shows some similarities especially with the last phase of the Chawuhu culture, represented by the multiple burials discovered in cemetery II and the northern parts of cemeteries I and IV.

Huoshagou (Gansu) and Yanbulake (Xinjiang).

¹²⁸ By Xinjiang Kaogu Wenwu Yanjiusuo.

¹²⁹ Wang Mingzhe 1999.

¹³⁰ 14C dating has been employed for 15 tombs in cemetery 1, 32 in cemetery 4, 4 in cemetery 2, 1 in cemetery 5.

¹³¹ Other two sites, Daxigou, Habuqihan and Baileqier both also in Hejing county have been ascribed to the same cultural horizon, although a thorough investigation of these sites has yet to be done [Urumqi 1999: 176; 237].

¹³² Wang Bo et al 1986.

Chawuhu

At Chawuhu site, five burial areas have been identified in total and analysed. Their material shows that most of them were active within the same period of time or slightly later.¹³³ Burial pits are marked on the surface by a variety of triangular, elliptical and round enclosures surmounted by piles of pebbles [Fig.15]. Tombs are mainly stone shaft tombs with a stone enclosure elevated on the ground. The shape of the tombs changed through time, the earliest being the triangular ones with curved corners, then the elliptical and finally rounded pit with pebble mounds. Together with the form of the elevated enclosures, also the shape of the actual pit evolved from shallow to deep with entrances on two sides of the chamber, one entrance on one side, or bag-shaped without entrance,¹³⁴ and straight walled vertical pit with no mound.

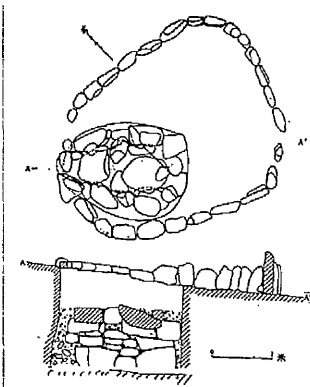


Fig. 15 Pit M 104 in Cemetery IV [Wang Mingzhe 1999: fig. 22, p. 30]

The occupant usually lied supine with crouched legs, or less frequently on one side with legs drawn up. Contracted burials and secondary burials are present at the site and multiple interments are more common than single ones. Children around seven years old, either crammed into the spare space in the adult tombs or buried together with the adults are present with the emergence of multiple burials. In the later periods, children burials appeared attached to one side of the adult tomb stone circle. From the analysis of the various burial customs a steady evolution can be evinced through time, from the simple single burial type to the multiple and secondary one.

The present investigation will be focused on the earliest part of the first millennium BCE, hence on cemetery IV and cemetery I that together with cemetery IV are supposed to date back to the early phase of the Chawuhu culture. Cemetery IV yielded 248 tombs with a simple vertical structure and sometimes accompanied by a horse sacrificial pit, all provided with funerary artefacts, comprising pottery, bronze, wood, bone, stone, wool textiles, together with gold, silver and iron, for a total of over 2000 objects. The much larger cemetery I yielded around 700 tombs oriented to northwest with burial features

¹³³Cemetery 1: 1000 and 500 BCE, Cemetery 4: 1200 and 200 BCE, Cemetery 2: 600 and 400 BCE, Cemetery 5: 500 BCE (although only one tomb has been analysed so far) [Urumqi 1999: 283-4]. Cemetery 3 is the only one to contain tombs with straight-sided rectangular earthen pits beneath a pebble mound, or tombs with straight-sided pits and side chambers. Furthermore, apart from the design of the tombs, also the burial custom (bodies face up with straight legs) and the cultural affinities of this cemetery are different from those associated with the Chawuhu culture, and it must have belonged to a different culture [Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1990].

close to those encountered in cemetery IV. All tombs in fact present a vertical stone chamber, surmounted by a triangular enclosure (70% of the total, while others are elliptical or rounded) made of pebbles. Most of the tombs were provided with a tomb stone slab; a few tombs (7) present wooden logs instead of a stone slab to close the entrance to the chamber. At the bottom and along the walls of the tomb chamber large stone slabs have been often found laid. Then smaller pebbles were placed to fill in the space evenly up to a second level. Not all the burial chambers yielded a funerary set of objects (similarly to cemetery IV). Finally, a restricted number of horse pits attached to the tombs have been identified, like in cemetery IV.

Only 11 of the 132 tombs excavated so far hosted a single occupant, the head to the west and the feet to the east, lying on one side with bent legs. The skull of the young man in M263, backed by a pottery *fu*-jar and two ladle-cups, presents signs of trepanation. Infant pits accompany a number of burials on the side. Only five independent infant tombs and 35 double burials (both with primary and secondary interments) have been found, with no regard to sex and age differentiation and probably containing members of the same clan. For instance, M309 presented a small child oriented to the west, lying on one side with legs bent with the usual funerary set (a *fu*-jar, a *hu*-vase, a bronze awl and a bronze knife) placed at the back of his head. Funerary objects are usually placed at the back of the heads. Sometimes, when secondary burial practice has been followed, the occupant on the first level has been buried immediately after his death, whilst the bone remains of another body are found on the entrance slab, covered by the pile of pebbles only. Triple primary, mixed primary-secondary, and only secondary burials have also been detected (30), together with multiple burials with up to seven co-occupants both in primary and secondary interments. Both cemeteries feature the major number of multiple burials of the entire site, the largest choice of funerary repertoire and burial practices, in all reflecting a very long period of ritual use. They are both located on a hill plateau and feature tombs with stone enclosures, mostly of triangular shape, whilst in the northern part of the area stone tumuli start to appear in the late phase. Both cemeteries feature the same tomb arrangements, which seems to respect a certain chronological order. Tomb structure seems to evolve from south to north, with the simplest burials in the south and the most complex ones in the north side of the cemetery; the earliest tombs are all placed to the south, whilst in the central and northern part of the site later burial types are the majority. Either horse pits or children tombs accompany a group of tombs placed on the northern and central part of both cemeteries. A stone slab or a wooden cover usually covers the vertical stone chambers,

¹³⁴ i.e. wider at the bottom than at the opening.

and the funerary inventory is placed on a side of the tomb pit (usually behind the head). In both burial areas, pottery utilitarian vessels with flatten bottom, red body and spouted rim prevail on any other medium. Follows bronze, with small portable items, either knives, or various types of ornaments, comprising earrings and plaques, horse harnesses (horse bridles and bits). Burial posture and orientation of the bodies is the same, always facing west or northwest, lying on one side with legs bent.

Within these parameters cemetery V can also be included; vertical pit tombs show the already mentioned triangular stone enclosure, whose inventory is mainly constituted by plain monochrome portable ceramics.¹³⁵ All these features are characteristic of the earliest phase in the cultural development of Chawuhu (phase I in cemeteries I and IV), although the only carbon-date available so far on this cemetery suggested a later date of around 500 BCE.

The neat order and arrangement shown on the actual disposition of burials within the site would reflect a rigorous system of public order and maybe an egalitarian society. Furthermore, the contemporary presence of separated areas (cemetery V, and the southern part of cemetery IV and cemetery I) could be understood as an intention of separation between clans. This would explain the similarities and congruencies in burial structure and inventory amongst the cemeteries. It is also interesting to notice the composition of multiple burials: no actual gender or age differentiation seems to regulate the practice, whilst the presence of elderly, young, men and women could be dictated by principles of clan appurtenance or household composition. Clans are considered the first social organisation in an incipient agriculturist society. From the analysis of burial inventories it seems logical to suggest a form of social structure based on clan association and household linkages, where men were mostly involved in nomadic pastoral activities and animal husbandry. Noteworthy is also the scarce presence of couple burials. It would appear that in this society marriage links were indeed less important than clan association. Multiple burials are usually evidence for commonality, however in these tombs, small ceramic vessels and bronze items are indeed found lying in the proximity of individuals, rather than at the rear of the tomb chambers (where *guan*-jars and *fu*-vessels are usually placed). In phase I, no children individual burials have been located, whilst they appear in subsequent periods, placed adjacent an adult tomb. The total absence during the first phase of cultural development would indicate the non-recognition of infants within the social structure imposed in Chawuhu. The threshold between childhood and adulthood might have been quite late in the lifetime of an

¹³⁵ Just one painted jar has been brought to light at this site.

individual. Most children must have hence been buried within the domestic enclosures, as it happened earlier in Zhukaigou and Lijiaya. The fact that no residential area associated to Chawuhu has been found so far hampers further investigation on the subject.

The good preservation of the corpses has allowed further physical anthropological assessments on the racial type, apparently pointing to the Europoid family, probably coming from southern Siberia or Kazakhstan. These skulls are distinguished from the "proto-European" type in having more "modern" morphological features such as high face and orbits, straight frontal slope and narrow nasal breadth. They are smaller in size yet generally still bearing resemblance to the "proto-European" type. There are important clues for tracing the relationship between them and the "proto-European" type. In fact, trephination (or trepanation) of the skull was commonly practised in Chawuhu, a custom also found amongst several Europoid groups throughout Inner Asia and Europe and later encountered at Alagou. A square or circular hole of around 1 cm of diameter often accompanied by chopping and cutting scars was done on the skull, probably as part of a surgical treatment or of magical ritual, mainly on men rather than women. The presence of incipient healing processes on the trepanned subjects would confirm the medical reason; on the other hand, the fact that most of these interventions were actually made on the left parietal could suggest a sort of codified ritual practice, whose meaning is now difficult to grasp. In later tombs datable to the end of the Chawuhu period, Mongoloid racial types are encountered too, speaking out of a mixed ethnic society, combining elements coming originally from the West with groups from the East.

Qunbake

Luntai xian Qunbake (*Chong Bagh*) is considered by some scholars as culturally associated with Chawuhu, as it expresses many features already encountered within Chawuhu.¹³⁶ A further investigation of this site is therefore needed to assess the extent of their interrelationship. The site of Qunbake comprises three different burial fields, located in a desert area in Luntai County on the southern slopes of the Tianshan Mountains. Every section comprises between 10 and 50 tombs, constituted by a round earth mound, the largest around 30-40 m in diameter, 1-2 m tall, the smallest, 4-5 m in diameter and 30-40 cm high. Only sections 1 and 2 have been excavated so far. Excavations to section 1 started in 1985, comprising an area of around 800 (north south)

¹³⁶ Mei and Shell 1998.

x 200 meters (east west).¹³⁷ 43 tombs were identified in total. Works in section 2 followed in 1987 with the excavation of 13 tombs.¹³⁸

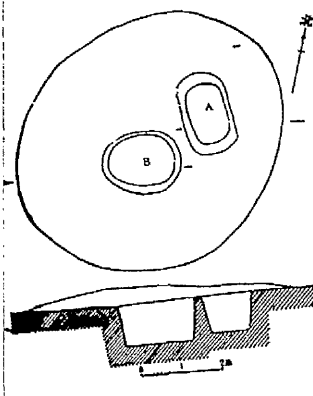


Fig. 16 Qunbake burial mound [Cong and Chen 1991: fig. 4, p. 283]

Both areas yielded similar tomb structures and funerary inventory. Each earth tumulus hides a vertical stone chamber oriented to the north [Fig.16]. A tumulus may have covered either a larger tomb around which other smaller tombs were scattered, or a small group of similar tombs. Usually a tomb passageway led to the main stone chamber framed by a series of vertical timber logs and covered up with mats made of *jiji* grass (already encountered in Chawuhu), camel thorn grass and other vegetal fibres, which were set on fire probably at the time of the funeral. Smaller tombs, often of elliptical shape, not only did not have a short rampart to the chamber but they lack also the wooden logs frame, whilst on the simple wooden cover no traces of any ceremonial combustion of the vegetal fibres are visible. The inventory of the tomb is usually very simple, with some wooden logs and mats made of *jiji* grass or red wicker placed on the ground. Secondary practice interments are the majority, especially in larger tombs. Up to ten people were at once buried in the same pit regardless of age and sex discrimination, suggesting a household pattern of burial selection. Smaller peripheral tombs were often primary burials, counting one to five occupants, whose bodies were thus much more preserved than those in larger burials. Some couple tombs are also present with both bodies laying either supine or on one side and legs bent. In the second burial area only, horse and camel heads pits have been found associated with one large central multiple grave surrounded by a great number of smaller elliptical pits, underneath the same tumulus. These tombs contained adults, infants or animal remains comprising not only horses and camels, but also dogs and sheep. In particular, sheep/goat astragali seem to

¹³⁷ Sun Bing-gen and Chen Ge 1987 .

¹³⁸ Cong Texin and Chen Ge 1991.

have been commonly associated with infant burials,¹³⁹ used as toys or symbols of well-being.

Sidaogou cultural horizon

By the beginning of the first millennium BCE, certain features of the Yanbulake culture of eastern Xinjiang were evident in Sidaogou (*Tort-Erik*).¹⁴⁰ The Sidaogou culture, taking its name from its eponymous site excavated in 1976, stretched from the Hami region beyond the Turfan Oasis to the north side of the Bogedashan Mountains. Sites ascribable to this cultural horizon are Mulei xian Sidaogou,¹⁴¹ Banjiegou and Hongqijijiechang in Qitai xian,¹⁴² and Ka'ersan in Yiwu,¹⁴³ and Shirenzi near Balikun.¹⁴⁴ In particular at this site (A and B), walls were constructed with boulders and mud-bricks; also, wooden beams and daub were found, suggesting that these were oasis habitation sites.¹⁴⁵

Sidaogou culture sites are characteristically small mounds, 20 to 50 metres in diameter and 1 to 4 m. tall. A large number of such small mounds are distributed in a belt of land at the northern foot of the Tianshan Mountains, especially in Balikun county (at Lanzhouwanzi) in a line stretching from Yanchi east of Koumenzi, to Yiwu, Kuisu and Shirenzi and are called *geda* (wart of earth).¹⁴⁶ At Shirenzi, Kuisu and other areas, local residents have found large grain grinders, painted pottery, preserved wheat grain and bronzes under these mounds.¹⁴⁷ A house excavated at the site of Sidaogou is constituted by a large circular structure with stone foundations, well preserved wooden posts, and four interior hearths.¹⁴⁸ Several Sidaogou-type tombs placed in the upper levels of the structure are similar to Yanbulake level 2 tombs in form and construction, although they often host multiple burials with the bodies in extended prone position. Multiple burials are a common feature of the beginning of the first millennium BCE, throughout eastern Xinjiang and along the northern rim of the Tarim Basin.

A similar construction has been excavated at the site of Lanzhouwanzi (Kok-tokay) in Balikun (Barkol). Some authors have ascribed this site directly to the Yanbulake cultural

¹³⁹ Chen and Hiebert, 1995: 281.

¹⁴⁰ According to Chen and Hiebert, 1995.

¹⁴¹ Yang Yiyong 1982.

¹⁴² Chen Ge 1981.

¹⁴³ Wu Zhen 1964.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁵ Huang Wenbi 1983.

¹⁴⁶ Wang 1996; Wang Binghua et al, 1991.

¹⁴⁷ Wu Zhen 1964.

¹⁴⁸ Yang Yiyong 1982:120-1.

horizon.¹⁴⁹ Conversely, others have considered it as a regional centre of the Sidaogou culture, given its large size and inventory.¹⁵⁰ Here, a stone mound excavated in 1984 revealed a large stone semi-subterranean construction with two rooms,¹⁵¹ with postholes with wood remains suggesting a roofed structure. The area of the structure covered 200 square metres. This type of structure shows close affinities with Andronovo house building tradition.¹⁵² Three occupation layers were identified, each with several floors, hearths and artefacts. Many large grinding stones, enigmatic stone balls, and distinctive ceramics such as painted wares and *guan*-jars with two strap handles were found. In the upper layers was a large ring-footed Scythian-type *fu*-cauldron, found with small bronze knives with ring finials. Within the structure, a multiple burial (more than 17 individuals) included an elderly woman, two adult men and children. Bones of horse, sheep/goat and deer, and wheat grains were also recovered.

At Sidaogou, a similar but much smaller stone structure has been recovered, including the remains of an elderly woman and two children. Craniometrical analysis states them as 'Mongoloid'.¹⁵³ Bone remains of horses, cows, goats and dogs have also been discovered.

Wupushuiku

The Wupushuiku (Qaradowa Reservoir) burial site has been incorporated to the later stage of the Yanbulake culture by some authors.¹⁵⁴ Tomb furnishings consist of painted pottery, woollen knitwear, woodenware, small sized bronzes such as knives, arrowheads, awls, needles, mirrors and plaques and a few small iron knives (implying the introduction of iron implements). The main radiocarbon date is 1100-900 BCE, hence slightly earlier than Chawuhu and later than the official date ascribed to the Yanbulake culture (1700-1100).

Excavations at Wupushuiku started in 1978. The site is located 70 km west of Hami city on the western edge of the depression at the deepest point of the basin, in a desert spot over an area of approx. 1 km². The climate is thus very hard and not very suitable to agricultural activities. Strata are quite mixed and confused, revealing a rather long period of residency. The only scientific report available so far concerns the study of two particular tombs, M151 and M 152, which are located at the centre of the cemetery, in

¹⁴⁹ An Zhimin 1998.

¹⁵⁰ Chen and Hiebert, *ibidem*.

¹⁵¹ 30 m. in diameter and 3 m. in height [Wang et al, 1991].

¹⁵² Kuzmina 1998.

¹⁵³ Chen and Hiebert 1995: 274.

¹⁵⁴ Shui Tao 1993 and An Zhimin 1998.



the deepest spot.¹⁵⁵ Both tombs display an elliptical vertical pit. The pit consists of two tiered platforms built with hand-made mud bricks. Between the platform and the pit walls earth has been filled in. Instead the platform is covered by a convex wooden plate.

M 151 is 171 cm long, 140 cm wide and 130 cm deep, its walls are not even, rather irregular both in elevation and plan [Fig 17]. The second platform is at 80 cm of depth. The cover of the second platform is further covered with *jiji* grass mats (as in Chawuhu).

Fig. 17 Structure of Wupushuiku burial M151 [Xinjiang Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1997: pl. 2, p. 113].

M 152 is 200 cm long, 150 cm wide and 144 cm deep, with irregular walls and a second platform at about 80-cm down the pit, similarly to M 151. The platform is topped by a convex wooden cover, which is also

covered with grass and weeds. Interesting are the data recovered from the structure as the bodies recovered from the bottom of the pit are rather complete, although skeletal remains have been fragmented. Both tombs are multiple, hosting either three (M152) or eight individuals (M151). In M151 the remains of two adult males accompanied by the rests of three children and two grown-up females, all with contracted legs. At the very bottom, another female adult skeleton has been discovered with rests of woollen textiles wrapped around her, wearing leather shoes and accompanied by sheep bone remains. In M152 only an adult couple has been recovered, although their skeletons are incomplete. Physical anthropological analysis has revealed a mixed population, with both proto-Europeans and Mongoloid elements.¹⁵⁶ Unfortunately the majority of burial objects have been disrupted and fragmented throughout the various levels of interment. Very few objects have come to light intact.

From the analyses of the burial structures presented so far by Chinese archaeologists Wupushuiku people seem to have partly belonged to a migratory wave from the west. The synchronous presence of proto-Europoid and Mongoloid elements reflects the social integration phenomenon, which is also encountered in Chawuhu (although apparently at a later date). However in this case, contrarily from Chawuhu, it would appear that these areas in the Hami basin were first pioneered by people coming from the East and, later on, by a subsequent wave from southern Siberia (similarly to Yanbulake). Unfortunately data on this site are still very scarce and need further investigation. The presence of a

¹⁵⁵ Xinjiang Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1997:110-19.

¹⁵⁶ Han Kangxin 1995.

wooden horse *psalia* would suggest that this people knew the know-how of horse riding and probably practised some form of animal husbandry (cows, sheep and horses remains have been found¹⁵⁷) although no other evidence is available to confirm this hypothesis. Yet, the burial practice of covering up the second enclosure with wood, the presence of woollen fabrics and reed mats would all point to proto-Europoid burials. Hand-made mud bricks for lining the walls of the internal subterranean enclosure were also used in Yanbulake burials datable to the 18th-16th century BCE. Bricks were also used in Yanbulake burial contexts of the 13th -11th centuries BCE, although they were usually lined on the surface rather than inside a rectangular pit. Mud-bricked burials would have been distinctive of the Proto-Europoid people (Andronovian)¹⁵⁸ who first settled in Yanbulake in the 18th century BCE. At Wupushuiku the reoccurrence of such practice so many centuries later could indicate a subsequent migratory wave of the same ethnic group (Andronovo) from the west, apparently around 1000 BCE, even supported by the discovery of a tripartite wooden wheel stylistically and technically close to Andronovo examples. Furthermore, in Wupushuiku a pair of leather boots with sewn-on beads has been excavated.¹⁵⁹ Such decorative custom on garments in fact was also present in the Andronovo culture, further connecting these two cultures.

Zahongluke

Another site yielding important evidence for Proto-Europoid presence is indeed Zahongluke (*Zagunluk*) in Qiemo (*Cherchen*) County. Situated in the southeast of the Taklamakan at the foot of two mountains ranges, the burial site yielded between 1985-1996 several hundred tombs. Their structure seems to follow the two-layer vertical earthen type, provided with a wooden canopy, topped with leather and grass mats, which has also been found in the Turfan basin.¹⁶⁰

Significantly, one small tomb contained the mummified corpse of an infant, tightly wrapped in deep reddish purple wool, his head covered with a blue woollen hat. Small blue stones closed the eyes. Next to his head, was placed a small bovine-horn drinking cup in which remained traces of a drinking substance; next to the cup, an ancient "baby bottle" made of a sheep's teat. Such a discovery would indicate a significant role of the infant in life: attempts appear to have been made to prolong his life after his mother's death with an ingenious device, possibly one of the earliest evidence of feeding bottles in

¹⁵⁷ The same type of livestock, perhaps used for sacrificial purposes as well, is encountered both in Gumugou-Qawrighul in the Lopnor region (18th century BCE) and further west in the Andronovo culture [Kuzmina 1998].

¹⁵⁸ Chen and Hiebert, 1995.

¹⁵⁹ Mei and Shell 1998.

history and great care was spent in the funerary arrangement of his single unique grave. Given the evidence of other children buried in multiple burials within the same cemetery, this grave must have belonged to a special boy indeed. Other tombs yielded other mummified corpses of adults with children, whose ethnic origin seems to be proto-Europoid too.

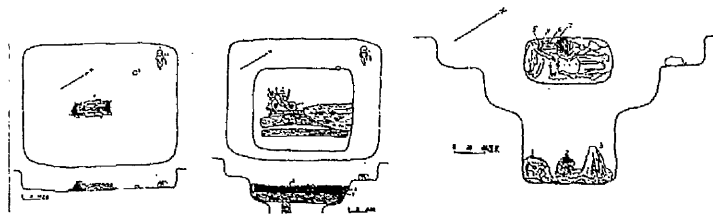


Fig. 18 Tomb M2 at Zahongluke [He Dexiu 1992: 328, pl. 5-6-7]

In 1989 He Dexiu uncovered two more tombs.¹⁶¹ In one of these (89QZM2) the large shaft pit was divided into two layers [Fig.18]. At the base of the pit was the main burial with the mummified remains of a mature woman whose body suffered severe disturbance. In the upper chamber were two individuals who seemed to have been sacrificed, since they showed signs of violent death; one woman with her eyes gouged out and the limbs severed,¹⁶² and a small baby who was inserted alive through a 30cm wide hole in the roof and had died suspended upside down in the chamber, his eyes tightly closed and mouth wide open. A metre north of the young woman laid the remains of a male infant lying naked on a woollen blanket. The woman presented moon-shaped tattoos on her eyelids and oval tattoos on her forehead. Tattoos were also found covering the back and wrist of her left hand. These black tattoos show that the custom of tattooing the body and face was in practice, similarly to the occupants of Pazyryk kurgans in southern Siberia. When tattoos were not present, painted motifs appeared: the female occupant of another tomb, with light brown hair, parted into four braids, of which two were not her own shows spiral motifs painted on her face, on her eyelids and at either side of her nose.

Other tombs were eventually discovered in the course of the 1996 recognition. In that occasion multiple tombs were also found, yielding individuals of any age and sex. Among

¹⁶⁰ Remains of vertical wooden logs are also found in Chawuhu and Qunbake.

¹⁶¹ He Dexiu 1992.

¹⁶² Yet no chopping marks have been found on the woman's bones that might suggest deliberate removal of her limbs. Hence, the deceased could either signal a second interment practice or a later exhumation by tomb violators.

them, it was also found one of the earliest surviving musical string instruments, whose features strongly resemble the harp from Pazyryk.

Alagou cultural horizon

The middle Tianshan range valleys attested an increasing infra-regional interaction during the 1st millennium BCE, despite the current absence of archaeological findings datable to the previous period. Near Urumqi, Alagou (*Alwighul*) site occupies an intermediate position between the eastern oases and the Zhung'er basin steppe. It is an important passageway connecting the basins of Turfan and Yanqi. The 85 tombs were excavated during 1976-78 and they can be ascribed to two classes: the first (identified with Alagou II) including only 4 tombs is characterised by a wooden chamber, whilst the second (Alagou I) featured pebbles in the burial chamber. A clear difference is reflected in the inventory, suggesting that the two burial types could belong to two different cultural streams: Alagou I (c.800-200 BCE)¹⁶³, and Alagou II (c. 500 BCE- 100 CE).¹⁶⁴ The site of Dongfengchang has also been ascribed to the Alagou I cultural horizon.¹⁶⁵

Alagou I

A full excavation report on Alagou I is yet to be published. The graves are shaft-pits with pebble-lined chambers, and with sometimes a timber-lined structure at the bottom, roughly 2 metres deep with a diameter of 2 to 3 metres. Similar burial layouts have been noticed in the Turfan Basin at Aidinghu (Lake *Ayding-köl*) and Subeixi in Shanshan County, suggesting an extension or at least a cultural connection with this area.¹⁶⁶

The dead lay in extended supine position with the head towards the west. Multiple burials were common, ranging from less than ten to several individuals (up to 30) piled up in the same pit. Corpses were sometimes intentionally dismembered¹⁶⁷, following the long-rooted tradition of secondary burial and mummification common in the southern Siberian region during the Scythian period, as evidence from Pazyryk, the Minusinsk basin and Tuva confirm.¹⁶⁸ The reasons behind this burial attitude could be attributed to specific religious or ritual behaviours, which encouraged the seasonal interment during spring or summer, inducing the temporary mummification of those who died during other seasons.

¹⁶³ Wang Binghua 1981, Jacobson 1985. Mei 2000: appendix 1 pl. 2.3.

¹⁶⁴ Mei 2000

¹⁶⁵ Mei 2000: 17

¹⁶⁶ Li Yuchun and Liu Hongliang 1982, Tulufan diqu wenguansuo 1984 and Tulufan diqu wenguansuo 1988.

¹⁶⁷ Obvious cutting marks are present on the arms and legs, which may have facilitated the introduction of a preservative fluid.

¹⁶⁸ Eileen Murphy 2000: 279-92.

Both proto-Europoid and Mongoloid individuals have been exhumed. All individuals wore their hair long, parted centrally into plaits and kept in place at the back of the head by a bone or wooden hairpin. At times, a silken hairnet was put over the top. The physical anthropology suggests diversity in the population with 'Pamir-Ferghana' type, so called 'Mediterranean' Central Asian types, and a few Mongolian individuals (47 against 7)¹⁶⁹. Animal remains included sheep, horses, cattle and camels, while flax seeds attest agriculture.

These burials are reminiscent of the Chawuhu culture, and have similar ceramics, although no actual agricultural implements were found. Some evidence though, come from some pottery jars containing crop seeds such as flax. There is also evidence of hunting in the wooden arrowheads filed from hardwood. The many horse, cattle, sheep and goat remains suggest a greater focus on pastoral activities. Trading activities are witnessed by the presence of agate beads and silken fragments which indeed revealed a predilection for the style of the Central Plain, especially of the Chu state. This trend increased in the late phase at Alagou, when single and double burials replaced the earlier multiple ones, thus reflecting a change in social structure. The early graves of the Jushi people in Turfan county at Yaerhu have funerary objects similar to the ones found in this archaeological context: such similarities could suggest that these tombs would belong to the Jushi people as well.¹⁷⁰

Dongfengchang

The Dongfengchang cemetery has been affiliated to Alagou I cultural horizon.¹⁷¹ It is located about 70 km west of Alagou, in an area of 500 x 100 m wide and yielded 43 pebbles tumuli aligned north to south, with a small number clustered together. After the excavation, two of the tumuli (those located on a hill in the westernmost part of the cemetery and of smaller size) presented no burial chamber but seem to have played a ritual part in the cemetery, given their primary position towards the west and their alignment north to south. The other 41 were indeed graves of which only a brief description is available.¹⁷² The mounds are either circular or square in shape. The construction marks on the square ones are still visible. Apparently they were built starting from the corners where big stone pebbles were placed, and then small pebble stones completed the perimeter, while other small pebbles would surround the mound, with a small enclosure wall. The majority of the tombs feature a shaft-pit with stone chamber of

¹⁶⁹ Chen and Hiebert 1992.

¹⁷⁰ Ma and Wang 1994: 218.

¹⁷¹ Zhang Yu Zhong 1998, Mei 2000: 18.

¹⁷² Zhang Yuzhong 1987.

oblong shape with the entrance smaller than the pit bottom. A small percentage displays a rhomboid stone chamber. And some others do not have a chamber at all, with the deceased directly placed underneath the pebble mound. The entrance is usually covered with wooden logs or stone slabs, as it is the bottom of the pit. Also the floor was originally covered with reed mats, woollen fabrics and felt.

The most common type of burial is the multiple one, with up to twenty individuals, either lying supine, partially mutilated or interred a second time, with no apparent age or gender relation. At the site three tombs featuring a lateral burial niche with infants were found. They all presented a small stone chamber flanking the main one. The small children found inside these tight pits were all wearing hairnets and felt caps, woollen robes and felt boots, sometimes also necklaces. Their bodies were lying supine with extended legs, head to the west, and wrapped in a woollen and felt shroud, tighten up with a woollen thread. Burials seem similar in structure to those found in Alagou I, with stone mounds as surface markers, pebble-lined burial chambers and the practice of multiple burials. Furthermore, animal sacrifice seems to be a common feature too, with goat heads and horse heads interred with the deceased and matching the number of the humans buried. This numeric equality shows that at the time social differentiation was not yet very clearly set and that the status of people was apparently not relevant (although the three tombs with infants would tell otherwise).

Alagou II

The four tombs at Alagou II (Yuergou) were marked on the surface by stone mounds and rectangular enclosures, oriented north to south [Fig.19]. The chambers were rectangular shaft-pits lined horizontally with wooden logs (pine) and covered by a layer of criss-crossed logs, with wooden planks and grass on top.¹⁷³ The pits were filled with piles of sand and stones brought from the nearby riverbed.

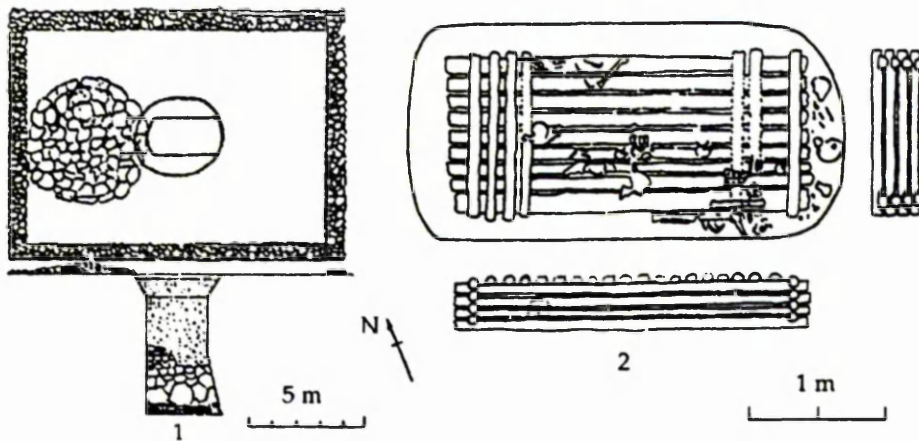


Fig. 19 Alagou tomb M18 [Wang Binghua et al. 1981: pl.2,3]

The largest tomb measured 6.56 m in length and 7.1 m in depth. Three were joint burials of two individuals each, whilst the fourth retained traces of just a single young female, but all were in supine extended position, with the head oriented towards the west. Some sort of red pigment appeared on the skin of the deceased. The use of ochre in burials is a tradition widely found in Eurasia, particularly in the steppe-lands of Ukraine and southern Russia (Yamnaya pit-grave and Afanasievo cultures¹⁷⁴), but also in Xindian and Shajing contexts in Gansu province. The significance of such practice is debated, ranging from life giving blood inferences, to death, to the colour of the sun, as a method of purification, or as a proper funerary personal adornment. The skull of the young woman presents also a perforation of 5 cm of diameter. Trepanation was a common post-mortem custom related to Scythian burial rituals in the Minusinsk basin of southern Siberia, in Tuva, in Altai, in Kazakhstan and north-western Mongolia. Given the widespread occurrence of such phenomenon in Central Asia, the ritual was possibly connected with certain funerary rituals, including embalming and mummification, belonging to a particular ethnic group, possibly the Scythians. Two calibrated radiocarbon dates from M30 are ranging from 400 BCE to 60 CE.¹⁷⁵ Most of the funerary objects from the log graves are

¹⁷³ Issyk kurgan structure is similar [Akishev 1978:3].

¹⁷⁴ Mallory 1989: 223, 225-6.

¹⁷⁵ Mei 2000: Appendix I.

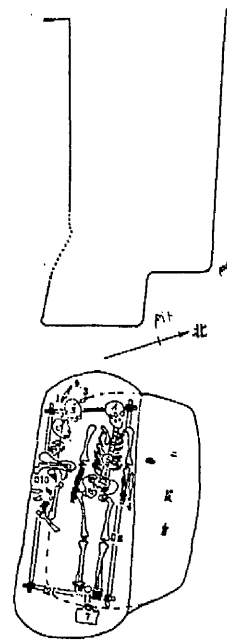
household items and ornaments, but rarely you find everyday implements such as stone pestles. Hence it may be inferred that the few people buried in such tombs may have been of noble extraction or, the existence of a very limited agriculture in a strongly nomadic economic context. The orientation and type of burials, together with their content have encouraged some archaeologists to connect these people with the Wusun of the Yili valley.¹⁷⁶

Subeixi

Subeixi (*Subeshi*) in Shanshan County in Turfan basin can be ascribed to the same cultural context of Alagou and Dongfengchang. Site no.1 lies on the west side of the Tuyu gou gorge (*Toyuk*) on a flat terrace of barren sandy gravel with no apparent marks on the surface.¹⁷⁷ In the first 1980's excavation report, roughly 75% of the tombs (6 out of 8) unearthed at cemetery no.1 display a typical catacomb style structure with vertical shaft. Wooden logs are used to cover the entrance hole, together with reed mats and topped with a pile of pebbles. The interior was provided with a simple wooden structure (a pseudo coffin) where the corpses were placed supine, facing west and with legs extended.

Fig. 20 Subeixi catacomb style tomb M3 [Tulufan diqu wenguansuo 1984: fig 3].

M3 hosts a male in perfect conditions, accompanied by other fragmented skeletons of a woman and two children, probably the result of second interment practice, when the relatives of the dead man were to follow him later, or, less likely, the evidence of human sacrifices, where all the close relatives of the deceased were to follow him right after his death [Fig.20].



Another excavation took place in 1992, bringing to light other 5 tombs (M9-M13), with other 39 tombs still to be dug up, for a total of 52 tombs identified over the entire burial area (cemetery no.1). Of these 5 tombs, four feature a straight vertical shaft pit structure (M9-10-12-13) and only one can be described as a catacomb (M10).¹⁷⁸ In one of these vertical tombs, a man lays over a woollen carpet, dressed in sheepskin boots and coat accompanied by a woman wearing a tall, conical hat and a black hair net (M11). Such conical hairnet seems to be a constant ornamental feature in Subeixi, as other more

¹⁷⁶ Ma and Wang 1994: 209-225.

¹⁷⁷ Tulufan diqu wenguansuo 1984 and 1986.

¹⁷⁸ Xinjiang kaogu wenwu yanjiusuo et al 1993.

éclatant examples have been found in cemetery III. As in the case of the vertical pit burials, also the catacomb-type tomb (M10) hosts an individual with extended limbs and head facing west. Like the catacomb-type tombs found during the 1980 excavation, the burial was covered with wooden logs, reed mats and grass, and features a stepped internal platform. In all the tombs iron objects were found together with bone, wooden, horn, woollen and leather artefacts. The inventory is similar to the 1980's burials, with a significant percentage of plain red pottery *guan*-jars and *pen*-basins. Yet only two copper earrings were found. The scarcity of bronze and copper artefacts and the presence of only two ornaments in such material would testify the shift of importance from bronze to iron, as far as hunting tools are concerned.

Catacomb style tombs which represent the majority in Subeixi burial site could be dated around the 3rd century BCE, according to the first 1984 report on the excavation, as carbon dating on M3, one of the catacomb tombs gives a 2225 ± 75 B.P.¹⁷⁹ Archaeologists maintain that vertical pit tombs are earlier than catacomb style ones, and date the entire cemetery between the Warring States period and the Western Han period, although further carbon dating is needed to confirm this date (only two tombs have been subjected to C14 so far). This type of catacomb tomb results very similar to those found at the Hamadun site belonging to the late phase of the Shajing culture, in Gansu province (9th-7th century BCE). Furthermore the stylistic similarities between these two cultures include the custom of wrapping the corpses into reed mats, the ceramic inventory, similar bronze knives, and the presence of dismembered corpses accompanying the main occupant of the tomb. All these are elements that would indeed reflect some kind of connection with the Scythian culture.

The *Han Shu* (*Xiyu zhuan*) narrates that the area at that time was inhabited by the Jushi people, the same people encountered at Alagou and Yuergou, whose burial monuments shared affinities with Subeixi. Similarly, the presence of dismembered corpses accompanying the main occupant of the burial could point to, according to the excavators, to human sacrifices justified by a slave-based social structure. This idea would be supported by references again in the *Xiyu zhuan*, which however refer to the Xiongnu in the 2nd century BCE, rather than to the Jushi people.

However, the presence of such fragmented bodies could otherwise signal the custom of *post-mortem* dismembering and embalming, which also pertains to the Scythian peoples of the Eurasian Steppes. According to Russian scholars, this custom was maintained to make the corpses easy to transport through long distances, in the case that the dead

person would have passed away far from his burial destination.¹⁸⁰ Recently, by

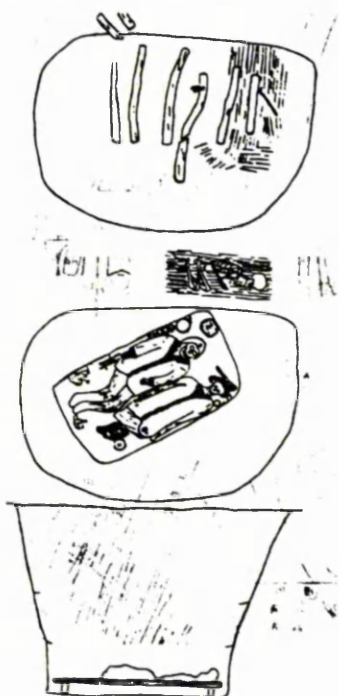


Fig. 22 Cemetery III tomb M6 [Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1994:fig 4].



Fig. 21 Woman with tall hat from tomb M6 [Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1994 : fig 10].

analysing several corpses from Siberian kurgans of the Scythian period, it has been discovered that the deceased were deliberately de-fleshed.¹⁸¹ The evidence was not, as previously thought, a sign of 'endo-cannibalism' but rather a confirmation of Russian theory for practicality in transporting the corpse. Cemetery no. 3 consisted of 30 tombs almost all oriented to the west, excavated in 1991 at a close distance from cemetery I.¹⁸² 29 of them present a vertical shaft pit structure, with a grass mat placed at the bottom. The occupants were lying with their legs bent, accompanied by funerary objects behind their head or by their side. Wooden logs were used to cover the entrance to the tomb, whilst sometimes a wooden platform supported the corpses. Traces of fatty substance containing animal protein have also been recovered, probably employed as an anti-bacterial agent, which helped preserving the corpses.¹⁸³ M6 revealed a couple lying supine with legs bent and their head towards the northeast [Figs.21-22]. The old man was wearing a felt cap, a sheepskin coat and boots, whilst his old consort was wearing a black hair net made in sprang¹⁸⁴ with a long conical hat, distinctive of Subeixi women.

¹⁷⁹ Tulufan diqu wenguansuo 1984.

¹⁸⁰ Davis Kimball et al. 1995: 302.

¹⁸¹ Mallory and Mair 2000: 41. Indeed a similar gum-like substance, possibly a concoction of oil, wax and mercury (used as anti-septic) has been frequently noticed on Pazyryk corpses.

¹⁸² Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1994.

¹⁸³ Mallory and Mair 2000: 177.

¹⁸⁴ When the parallel threads are twisted around each other one after the other, and then the twists are pushed to both sides until there is no room left for further twists. Then a thread is darned in crosswise to hold

Such conical hats suggest some sort of ethnic affiliation with the *Saka Tigraxauda* (Sakas who wear pointed caps) enlisted by Darius I of Achaemenid Persia (550-331 BCE), who allegedly inhabited the region between the Syr Darya and the Semireč'e. On her sides two leather pouches containing a bone comb and some mineral pigments were also discovered. Such custom was widespread amongst the Scythian Tagar people of the Minusinsk Basin of Southern Siberia, where several women were found accompanied by small rectangular leather bags with combs and mirrors inside. The preserved torso of another male (severed by a bulldozer) that died under surgical tools was found with three scars across his chest, sewn with horsehair. Attached to his coat was a small bag with a brownish substance believed to be realgar (red orpiment) and in another pouch were crushed herbal remedies, probably including ephedra.

M25 is the only example unearthed so far at the cemetery that features a catacomb structure, organised similarly to those found in cemetery I, displaying wooden logs and corpses wrapped in woollen mats. This tomb could be considered the embryonic form that is fully developed in cemetery I.

The cemetery would date back to roughly the same period of cemetery I, from the Warring States period to the Western Han period, although the prevalence of vertical straight pits would suggest a slightly earlier date (5th -3rd century BCE, mid Warring States period). The site would again belong to the same people, possibly the *Han Shu* mentioned Jushi, whose capital Jiaohe lies just a few miles away.

Half a kilometre away from the burial complex, three residential units were also detected, corresponding to the same cultural level.¹⁸⁵ These remains speak of the sedentary habits of their inhabitants, who engaged in weaving and pottery making, practised agriculture, cultivating grape, red soy beans and broom corn millet, and at the same time, herded livestock which they either ate or employed in the manufacture of leather and woollen accessories. Yet also evident from the recovery of various bows, arrows and quivers, is a certain level of hunting activities.

Ordos cultural horizon

The Ordos geo-cultural area spans from south-western Inner Mongolia to Ningxia, including various sites, the most important being Taohongbala, Gongsuhao (east of Taohongbala) and Aluchaideng in Hangjin Qi, Yulongtai, Sujigou and Xigoupan, in Jungar Qi, Nianfangqu, Dongsheng city and Shihuigou in Yijinghuoluo Qi. Not all the

the twists from unwinding, thus making a stretchy net [Barber 1999:200].

sites have yielded funerary monuments, as many are indeed hoard findings or isolated elite tombs (as in the case of Aluchaideng). From the analysis of burial structures and assemblages in the Ordos region, a link can be seen with other neighbouring areas to the north and to the west. It was in fact during the 1st millennium BCE, that a specific ethno-cultural zone was formed in the western Mongolia region adjacent to the Sayan and the Altai mountains. This area shows further stylistic similarities in bronze inventory and burial structure to Tuva, the Altai region and eastern Kazakhstan, therefore linking it with burials such as Pazyryk and Arzhan. It is interesting to notice that these ethno-cultural differences between western and eastern Mongolia lingered on into the early Iron Age, although certain traits (especially as far as bronzes are concerned) started to be shared.

Maoqinggou

Although Maoqinggou complex is often culturally detached from the Ordos group of sites,¹⁸⁶ certain stylistic features in terms of burial structure and funerary artefacts would seem to link it closely with other sites in the Ordos plateau, such as Taohongbala. The cemetery covers an area of 100 m. x 70 m. where 79 tombs (the majority oriented to the east and concentrated in the northern sector) and a pit for sacrificed horses were excavated with no signs of intrusion or superimposition. Yet 13 of these tombs contained no furnishing and no sacrificed animals and an additional 19 contained only a few objects or animal bones. Hence only 47 tombs yielded a decent assemblage comprising metal and ceramic items. Overall, no cases of second interment or multiple burials have been identified at the site. Some pits did not even yield a proper human skeleton, but only a few scattered phalanges.¹⁸⁷ Interesting enough, M10 hosted a single female occupant embellished at the waist with a belt made of bronze plaques and florets and by a beaded necklace, who was accompanied by her still born baby girl (remains consisted in part of her tiny skull and finger bones) [Fig.23]. This young lady must have been quite important, considering the fact that her assemblage is one of the richest in the cemetery.

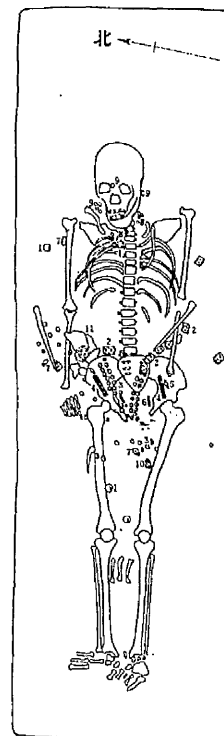


Fig. 23 Tomb M10 at Maoqinggou [Tian and Guo 1986: pl.7, p. 236]

¹⁸⁵ Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1994.

¹⁸⁶ Bunker et al, 1997.

¹⁸⁷ Data according to Tian and Guo 1986: 227-315.

Judging from the analysis of assemblages in male and female graves, gender roles may not have been clearly demarcated, although among all the artefacts found, short swords, pick axes, arrowheads and horse bits seem to be associated with a small minority of adult males, perhaps a military elite. Yet the majority of the tombs would seem quite undifferentiated, with both women and men embellished with necklaces and belt girdles and sometimes accompanied by animal sacrifices. On the other hand, assemblages seem to vary with time. According to the excavators, four phases of development can be identified; whilst in the first period (late Spring and Autumn period) assemblages include pottery vessels and bronze ornamental plaques, by the second period onwards (Warring States period), iron emerged and was gradually used for weapons, tools and ornaments.

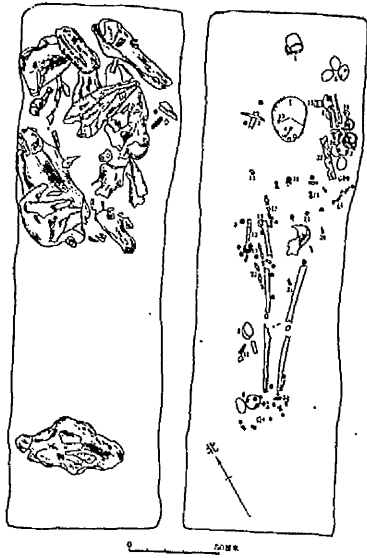
Generally speaking, tombs also display a rather homogeneous structure; they all are rectangular pits with a single occupant lying supine with limbs extended, sometimes provided with a frontal niche or an internal coffin made of wooden logs. The tendency to combine different burial styles is shared by another site in Liangcheng County, Guoxianyaozi,¹⁸⁸ which is traditionally associated with the northern Di tribe. The burials of the first phase at Maoqinggou must belong to this same tribe. Following periods must have instead reflected the intrusion of nomadic people from the west, perhaps the Loufan group, a tribe culturally related to the later Xiongnu.¹⁸⁹

The common orientation and the absence of phenomena of superimposition would signal a very organised and persistent human agency behind the distribution of the pits, hinting to a long-established, relatively peaceful, sedentary society. The metal inventory further indicates a people rather different from the typical early nomads and points to a pastoral hunting community in contacts with other more powerful mounted nomads who were gradually penetrating the area, especially the Ordos. The presence of kilns and residential remains nearby would seem to substantiate this hypothesis. It is possible that the early people of Maoqinggou belonged to a sedentary society but started to develop in the direction of a more specialised pastoral nomadic economy, induced by contacts with nomads of the Loufan group in the Ordos. Physical anthropologic data seem to corroborate this phenomenon with a mixed Eastern (pre-existent) and Northern (intruded) Asian Mongoloid population.

¹⁸⁸ Neimenggu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1989.

¹⁸⁹ Di Cosmo 2002: 78.

Taohongbala and Gongsuhao



Taohongbala and Gongsuhao sites in Hangjin Qi are situated on a high plateau at 1500 m from sea level.¹⁹⁰ The small Taohongbala cemetery yielded six vertical-shaft shallow earthen pits all arranged on a west-east line [Fig.24], whilst Gongsuhao yielded only one tomb, similar in structure and apparatus to Taohongbala ones.

Fig. 24 Tomb M1 at Taohongbala [Tian and Guo, 1986: p12, p.206].

These remains have been partially carbon-dated between the early and the late Spring and Autumn period.¹⁹¹ The single occupant presented a stretched supine body oriented to the north. Goat, horse and cow skulls have been recovered on top. In the case of male occupants the majority of bones belong to horses, also retaining some decorative ornaments and harness accessories (horse bits). Whilst in the case of a female occupant (M2) the majority of animal remains belong to the ovine species. The simple structure is thus different from the Yanglang catacomb tomb, which included instead a recessed area.

Sacrificed horses, cattle and goats enclosed in these tombs are found represented only by skulls and hooves (only not edible parts).¹⁹² At this moment in time, the contingent environment was indeed very suitable for animal husbandry and herd pasture, being, as it was, constituted by irrigated grassland. It was only in the latter part of the 1st millennium BCE, later than the time of the Taohongbala tombs, that water resources started to decline.¹⁹³ Bearing in mind the ecological context of the mid 1st millennium BCE, the high number of animals sacrificed in tombs can be interpreted as an attempt to ritualise the use of domesticated animals. Furthermore, the specific prevalence of horses in male tombs and sheep in female tombs would suggest an engendered separation of roles (as if men were to ride horses and women to look after the flock).

¹⁹⁰ Tian and Guo 1986: 203-226; Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1978.

¹⁹¹ 9th-3rd century BCE (calibrated c. 840-600 BCE and 810-434 BCE) [Di Cosmo 1996: 92]. 14C 665± 105 BCE and 590±105 BCE [Tian and Guo 1986: 218]. About 500 BCE, Zk-266 [Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1978].

¹⁹² As it happens in the Yanglang area.

¹⁹³ Shi Peijun 1991.

The remains from Taohongbala are similar to those unearthed in the Yanglang cultural type, although the very structure of the tombs differs. Chinese historians in particular, have identified the Ordos and the Taohongbala site as the home of the Linhu, who together with the Loufan tribe (already mentioned for Maoqinggou) inhabited the Ordos region between the 6th and the 3rd century BCE. Skulls seem to belong to the Northern Asian Mongoloid family.

Aluchaideng

Aluchaideng in Hangjin Qi, close to Taohongbala, is situated on a high grass irrigated plateau on the northern rim of the Maowusu desert in Inner Mongolia. It yielded the fortunate discovery of two rich tombs, probably belonged to aristocratic members, the structure of which has not been preserved to the present and cannot be analysed then in this context. However, since other archaeological sites at a few kilometres distance surround the site, the archaeologists have presumed their burial affinity, with a simple rectangular shafted tomb type. Yet Aluchaideng tombs have yielded an inventory, which would point to a later date (3rd century BCE), and as such, their burial structure might have been changed in time.

Xigoupan

At Xigoupan, in Jungar Qi, no organised burial complex has been unearthed so far, but only three tombs of different periods all within the Warring States period, scattered in an area of 2 squared km.¹⁹⁴ They are rectangular vertical earthen pit graves found oriented to the north, with horse and goat skulls. M2 yielded a single male skeleton with his face towards the north, with no coffin, but accompanied on his left side by several ovine and equine skulls. In M2, the best preserved burial pit, in the proximity of the corpse, four bronze deer (more likely ibexes) in the round, two bronze arrow heads, one ornament with a bird design and 7 silver bridle bits (*Jie yue*) with tiger decorations were found. Around the neck, a golden torque, two golden earrings, a bronze mirror, a golden roundel with an enrolled deer design, whilst on his right hand, an iron short sword, a wooden scabbard covered with golden foil. At the waist, one rectangular golden plaque; between the legs, one bronze roundel and a golden finger cover. Finally, resting on the belly, also numerous silver florets. This tomb yielded more than 60 artefacts in gold and silver, amongst which mirror-image plaques cast in lost wax lost textile technique, with inscribed Chinese weight.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ A second excavation brought to light other 8 tombs datable to the Western Han period [Tian and Guo 1986:353].

¹⁹⁵ Bunker 1994.

M3 yielded fewer and less lavish objects, comprising a bronze short sword, with a snake decoration incised on the hilt and a mushroom pommel, a bronze knife, as well decorated with a snake pattern on the handle, some bronze buttons, a rectangular tubular fitting, a ring-shaped belt hook, some bird shaped ornaments, comprising plaques and awls. Also 3 turquoise beads were discovered. M1 instead unveiled a larger number of iron artefacts.

The presence of a settlement in the vicinity of the cemetery shows signs of semi-sedentary economic strategy. This evidence is further attested by the sharp differentiation in the funerary assemblage. This could reflect distinction in social status rather than ethnic differences and may refer to the establishment of a rich aristocracy, based on cavalry. In fact, the large presence of more and more *jie yue*, small decorative fittings used on riding bridles, already encountered in southern Siberia and Kazakhstan, could indicate the shift of importance from chariot riding (signalled in earlier tombs by the ritual presence of yoke ornaments) to horse riding.

The Yanglang cultural horizon

The Yanglang type of sites, covering the Qingyang plateau in Gansu and Guyuan county in Ningxia, are merely known from their burial remains, including some twenty sites with more than a hundred tombs and a long list of minor satellite sites, all showing stylistic affinities in their inventory.¹⁹⁶ The Qingyang plateau in Gansu has always been a strategically sensitive area between the Zhou domain on the Wei and Huang Rivers, and the grassland to the north and to the west. There, in Ning xian, Qingyang xian, Zhenyuan xian and Zhenning xian, around ten sites, mostly constituted by a single burial, have been excavated and associated to the same cultural horizon encountered in Ningxia and dated accordingly between the 7th and the 3rd century BCE.¹⁹⁷

In terms of burial structure, the few tombs from Qingyang survived to the present mostly feature a vertical shaft earthen pit structure, sometimes with an adjacent horse pit.¹⁹⁸ In the only survey of the area at our disposal, no catacomb type tombs have been mentioned. It seems that the sites situated in eastern Gansu would be similar to those

¹⁹⁶ For a list of more than twenty sites in Gansu province associated with contemporary Ningxia sites, such as Fengpucun, Ligoucun, Mazhaicun, Wujiagouquancun, Tatou, Wulipocun see Liu and Xu 1988. The definition of archaeological area based on homogeneity in burial structures and assemblages has been proposed by Wu En and Bunker [Bunker et al 1997].

¹⁹⁷ Dating is also based on comparative analysis of metal artefacts from the Ordos zone, especially Taohongbala, Xigoupan and Yulongtai. See Liu and Xu 1988 for a list of related sites in the Qingyang plateau.

¹⁹⁸ Namely Yuanjia in Ning county, Houzhuang in Zhenning county, Miaoqu and Hongyan in Zhenyuan county [Liu and Xu 1988].

small sites detected in Ningxia, after all.¹⁹⁹ Yet the fact that most of them have yielded a single burial would point to an attitude towards death different in many respects to the organised cemeteries found in Yanglang Mazhuang and Pengpu Yujiazhuang in Ningxia. Animal sacrifice is abundant, mainly documented by heads and hooves of horses, oxen or goats (all ungulates which would have been most suitable for herding in the ecological context of the Qingyang plateau).

In Guyuan county, in Ningxia, more than 30 sites affiliated to the Yanglang type have been detected, whilst many others whose burial features would relate to Guyuan have been identified in neighbouring counties such as Pengyang and Xiji around the Huang He middle reaches in an area known in antiquity for being populated by nomads.²⁰⁰ Generally the tomb would consist of a straight vertical pit or a catacomb, with no internal coffin, with the deceased facing the east and the prevalence of bronze objects, in great number, placed amidst the remains of ovine, equine and bovine skulls. Such behavioural pattern would suggest a cultural affinity with both the Ordos and the Maoqinggou complexes, where similarly hunting and herding were significantly the favoured economic strategies. The amount of sacrificed animal skulls seems to diminish through time. The orientation to the east is consistent with Maoqinggou burials, but not with the Ordos ones. The custom could be related to the widespread belief amongst nomadic people of facing the rising sun in death, also encountered in the Xiongnu of the *Shiji* account. Again, textual references in the *Shiji* would suggest that the area was once the homeland of the Xi Rong tribe, with whom the Qin had close encounters.²⁰¹ All the sites are in fact in the proximity of the ruins of the Great Wall built by the Qin state to prevent the ingress of nomadic hordes into Chinese territory, during the Warring States period. Luo Feng has corroborated this hypothesis with the evidence of an inscription on a Han bronze ding found in Guyuan that would point to the so-called *wuzhi* branch of the Rong tribe.²⁰²

Yanglang Mazhuang

Yanglang Mazhuang in Guyuan xian comprises three adjoining burial grounds (zones 1-2-3) close to a small riverbank for a total area of 3000 x 200 m. 49 tombs were identified, although only 29 were found in good conditions. Zone 1 revealed five different stratigraphic levels, whilst the other two zones did not show any stratigraphic variance. 1 vertical and 28 catacomb style pits have been found. All but one of the catacombs hosted a single chamber (the remnant one presents a double chamber). Generally the

¹⁹⁹ Especially, Pengpu Houmo and Hezhuang Shangdai in Guyuan county [Luo and Han 1990:403], Caomiao Zhangjie, Liuyuan Miyuan and Jiaocha Xianma in Pengyang county [Yang and Qi 1999:28].

²⁰⁰ Yang Ningguo and Qi Yuezhong 1999.

²⁰¹ *Shiji Xiongnu Liezhuan*.

entrance was carved on the eastern or northern wall. The catacombs are rectangular in shape, yielding most of the times a complete skeleton lying supine with legs extended, the head mostly oriented to the north or the east, without coffin, with the head lower than the feet (slanting bottom) [Fig.25].

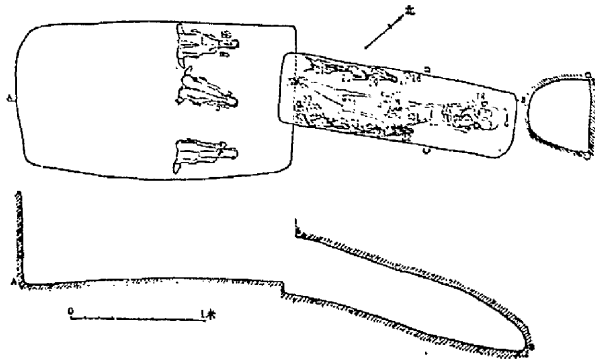


Fig. 25 Mazhuang IM3. Catacomb style tomb [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1993: p.22, pl.10]

No joint burials have been detected. Both adults and children were buried. As in the case of Pengpu Yujiazhuang site, which can be considered the parallel site to Mazhuang, most tombs are catacomb-style graves, with only few vertical pits. In both sites the placement of the burial niche and the position of the deceased was the same, either in the centre of the wall or near one corner of the pit.

Although the quantity of burial items varies greatly according to the tomb, from 121 to 3 items only, the personal adornment arrangement seems consistent as beads are always placed around the cranial area, earrings always embellish both ears of the deceased, bracelets and rings on the abdomen or at the side, belt ornaments around the belt, together with belt plaques and other related ornaments, and the belt buckles always at the left side by the waist. Weapons and tools are found everywhere around the body: a dagger by the side of the skull, a spear by the abdomen, swords close to the thighs, knives mostly by the hips, crane-beak axes by the belly or the side of the skull, a chisel on the body's left side, an awl around the skull. Every type of tubular fitting would appear at both sides of the legs. Deer, sheep and dog shaped yoke ornaments were placed either in the mound topping the pit, or at either sides of the body, or again together with the sacrificed animal bones. Small harness pieces, such as *jie yue* and beads were found close to the body, whilst big size chariot accessories, such as finials, bells and pole fittings were mostly placed with the sacrificed bones.

²⁰²Luo Feng 1990.

Animal sacrifice was also here consistent, with a standard offering of three animals. Heads and hooves (inedible parts) of sacrificed horses, oxen and ovine, accompanied all the deceased. Ovine bones represent the majority, being present in all the pits, whilst equine and bovine remains are absent in some tombs (respectively in 6 and in 2 tombs). All of them were found placed together with pottery and horse harness ornaments. It appears that the number of sacrificed animals in the tomb would reflect the owner status in life (the more animals, the higher the position in the social ladder).

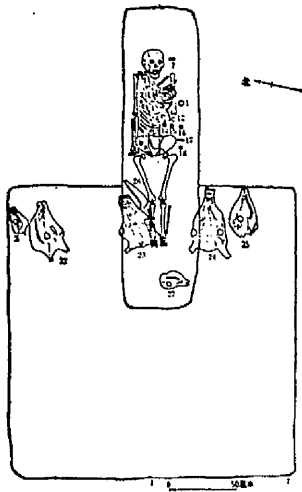
The inventory would in general speak of a pastorals group. In fact, apart from the sporadic presence of celt spades, not many other agricultural tools have been detected, and this aspect would suggest not only the relative unimportance of such activity but also the consequent strong herding connotations of this people. Furthermore, in the late group burials, the prevalence of chariot ornaments would signal the ritual and not only functional importance of the vehicle, an important symbol in pastoral societies of the late Bronze Age period throughout Central Asia.

From the stratigraphic analysis, it appears that there are two subsequent phases, spanning from the late Spring and Autumn period to the late Warring States period, based on typological comparative analysis with other sites to the east, Maoqinggou and Taohongbala, in Inner Mongolia. Yet, the consistency in burial material culture could imply continuity in the ethnicity of the resident group. Traditional Chinese texts such as the *Shiji* and the *Hou Han Shu*, indeed inferred that the Rong people once populated the area.

Pengpu Yujiazhuang

The site of Pengpu Yujiazhuang is situated 2.5 km north west of Pengpu Sanmencun, in Guyuan xian, to the north of the Great Wall remains.²⁰³ It covers an area of 500 x 50 m, on an irrigated basin. Three zones compose the cemetery: the northern zone, which yielded 3 tombs (NM1-NM3), the central zone with 20 tombs (m1-m20) and a southern zone with 5 tombs (SM1-SM5). The site did not yield any evidence of superimposition or intrusion. Among the 22 tombs which have been preserved up till now, only 2 are joint infant tombs (vertical pits), whilst the rest yielded single occupants lying supine or by their side with legs extended and face oriented to the east, north-east, with no internal coffin. As in the case of Yanglang Mazhuang in Guyuan county, the head was placed at a lower level than the feet, i.e. on a slanting bottom. The tombs generally feature both rectangular vertical pits (6) and catacomb style pits (16). Within the catacomb style pits

²⁰³ Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1995.



there are four further subdivisions: vertical shaft type, concave style, knife style and convex style catacombs.

Fig. 26 T-Shaped tomb M 15 at Yujiashuang [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1995: p.83, pl. 6]

The first type present the body, in most cases a child, encased inside a niche surrounded by funerary items, whilst sacrificed animal skulls are found in the main pit. The convex type (T-shaped) presents a rectangular main chamber with a slanting niche placed in the middle of the eastern wall, where the body is encased [Fig.26]. The knife type (L-shaped) presents the

niche on the left side of the eastern wall and the concave type or U-shaped presents two niches (only one tomb features such type). Sacrificed animals include cows (54), horses (42) and sheep (166) symbolised by their skulls mainly, although some hooves and necks have also been found. Their placement in the tomb may vary: for example, in vertical pits the bones are mostly placed under the occupant's feet, whilst in the catacomb they are usually piled up in the main chamber by the side of the wall where the niche opens up, or inside the mound. A great disparity in quantity of animal bones is evident in the tombs, yet it is also clear that vertical pits generally present less animal bones than catacombs do. And as such their presence could also signify a different social stratum, lower in the case of the vertical tombs, and higher for the catacomb style burials.

Apart from the few pottery jars recovered, in general there are no utilitarian tools or agricultural tools in the burials. The absence of agricultural tools would suggest poor familiarity with agriculture, or at least appreciation of this activity, at a social level. In fact, the massive consistent presence of animal sacrifice custom, would indeed point to a society based on animal breeding and herding rather than agriculture. Moreover, the absence of agricultural tools would further indicate the nomadic nature of such society.

According to comparative analyses with other sites in Ningxia, Gansu and Inner Mongolia (Taohongbala, Maoqinggou) the site has been ascribed to the late Spring and Autumn period -early Warring States period (5th century BCE). This conclusion has been based on the study of short swords unearthed at the site that closely resemble both examples from Maoqinggou and from Hulusitai in the Ordos complex. The knives and some of the plaques, on the other hand, are similar to Taohongbala examples of the late Spring and Autumn period. Catacomb pits are also thought to have been earlier than the vertical ones, according to inventory analysis. Besides the Ordos and the Maoqinggou

burial affinities, burial inventory and structure have been said to show also some affinities with Shaanxi Fufeng Liujia 'Qiang Rong' catacomb tombs.²⁰⁴ Yet it is distinct. From the analysis of textual references on geographic location, it would appear that the Xi Rong people once inhabited the areas of Ningxia, Gansu and Shaanxi where similar burial inventories have been found. Eight skulls were analysed by Han Kangxin five of them were male and three female.²⁰⁵ The morphological traits of their cranium and face revealed the appurtenance to the North-Asian (Siberian) Mongoloid group, yet they are different from pre-existent Neolithic and early Bronze Age skulls from the same area. The shift in racial morphological characteristics could reflect the cultural discrepancy between settled farmers of the early Bronze Age period in Ningxia and the new steppe nomads of the 5th -4th centuries BCE.

²⁰⁴ Shaanxi Zhouyuan Kaogudui 1984.

²⁰⁵ Han Kangxin 1995.

Conclusions

Burial structure and the issue of ethnicity: catacombs and niche-tombs

An important factor enlightened in the study of Siba-Huoshagou is the presence of so-called catacomb tombs, here simply constituted by a lateral recessed niche, rather than being proper catacomb structures. A similar structure was also employed in later cemeteries related to the Xindian and Kayue horizons in central Gansu during the early 1st millennium BCE. Yet, the earliest tombs with a proper longitudinal niche, used to contain the deceased, are found in Shajing contexts further to the north-west, in the Hexi corridor. According to Chinese archaeologists,²⁰⁶ the remains of Shajing burials and citadel settlements would belong to the proto-Yuezhi tribe, dating back to the 9th- 7th centuries BCE, hence much earlier than all the Yuezhi-related Central Asian examples.²⁰⁷ This chronological sequence would suggest a westward migration of this type of burial, hence to use it as parameter of ethnic appurtenance (univocally linked to Yuezhi) seems a bit hazardous. Indeed a slightly later (5th-3rd c. BCE) counterpart would come from the Subeixi catacomb tombs located in the Turfan basin in eastern Xinjiang.²⁰⁸ These tombs display a similar structure, with similar internal furnishings (wooden logs, reed mat wraps). Furthermore they provide the evidence for discarding the parameter of burial structure as bearing unequivocal ethnic connotations, since vertical pits found in the same burial context yielded analogous burial inventories, reaffirming the scepticism expressed by Lu in his article.²⁰⁹ This type of tomb was also employed further to the east at apparently an earlier date (late Western Zhou-early Eastern Zhou period) in Shaanxi province, at Fufeng Liujia. The distribution of niche tombs on pre-dynastic Qin territory further confirms the link between Qin and the frontier people of Gansu and Ningxia (the so-called Xi-Rong). Indeed it could also indicate that Qin somehow provided the channel through which this burial style travelled eastward towards central China.

²⁰⁶ Lu Enguo 2002: 21-22.

²⁰⁷ Zadneprovskiy [1999] associates Shajing *podboy* burials with similar structures unearthed in the Semireč'e, in Ferghana (Tianshan foothills), Sogdiana (Zeravshan Valley), and the Tulkhar group in northern Bactria, a site apparently belonging to the Yuezhi, but all dated not earlier than the 5th c. BCE.

²⁰⁸ Even later examples are provided by tombs in cemetery III at Chawuhu site, dated to the Western Han period [Wang Mingzhe 1998: 258-261].

²⁰⁹ Lu [CIAA 15] suggests caution when relating archaeological material to ethnicity, especially in the case of the *podboy*-Yuezhi issue.

Gender in archaeology: women status in north-western China

Investigating the issue of gender within the archaeological context of north-western China does not represent an easy task, given the paucity of relevant information. While most sites have not yet been thoroughly investigated, the discovery of particular cases of female internments would seem to shed some light on the role played by women in some societies. Since these cases represent exceptional discoveries in a largely standardised context, they may not be generalised. Still, seemingly parallel gender behaviours in idiosyncratic burials found in different cultural contexts could provide yet another clue in the search for ethnic affiliation.

The majority of the cemeteries dated to the 2nd millennium BCE favoured multiple and/or couple arrangements and secondary interment practises, in turn indicating quite a simple, poorly-stratified society, perhaps based on clan bondages, with women considered in equal terms with men. Almost the same behaviour is encountered even at a later date at Chawuhu, one of the fewest archaeological complexes in the north-west to have been thoroughly excavated and studied.

However, during the early 1st millennium BCE in Shajing contexts no multiple burials were found. Instead, single female burials have yielded particularly rich inventories, which may relate women to three sub-categories of gendered agency.²¹⁰ Artefacts in fact comprised turquoise stones used as ear pendants as indicators of femininity,²¹¹ small cooking stoves with meat (pertaining to the domestic sphere), but also bronze ornaments and spherical plaques (pertaining to the military sphere - encountered in male inventories as well), and even a possible falconer hand-guard and a sort of whip made of leather and bronze bells, which may tell us something about the formulation of a religious sphere. This unique artefact may point to a leading role in life for its young female owner. The presence of small tingling bells attached to the whip may suggest a shamanistic valence, hence associating this woman with the sphere of magic and divine within the pastoral Shajing community. However, the material at our disposal is still fragmentary. Further analysis is needed for all the female burials within Shajing context, to corroborate this hypothesis.

On the other hand, this type of female/magic association brings to mind another, slightly later, example encountered in eastern Xinjiang in the burial complex of Subeixi, in the

²¹⁰ The same division is evident in later Scythian contexts, like in Pokrovka kurgan complex. Cf. Davis Kimball: 1998. See also gender categories through dress, discussed by Sorensen [2000:142].

²¹¹ The use of turquoise pendants was indeed considered gender-specific within the later Scythians, an idea

Turfan basin. Here, women with tall cylindrical hats, reminiscent of Central Asian female headgears, were buried with their consorts wearing robes and boots and holding by their side a small leather bag with a mirror and some 'make-up' powders, a gender-specific item consistently found among the southern Siberian women of the Scythian period. Their many elements of connection with the southern Siberian Scythian tribes would also suggest a religious connotation for their huge pinnacle-hat as similar headgears found throughout Central Asia, from Pokrovka and Ukok to Pazyryk and Issyk, would also seem to indicate.

Indeed, the presence of pouches containing colourful pigments might have had a more magical significance than mere make up. The crushed pigments had more than one use ranging from cosmetic colours applied for rituals, used for tattooing the skin, dying yarns for textiles or for painting ritual designs on clothing or skin.

Other sites close by, tentatively dated to roughly the same time (mid 1st millennium BCE), such as Wupushuiku in Hami and, further south, Zahongluke in Qiemo county exhibit quite unique features in burial behaviour, especially in terms of gender. Curiously enough, both sites appear to display signs of Proto-Europoid presence. At Wupushuiku, a site related to the later stage of Yanbulake culture, a female adult skeleton was discovered at a very bottom of a tiered burial structure (M151), wearing leather shoes and woollen robes. On top of her, the remains of four adults (two males and two females) and three children were piled up. This peculiar arrangement might indicate either a ritualised behaviour, involving human sacrifices or a clan massacre by an external usurping agent. In both cases, the position of the old woman seems to reflect her pre-eminence in society or within her clan. A much larger number of similar cases from the same context would certainly help to corroborate the hypothesis.

Other examples of tiered vertical pits were brought to light at Zahongluke, another site where the presence of proto-Europoid people has been corroborated. Again, in one case the archaeological excavation reported the horrific scene of an old woman on the bottom of the pit, surmounted by three seemingly sacrificed individuals, this time a young woman and two small boys. The disturbed tomb was difficult to read, yet the presence of the old woman, as the main occupant of the tomb seems to parallel the behaviour at Wupushuiku. The old woman had semi lunar tattoos on her upper eyelids, whilst dark bluish-green S-shaped designs were tattooed on her left hand, reminiscent of similar practises among the people of southern Siberia (Pazyryk), where tattoos were believed

that may have been indirectly drawn from past Andronovo beliefs.

to mark social distinction.²¹² The only food apparent for her journey to the next world was in the form of sorghum-type bread. The majority of the other artefacts seem to belong to the cultic sphere and included a wooden tray with short legs resembling Sarmatian priestess' sacrificial altars; two carved wooden spoons without handles; two bovine horns used as cups; a spindle plus a spindle whorl, both carved from wood of the exact type also encountered at Chawuhu.²¹³ At the same time, additional textiles in plain weave with roughly executed red scrolls painted on the surface were found in the burial. The presence of coiled patterned textiles, symbolic tattoos on her skin and the sacrificial altar would seem to indicate her role as 'priestess'. Another woman from Zahongluke, currently in display at the Urumqi Museum further confirms the special role played by women within Zahongluke society. Here again, the most unusual aspect consisted in the painted and tattooed coiled motifs. Even artefacts seem to parallel those from the previous burial: bovine horns, wooden cultic spoons, a large wooden platter and one stick wrapped with red yarn and another with white yarn were included in her mortuary assemblage, together with spindles and spindle whorls.

Tattoos and skin painting could be considered as gender-related customs.²¹⁴ Perhaps, these signs reflected signifying differences and subtleties in the social behaviour of women. Indeed traditions involving the special treatment of the head and the headdress and the use of hair ornaments are known from the early Bronze Age, transmitted through changes during the medieval period into ultimately our time. Tattoos in Eurasia were traditionally made by women, at young age, sometimes connected with Shamanistic initiations, believed to be signs of death and resurrection to gain access to the spiritual world.²¹⁵

Hence from the evidence collected so far, including the unique variety of organic artefacts preserved in the desert areas of Xinjiang, a pre-eminent role for women could be associated to Scythian-related societies, and before then, possibly to Andronovo groups of Central Asia. The model of a female mother-warrior-priestess (leader) could thus be extended to the sites mentioned above, where proto-Europoid individuals were indeed present, further linking eastern Xinjiang to the Eurasian steppe nomads of the

²¹² These designs also echo motifs found incised or worked into animal-style objects and clearly duplicate the leather cut-out from the early Sarmatian kurgan female burial at Sara near Ufa, Bashkortostan [Davis-Kimball 1998: 14, and pl.2]. It is worthy to notice that tattoos were also found on the skin of some individuals at Wupushuiku, further connecting the two sites.

²¹³ To this regard, the twenty-three spindle whorls with carved decoration unearthed at cemetery IV at Chawuhu would seem to exhibit a very important significance, perhaps linked with spinning and possibly to its magical symbolism, as in the Saka examples. Among societies without a written language, the fertility motifs combined with cloth and its making signified birth and life and ultimately became metaphors for both time and fruition [Barber 1994].

²¹⁴ Sorenson 1997: 104.

Scythian period. The presence of a similar model at an earlier time in Shajing could somehow indicate the presence of Proto-Europoid cultural influences (possibly Andronovo) even here.

²¹⁵ Eliade 1964.

Chapter 3

Ceramics: typology and meaning

2nd Millennium BCE

Sites datable to the second millennium BCE along the north-western frontier of China exhibit rich ceramic inventories, especially when compared to the penury of other types of findings. The availability of local resources (clay) and the widespread diffusion of the simple coiling technique certainly encouraged its adoption and exploitation. Ceramics were employed for both mundane and ritual purposes and often a difference in style and manufacture is discernable between the two categories. Utilitarian pots would feature a simpler surface decoration and a rougher appearance, whilst ritual vessels would exhibit a finer grain and a more sophisticated surface treatment, often including painted designs. Whilst in the past the degree of stylistic similarity in ceramics between groups was conceived as directly related to the amount of social interaction between them, now style is considered as an active informative medium,¹ providing valuable clues on aspects of social organisation, such as clan links, economic and lineage networks, and ethnic affiliation.² But style is expressed not only in ceramics, but also in any other type of material visible in the archaeological records. So far, many studies on stylistic patterns have focused on only one type of material or artefact; a particular emphasis has been laid on ceramic vessels and their surface decoration, since they are usually rather abundant in archaeological contexts.³ However, to avoid this analytical limitation, the analysis of the relationship between production, style, exchange and consumption of ceramic artefacts will eventually take into account the stylistic co-variation of other classes of artefacts.

Siba-Huoshagou cultural horizon

Ceramic vessels and tools are constantly present in Siba-Huoshagou cultural contexts. Yet their quality seems relatively modest in comparison with that of preceding and contemporary prehistoric cultures in both Gansu and the Central Plain. Most ceramics unearthed at Ganguya, Donghuishan and Huoshagou residential sites are very coarse, made of clay mixed with sand and gravel. Vessels were handmade by coiling up the main body and, sometimes, small moulded appliqué were then attached to the sides. Unpainted ceramics represent the largest number, impressed with N- and Z- shaped

¹ Wobst 1977: 329.

² Hodder 1982.

patterns and cuneiform shapes. On the other hand, funerary pottery is usually polychrome and displays a reddish-brown body, coated in red and painted over using mostly thick black pigment and in some rare cases red pigment. These pigments are applied in thick strokes so that to appear almost in relief. Indeed abstract and simple geometric patterns, rather than animal and human designs, are a constant feature in ceramic decoration and they lack variation.

Siba-Huoshagou pottery must have stemmed from the previous local Machang tradition: the Machang connection is visible in pottery decoration comprising floral motifs in shallow relief applied on the surface, zigzag bands and squared curled designs painted on the body, as encountered at Huoshagou, Yingwoshu and Siba sites [Fig.1].⁴



On the other hand, a close relationship with Qijia culture can be perceived in specific shapes (like the double handled *guan*-jar) and decorative patterns (such as cord impressions). In fact, Qijia culture occupied the same area from around 2300 BCE to 1900 BCE, and its latest phase can be considered roughly contemporary to the early phase of Huoshagou development.⁵

To further prove Qijia cultural affiliation, at Ganguya, one of the three most important Huoshagou sites, a double-layered ditch was found yielding on the inferior strata pottery vessels strikingly similar to the ones unearthed at Wuwei Huangniangniangtai (Gansu), a typical Qijia site.

Fig. 1 Guan-jars from Donghuishan site bearing evident Machang and Qijia stylistic influences [Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1998: pl.95].

Rounded *guan*-jars and *hu*-vases are predominant amongst the findings, yet there are also other containers that can be instead considered quite distinctive of Huoshagou culture: the double handled painted *guan*-jar with a coarse surface, the four-handled *guan*-jar with spike-shaped cover (a unique feature) and the *hu*-vase with loops on the belly. These three ceramic types are constantly seen throughout the strata at Huoshagou and do not appear in any other cultural horizon within the boundaries of Qinghai and Gansu provinces.

At the same time, the sites also yielded some pottery vessels made of fine clay, narrow neck, round bottom and decorated with delicately applied or comb designs against a

³ Shui Tao 1993.

⁴ Li Shuicheng 1993.

⁵ Chang Wenming 1978; Debaine-Francfort 1995 and Gansu sheng bowuguan 1979.

finely cord-impressed ground. Such type may have been derived from a Northern Zone prototype, like the ones found in Lijiaya and Zhukaigou contexts.

There are other vessels distinctive of Huoshaogou culture. One of these is the *dou*-cup roughly painted in red and sometimes bearing turquoise inlays around the base [Fig.2].⁶ Turquoise beads, frequently found in Qijia related sites, may have inspired the aesthetic preference in Huoshaogou. On the other hand, the technique of inlay was rather customary in Huoshaogou, since several pottery vessels inlaid with shells have also been found.

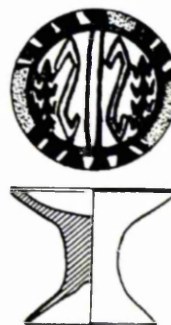


Fig. 2 Donghuishan *dou*-pedestal [Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1998: pl. 95].

The wine cup in the shape of a human foot represents another peculiar vessel and probably one of the fewest anthropomorphic representations in Siba-Huoshaogou ceramics.⁷ Squared tripods, *zun*-basins with two loop handles, rectangular trays and a large number of ceramic flutes (more than twenty in total) similar to *ocarinas* with one hole to inflate and three tuning key holes, can also be considered distinctive elements of Huoshaogou culture. On the other hand, the *li*-tripods, so popular in the Yellow River valley and at both Lijiaya and Zhukaigou, are not to be found in Siba-Huoshaogou contexts.

Possibly, according to Chinese archaeologists, Huoshaogou artistic production passed through three phases of evolution. In the early period small double handled thick *guan*-jars represented the majority, in the middle phase larger double handled *guan*-jars replaced the previous ones, whilst tall and thin-walled *guan*-jars with a single loop-handle were mainly used during the late period. Furthermore, this pottery typology is consistently found throughout the Siba-Huoshaogou cultural horizon, not only in Yumen xian (Huoshaogou site) but also in Jiuquan xian (Ganguya site), Minle xian (Donghuishan site) and Shandan xian (Siba site). During the late period though, the pottery industry suffered a decline, visible in the reduction of typologies.⁸

The majority of pottery items reflect an evident utilitarian purpose. Their body composition, colour and decoration is rather consistently applied both in funerary and residential contexts. However, depending on the context, certain typological discrepancies are evident. At Huoshaogou, Ganguya and Siba sites pottery vessels found in the residential area are larger and sturdier than the ones unearthed from burials,

⁶ Observed in November 1999 in Gansu Provincial Museum (Lanzhou).

⁷ Another peculiar pottery jar with a tall pedestal in the shape of two human legs was kept in display at the Lanzhou Provincial Museum in 1999 [Yang Jidong 1998].

⁸ Li Shuicheng 1993:81-105.

suggesting some role differentiation: sturdier utilitarian within domestic walls, finer ritualistic when buried in the ground. However, from the archaeological reports one cannot extrapolate whether besides a change in morphology also a change in burial distribution and frequency occurred. Further data would probably help in understanding whether any socio-economic change (such as a shift from agriculture to pastoralism) might have accompanied this change in burial assemblages, since apparently pottery was considered an efficient social marker in funerary settings. In fact, in tombs where a large quantity of pottery vessels was found, not only bronze and gold items, but also precious and semi-precious stones (turquoise for the most part), cowries (stored inside ceramic recipients) and jade accessories were interred with them to signal the prestige of the deceased.

Ceramic jars containing carbonated wheat grains (*triticum aestivum*) have been found at Minle Donghuishan.⁹ The storage and preservation of this kind of staple could reflect the importance of agriculture in Siba-Huoshagou contexts.

This discovery –considered the earliest evidence for wheat in China- would point to western cultural connections. West Asia is the place where wheat and barley were first domesticated and cultivated, whilst the Yellow River valley is where millet and broomcorn millet were instead first successfully exploited. Wheat samples from Donghuishan are about 5000 years later than the first samples from western Asia. Wheat was first cultivated (from around 8000 BCE) in the foothill region of the Near East known as the Fertile Crescent, from where it gradually spread in Syria, the Zagros Mountains into Anatolia and then Mesopotamia in the 6th millennium BCE.¹⁰ Due to the geological conditions in the Hexi corridor, not favourable to agricultural implementation, it could mean that wheat was introduced from western Asia, through Xinjiang, where indeed wheat has been discovered at Gumugou (2000 BCE).

Yanbulake cultural horizon

Despite the difference in burial structure encountered in Yanbulake cultural horizon, pottery typologies from this area seem to follow a common thread, forming a rather uniform assemblage. Vessels were all produced by coiling, the majority displaying a coarse sandy body painted with a red coat, further embellished by impressed cord patterns, nipple and incised designs. According to the survey conducted at Yanbulake, painted pottery would represent only one third of the entire ceramic inventory and would betray stylistic stimulation from the east, especially from Gansu province. Vessels exhibit

⁹ Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1998 and Li Fan et al. 1989.

¹⁰ Heun et al 1997.

black designs on a red ground, featuring bowstring patterns, saw-tooth and S-shaped designs, net-patterned triangles and pine-needle motifs. In particular, this last motif may have had a northern prototype, as similar designs are found in the Andronovo culture of Southern Siberia. In fact, the presence in Yanbulake of a small number of grey and black-coloured vessels would further indicate a contact with the Afanasievo and Andronovo pastoral peoples.¹¹

The most popular typologies encountered in Yanbulake are represented by eight vessels [Fig.3]: *guan*-jars with two small loop-handles on the shoulders, a cylindrical beaker with a single handle, *guan*-jars with a long neck and a single handle, *dou*-pedestal cups with a single loop, single looped *pan*-basins, single handled *guan*-jars, bulbous *hu*-vases with two small loops on the belly and a single-looped *bo*-bowl with a central perforation in the cavetto, probably meant for water straining.

Fig. 3 Pottery typologies unearthed in Yanbulake-related sites [Shui 1993: pl. 2, p. 451]:

	雙耳罐	桶形罐	長頸罐	雙耳盆	單耳罐	豆	腹耳盃	單耳鉢
1-Yalinban								
2-Wupushuiku	T12M15	89HLBM3	88HLBT17 + 2	88HLBM32 + 2	89HLBT7 + 1			
3-Yanbulake								
4-Lafuqiao	五保水陸泉地 哈博展品 			哈博展品 	哈博展品 	哈博展品 	哈博展品 	
	北不拉克泉地 C1 + 1 	1 + 1 	M2 + 1 	M6 + 1 	M2 + 2 	M6 + 2 	M7 + 1E 	T1 + 1
								哈博展品

It is interesting to observe the decorative motifs applied to some of the painted vessels: sometimes long vertical trembling lines are painted on the body of jars and vases, slightly reminiscent of the snake-pattern encountered in *li*-tripods of the Zhukaigou culture. It is thus likely that this motif may in fact have originated within Qijia cultural context and then spread out to the north and to the west, permeating ceramic productions of different cultural contexts, although the pattern may have also been created independently at a local level. Other motifs on painted pottery have been found similar to the painted pottery of the later Chust culture of the early Iron Age of Western Central Asia. Chust ceramics also feature hanging triangles, which in turn are

¹¹ Yanbulake grey pottery would be close to the Alakul'-Fedorovo ceramic type of the early Andronovo culture (1900-1750 BCE), a mobile group of pastoralists [Chen and Hiebert, 1995:264 and Hiebert and Shishlina 1998:222-237].

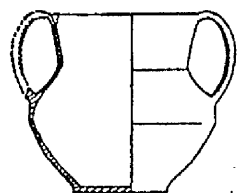
encountered in Andronovo vessels as well.¹² Perhaps, the Chust connection could have been favoured by the intermediation of Andronovo pastoral people. Furthermore, similar bronze mirrors have been found in Yanbulake and Chust contexts, whilst celt spades from Urumqi and Nanwan carry strong affinities with the late Bronze Age examples from Ferghana. From all these data the indirect connection between Xinjiang and Ferghana seems evident.

Whilst it has been found quite frequently in burials from the first period, painted pottery decreased as time went on, together with certain vessel typologies that slowly faded away such as the *dou*-pedestal and the *bo*-bowl. On the other hand the most popular single- and double-handled *guan*-jar remained present throughout the three chronological phases. This typology shows strong similarities with Siba-Huoshagou jar whose stylistic prerogatives are also evident in some decorative patterns, such as the ones applied on the interior of *dou*-pedestals. The influence of Siba-Huoshagou culture on Yanbulake culture is more evident in the ceramic repertoire unearthed at Yamansukuang Linchangban, otherwise known as Yalinban,¹³ a site dated around 1700 BCE slightly earlier than Yanbulake, where pottery types are closer in shape and decoration to their western prototypes coming from the Gansu grassland.¹⁴

Zhukaigou cultural horizon

The earliest stratum from Zhukaigou, although seriously disrupted given its lowest location, speaks of strong Longshanoid influences (being indeed within the late Longshanoid horizon, together with western Henan, southern Shanxi, Shaanxi and Sanlijiao Longshan cultures). Grey, brown and polished black *li*-, *guan*-, *dou*- and *he*-pottery containers reflect a mixed Chinese Longshan, western and northern Asian Neolithic background.

Instead, the second and third strata (early-mid 2nd millennium BCE) yielded pottery and other funerary objects, sometimes with remains of fabric (mat) impressions, whose



features had been drawn from Qijia culture in the Upper Wei River Valley, Qinghai and westernmost Inner Mongolia [Fig.4].¹⁵ The pottery discovered in these burials included flat-bottomed *guan*-jars with constricted neck, flaring mouth and double ears strap handles, features that are considered diagnostic of Qijia culture.

Fig. 4 Zhukaigou *guan*-jar of Qijia type [Nei Menggu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1988: p. 315, fig 18.14]

¹² Zadneprovskii 1978 and 1995: 15-18.

¹³ Chang 1989:274-5.

¹⁴ Shui 1993: 447-490.

¹⁵ Xie 1981.

To this regard, according to Linduff, the inclusion of Qijia cultural features would signal the adoption of foreign elements from within, but not necessarily the recognition of their ethnic affiliation.¹⁶ According to her, the coexistence of Qijia and local indigenous pottery types would suggest a situation of non-conflicting interests, rather than a social differentiation based on ethnic grounds. However, the persistence through time of a specific stylistic choice such as the shape of certain vessels and their manufacturing technique (handmade process) could indeed constitute a conscious and active effort of preserving and maintaining a common material memory within a different social and ethnic context. In fact, in the later strata, Qijia vessel types were still produced according to the original method (working the clay up from a bottom plate, by coiling) by local potters, maintaining throughout the centuries a distinctive technology. This conservative attitude could be read in many different ways and to understand the motivations behind it would certainly help to define the extent and the nature of the interaction between Qijia and Zhukaigou during the middle 2nd millennium BCE.

Furthermore, the introduction of wheel-thrown pots (contemporary with Qijia explicit cultural presence in phase 3) could suggest an incipient process of job specialisation (at least as far as ceramic production is concerned) and, consequently, a greater social differentiation. On the other hand, it was indeed during the late 2nd and 3rd phase (c.18th century BCE) that the handmade cord-marked pottery *li* -tripod with snake pattern and flower-shaped border also appeared. Differently from earlier ceramics, its body is made of very thin sandy clay, a feature that will become prevalent in phases 4 and 5. This typology is generally regarded as a diagnostic feature of later nomadic peoples present in the region, as some examples have been found datable to the 1st millennium BCE [Fig. 6]. Although the term can be considered far too generic with many different snake patterns detected all over Chinese Northern Zone, some scholars strongly believe that it first originated in Zhukaigou [Fig.5] and then spread over a large area to the east (lower Xiajiadian areas), to the west (in Gansu province within Siba-Huoshagou cultural horizon, Xindian, Shajing and later Yanglang zone) and to the Transbaikalian region of southern Siberia (Karasuk culture).¹⁷

¹⁶ Linduff 1995: 140 ff.

¹⁷ See Li Shuicheng 1992: 50-57.

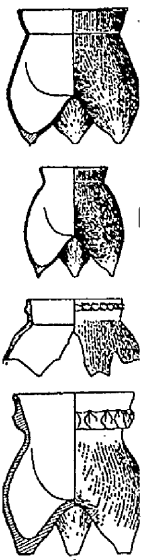
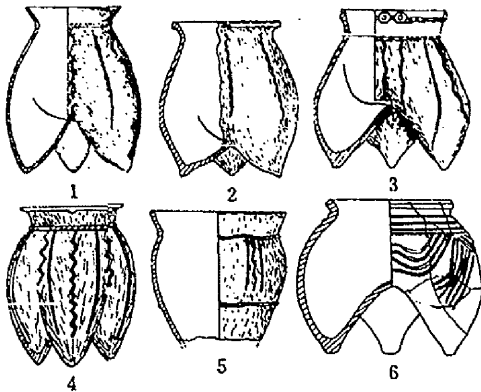


Fig. 5 Snake and flower li vessels from level III at Zhukaigou [Nei Menggu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1988: p.315, pl.18]

As we will observe in the course of this investigation, pottery *li* vases with these broadly defined decorative features are found over a vast geographical area characterised by homogeneous ecological conditions.

Certainly, environmental affinity may have been partly responsible for the high frequency of contacts and exchanges between different pastoral nomadic groups inhabiting the steppe prairies. Consequently, affinities in cultural expression may also be explained as the result of frequent interplays amongst them.

Fig. 6 Snake patterned *li* vessels: 1. Qingshuihe county, Poniyaози site (Lijiaya culture). 2. Liangcheng county (Zhukaigou culture) Maanqiaoshan site. 3. Zhukaigou M1064. 4. Jungar Banner (Inner Mongolia) site of Dongjiao. 5. Zhukaigou QH 78:1. 6. Maoqinggou site (late Spring and Autumn period) [Li 1992: fig 3].



Worth noticing is the earlier appearance of such snake-patterned *li* tripods in urn-pits (*weng guan*) meant for infant interment in level 3 and their later presence as both burial items and utilitarian vessels in levels 4 and 5.¹⁸

Yet the same phenomenon seems to occur also with another pottery typology, the button-banded *guan*-jar [Fig.7]. This shift of location from infant urn-pits to adult interments must reflect a change

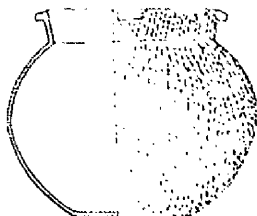
in meaning. Their increased symbolic importance is signalled by inclusion in tombs of level 5 dated to the early Shang period, generally associated with the elite class and by their complete absence in children urn-pits from the same stratum.¹⁹ It seems like the later inhabitants of Zhukaigou may have considered them collectable, valuable items, or

¹⁸ Snake pattern *li* tripods have been discovered not only in burials but also inside the residential area in level 5 [Nei Menggu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1988]. This issue has been already mentioned in the Chapter 2 and will not be dealt in this context. Further remarks will be made in Chapter 6.

¹⁹ Judging from the analyses of quantitative and qualitative parameters in burial assemblages.

even tangible signs of their ethnic appurtenance.

Fig. 7 Button-banded *guan*-jar [Nei Menggu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1988: fig 30.11].



If we follow Li' Shuicheng hypothesis of the endogenous origin of snake *li* tripods,²⁰ then we may argue that this particular shape originally meant for mundane purposes, with time came to embody a particular aspect of Zhukaigou past to be retained and treasured. Unfortunately, such symbolic connotation is at present difficult to grasp. But if we further take into account the tripod found at Maoqinggou (Inner Mongolia) and described by Li Shuicheng as the latest example of snake patterned *li*-vessel, datable to the late Spring and Autumn period (6th-5th centuries BCE) and the one kept in Qingyang museum (Gansu), both likely to have been produced within a nomadic context, we can certainly conclude that such typology, by maintaining its stylistic prerogatives for such a long time from late Longshan period, through Shang to the end of the Zhou period, might have carried a symbolic connotation, perhaps linked to the pastoral world. On the other hand, its extensive geographic distribution, from lower Xiajiadian sites in Liaoning to the Machang sites along the Hexi corridor in Gansu, may attest the extent of cultural diffusion during the 2nd millennium BCE along the northern fringes of China. Such phenomenon though may not indicate for sure the maintenance of connotations of ethnicity, as the same typology was to be found in different archaeological contexts. Nevertheless, the archaeological evidence would seem to confirm continuity in the ceramic production within the area, into the 1st millennium BCE with the manufacture of exportable ceramics in Maoqinggou. Equally, Maoqinggou ceramic types are encountered throughout the north-western zone, in Ningxia and Gansu provinces.

²⁰ Li Shuicheng 1992:50-57.

Lijiaya cultural horizon

Most of the pottery artefacts (including a fragment of a pottery ladle) unearthed from sites related to the Lijiaya cultural horizon would display a fine sandy grey body decorated with thick cord pattern, 'cloud and thunder' motif (*yunlei*), fingernail or nipple designs, squarish spirals, bow-string impressions, trellis and band or 'chicken crest' designs, whilst shapes included *li*-tripods, *yan*-steamers, *gui*- and *dou*-vases, *weng*-funerary urns and *guan*-jars [Fig.8].

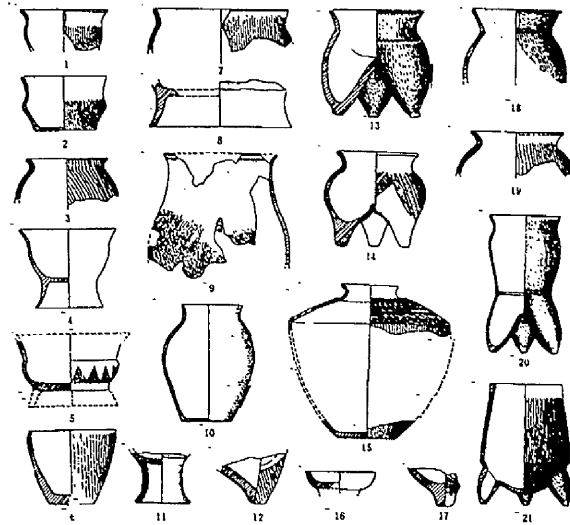


Fig. 8 Lijiaya pottery typologies [Zhang and Lu 1988: fig 7].

Certain decorative patterns seem to be confined to specific pottery typologies: impressed and fingernail patterns are usually applied on *li* and *yan* containers, whilst *yunlei* and squarish spirals designs appear on round-bellied *guan*-jars with constricted neck and *gui* vessels.

It is also interesting to note that most if not all of these decorative patterns (especially the *yunlei* motif) and pottery typologies (simple *li* and *yan*) are commonly seen in metropolitan Shang late Yinxu contexts,²¹ implying a close relationship with the Shang people of the Central Plain.²² This connection is further confirmed by the presence of drilled ox scapulae apparently used for divination, as it was customary at the Shang court.²³

According to the texts, this area was inhabited by the *Guifang* tribe, mentioned in the *Shi Ji* and Shang bronze inscriptions, who resisted Shang's attacks for three years, during the Yinxu phase.²⁴ Although the written evidence is rather scarce, and their identity cannot be speculated further, it is clear that the two entities were not engaged in a friendly relationship and that Lijiaya people (if matching with the Guifang) did not belong to the Shang ethnic background. Eventually, Lijiaya cultural markers faded away and such disappearance, in the mid Western Zhou period, could in fact coincide with the fatal

²¹ Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo 1986.

²² Lu 1987: 214-224.

²³ Although the practise in Lijiaya seems to predate the Shang tradition.

²⁴ KC Chang 1986a:12, and Wu Zhenlu 1972.

blow inflicted to the Guifang by the Zhou King Kang in 979 BCE. According to the inscription on a ritual bronze (Xiao Yu ding), after two successful battles against them, more than 18.000 Guifang captives, including 4 leaders were taken to a Zhou temple and sacrificed to the king.²⁵ From then onwards, the Guifang would never pose again a threat to the central Zhou authority.

According to the archaeological data published so far, it appears that pottery vessels would prevalently come from within the domestic enclosures: in the living space defined by square foundations and a hearth at a corner, *li*-tripods, *guan*-jars, *yan*-steamers, *weng*-urns, *pen*-bowls were found in fragments together with the bone remains of various animals (used for consumption).²⁶ Traces of combustions on some containers confirm their utilitarian function as cooking vessels.

Only rarely few ceramics, for the most featuring Shang typologies (simple *li*-tripods) and designs (cord, *yunlei* and spiral patterns), have been discovered in connection with burial complexes, as in the case of Jingjie xian Lingshi site in Shanxi province.²⁷ However such site has been identified as a fang (tribe) friendly to the Shang, expressing a non-belligerent nature, quite the opposite of most Lijiaya related sites. And as such its inventory could reflect a unique phenomenon rather than a 'Lijiaya norm'. Conversely, no metal artefacts have been apparently brought to light from Lijiaya citadel. Such space-function demarcation may in fact reflect a rather rigid and codified social order, reflected in the funerary arrangements, whereby only bronze and other metal (gold) ornaments were considered worth displaying, whilst ceramic containers were confined to their utilitarian role in the living quarters. Lijiaya culture seems to be the only nomadic group in the western section of Chinese Northern Zone featuring this clear role separation. As it will be evident from the quality of burial assemblages, prevalently composed by military objects (knives, battle-axes with tubular socket and knives), this society must have been structured according to rigid gender demarcations, given the absence of female bodies in the archaeological record. This fact may also be due to the poor reports focusing on Lijiaya-related sites. No gender investigation has been carried out so far, to discern the role of women within Lijiaya society. Even personal ornamentation cannot be assigned to one particular sex, as this is almost never mentioned in the reports. As all the burials found so far included military paraphernalia and personal ornaments one would conclude that it was indeed a male prerogative. But where have the Lijiaya women gone then? The penury of burials and the lack of serious gender analysis on the few tombs available pose a limit to this type of investigation.

²⁵ Lu 1987: 223.

²⁶ Zhang and Lu 1988.

1st millennium BCE

During the first millennium BCE, ceramic assemblages start to decrease in quantity and quality, with metal artefacts becoming more prominent as social markers in burial contexts. The paucity of residential findings shifts the investigation on funerary artefacts, thus further limiting the ground for speculation.

However, few ceramic typologies remain unaltered throughout the period used as ritual vessels, whilst other containers instead adapt to a more mobile way of life, by featuring single handles and smaller sizes. Ceramic centres become fewer, but their trading networks extend, with their products eventually reaching more distant areas.

Xindian cultural horizon

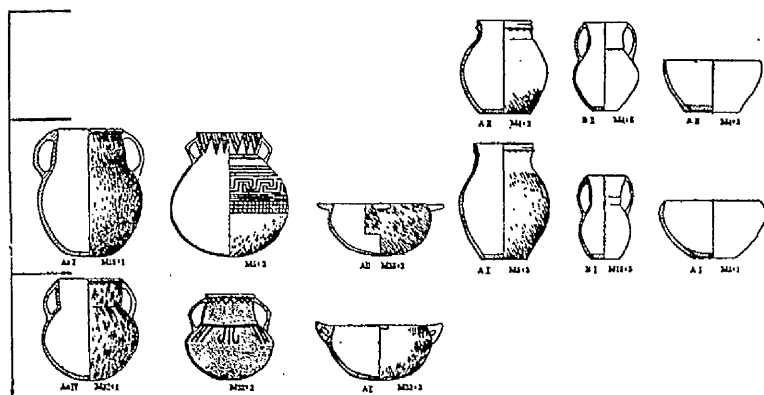
Archaeological assemblages of the Xindian culture consist of some stone implements, copper and bronze objects, and above all, included a distinctive ceramic style characterised by coarse and porous, red and yellowish grey fabrics, white and red slip with geometric patterns painted in black. The pottery was manufactured with coiling and beating. Both the coiled surface and the cord impressions produced by the beater were then smoothed over with wet fingers and applied over with painted decoration. The black paintings were simple and robust, executed freehand in bands around the shoulders and the middle circumference of the vessel. Apart from very simple straight and undulating lines, designs also include line filled triangles, meanders, double hooks, zigzags and saw bands, which Andersson suggested deriving from the Yangshao–Machang decorative tradition.²⁸ The designs are mostly curvilinear and round. Vessels are characterised by a distinctive demarcation between the body and the collar, by a large mouth and one or two large vertical handles attached to the middle part of the vase with one end connected to the body and the other attached to the rim or right below it and by a concave base.²⁹

Three phases of development have been extrapolated from the ceramic findings. Phase 1 is represented by the Shanjiatou pottery, which consists of two different inventories [Fig.9]. The earlier group related to late Qijia phase includes flat-bottomed *guan*-jars, *hu*-vases and *bo*-bowls impressed with cord and beater marks patterns. The later group, Xindian specific, consists of painted pottery vessels (*guan*-jars and *bo*-bowls still) with round bottom. Strap handles (influenced by Qijia ceramic typologies) are present throughout the sub-phases.

²⁷ Li Boqian 1998: 167-184.

²⁸ Andersson, 1943:177.

²⁹ Wu 1938:105-6.



图二 山家头基地陶器分期图

Fig. 9 Shanjiatou pottery typologies- three phases of development [Zhang Xuezheng et al 1993: fig. 2, p 173]

Phase 2 is represented by the Huizui site inventory, including pottery vessels, coarse and highly porous, mostly of grey or red colour, made by coiling and beating. Two are the main forms: round bottomed bowls and big-mouthed, high-collared jars with two handles. The handles are all vertical; either placed at the belly on its largest spot, or below the rim with one end attached to the rim, or the upper part of the collar and the other end to the shoulder. The bottoms are generally round. Dimensions are quite modest, with an average height and diameter of 15 cm. The surface designs consist of beaten cord marks, incisions, scratched short parallel lines, and paintings in black pigment. Such painting is confined to the shoulders and the collar, with simple geometric designs freely executed. Horizontal bands, wavy narrow lines, triangles and meanders and N-shaped designs are amongst the most frequently applied. Some conventionalised anthropomorphic and zoomorphic designs are sometimes visible. In this phase, on the surface of the jars symbols such as sun wheels associated with Z-shaped designs can be also seen.³⁰

Jijiachuan site has yielded a similar pottery assemblage [Fig.10], as well as a semi-subterranean rectangular house, a number of storage pits, and burials with bodies placed in the flexed position.³¹ Its ceramic inventory may have been partially derived from the earlier Qijia culture. Double-handle *guan*-jars are saddle-shaped like the Huoshaogou ones.

³⁰ Karlgren identified these signs with the archaic Chinese pictograms for 'sun' and 'lightning', suggesting an incipient form of writing [Karlgrén 1930].

³¹ Xie Duanjiu 1962 and 1980.

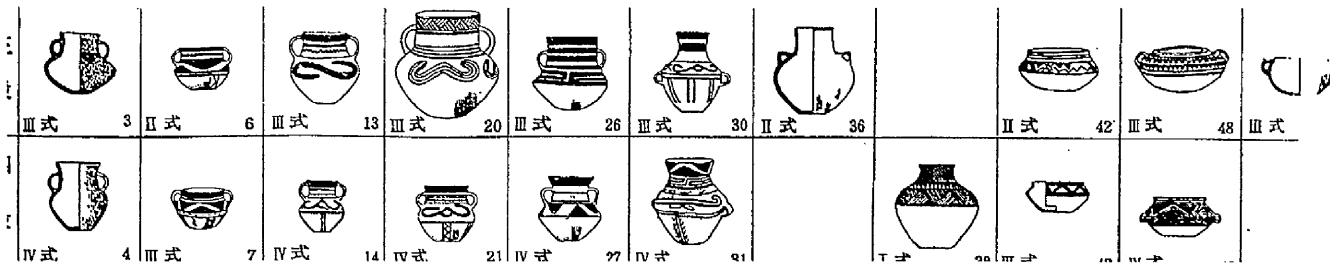


Fig. 10 Jijiachuan pottery typologies [Zhang Xuezheng et al, 1993: pl.2]

Phase 3 is mainly represented by Zhangjiiazui type, including some red and grey pieces with a fine texture, although the majority of specimens are made of brick red clay tempered with sand or powdered pottery [Fig.11].³² Like in the first phase, these vessels are coiled and burnished, although on the whole they show a finer paste and a greater proportion of white slipped items. Cord marks, applied ridge, beaten checkers and black and red paintings are also present. Designs consist of parallel lines, deformed S-shapes, double spirals, N-shaped patterns. Pottery vases with dropping mouth could have been derived from Huoshaogou, whereas the shape of other vessels and the decorative patterns on the painted pottery shows links with the Tangwang style. Vessels are now more elongated, with larger handles than their phase 2 counterparts, and the bottoms are uniformly flat rather than concave. In addition to jugs and bowl, pans, mugs, *li* tripods are also common. Pottery *li* tripods with cord impressions and bronze knives are very similar in shape and manufacture to implements of the Western Zhou period. The meanders on the painted pottery bear close resemblance to the decoration of the bronzes of the Western Zhou period, presumably from Shaanxi province, the area of Qin domain.

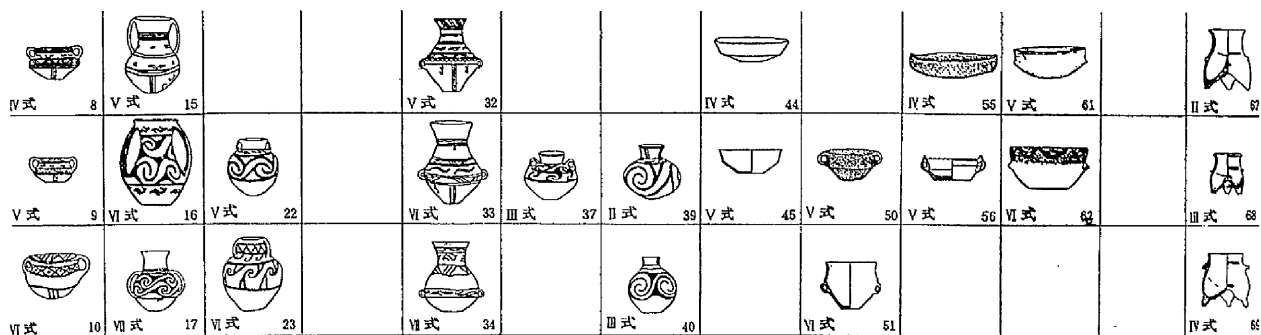


Fig. 11 Zhangjiiazui pottery typologies [Zhang Xuezheng et al 1993: pl.2]

³² Zhang Xuezheng et al 1993.

Shajing cultural horizon

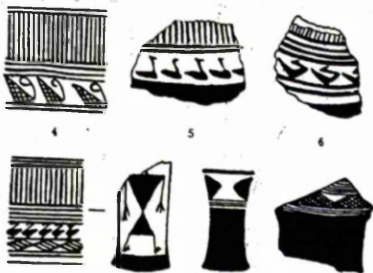


Compared with bronze and bone findings, ceramic artefacts are found in a relatively small number, and this fact would induce to consider them less 'important' from the symbolic point of view and primarily utilitarian in purpose. Indeed, it is within the enclosure of the Liuhudong fortress that coarse red pottery tempered with mica or sand grains have been copiously unearthed, suggesting their utilitarian connotation;³³ furthermore, some of these vessels are burnished on the surface, with visible traces of cord impressions and cloth patterns on the base. Usually they present a simple plain surface embellished with comb marks and incised impressions.

Fig. 12 Painted pottery vessels from Shajing sites [Li Shuicheng

1994: fig 6, p. 518].

Painted pottery has been discovered in most burials. The range of shapes is quite narrow: single and double handled *guan*-jars with round bottom, bulbous *bei*-cups with single strap handle, few *hu*-vases, most of them with red slip of the lower part and geometric designs in white and red on the upper part are amongst the most commonly found.



The vessels often present a dark red paint on red slip, with simple decorations comprising parallel, criss-cross stripes and vertical triangles, diamonds, zigzags [Fig.12].

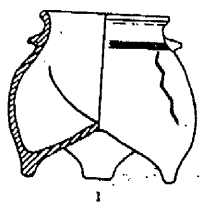
Fig. 13 Shajing painted red pottery fragments with zoomorphic and anthropomorphic designs. [Li Shuicheng 1994: fig 7.4-5-8, p. 519].

Sometimes, drawings of birds are added to the decorative frame. One of the funerary jars unearthed at Shajing cemetery shows in fact on the handle a human figure with no head, the hand with three fingers and the foot with two toes only, whilst on the body a frieze of birds (hooper swans) [Fig.13]. Whereas the birds are drawn in very true silhouettes, the human figure is utterly stylised in a manner similar to anthropomorphic designs from the neighbouring Xindian cultural horizon.

The typical vessels are small round-bottomed *guan*-jars with one or two shoulder loops and cylindrical mugs, but flat-bottomed *guan*-jars and *li*-tripods have also been

³³ Close to Shajingcun site, excavated by Andersson [Andersson 1943:197-215].

discovered. A giant *li*-tripod and other two smaller ones have been found within the Liuhudong fortress (no such items have been discovered in the burial ground). In particular, Andersson stated that all the tripods were discovered in the black earth (*hei tu*, local soil mixed with ash and charcoal, a feature only encountered in residential sites). Thus it may have been likely that they had a utilitarian function. The blackened exterior represents a further evidence of their cooking use. Body and collar of the vessels are not distinctively demarcated. In this sediment, bowls with triangular loop handles were also exclusively found. The differentiation between mortuary and utilitarian pottery seems then quite well defined. From the ceramic shards unearthed at the other citadel, Sanjiaocheng, pottery inventory must have consisted mainly of hand-made (built by coiling) red coarse flat or round-bottomed *guan*-jars with single or double loop handles and *li*-tripods. As in the case of Liuhudong tripods, these food containers have been exclusively found in residential contexts, further confirming their purely functional nature and suggesting a quite clear definition between functional and ritual vessels. Few containers are painted covered in white slip and embellished over with red thin lines, saw-tooth or triangular motifs, typical patterns of the Shajing cultural horizon. One of the *li*-tripods discovered within the residential compounds bears a particular type of decoration already encountered in the analysis of previous archaeological cultures from the region: the vertical snake pattern [Fig.14]. Such design would immediately bring to



mind the *li*-vessels with snake decorations encountered during the late 2nd millennium BCE in Zhukaigou and Lijiaya, further to the northeast. This discovery would just signal further the extent of cultural transmission along the Northern Zone throughout the centuries.

Fig. 14 *Li*-tripod with snake design found at Sanjiaocheng citadel [Li Shuicheng 1994: fig 3.1, p.515].

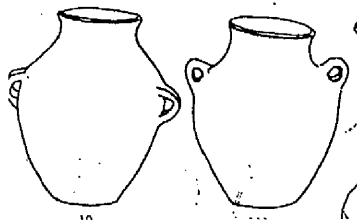


Fig. 15 Oblong jar with loop handles [Li Shuicheng 1994: pl.3.10-11, p. 515]

A type of oblong jar with two loop handles on the sides found within Shajing contexts provides another example of 'cultural stretching' [Fig.15]. It is in fact surprising to find a parallel further to the west in Mulei xian Sidaogou in Xinjiang; a site associated with early Saka presence, and possibly late Andronovo groups.³⁴ Not only this typology but also other Shajing-related cylindrical *bei*-cups, certain types of motifs as well as some bone arrowheads have been encountered at the site, suggesting an indirect contact.

³⁴ Yang Yiyong 1982.

Furthermore, an applied clay band is featured both on some round-bottom *guan*-jars from Shajing and other vessels from Sidaogou.³⁵ Interestingly enough, some scholars have thought this band³⁶ to be distinctive of Saka groups in western Xinjiang during the first millennium BCE. Such stylistic affinity could point to some common origin, rather than direct mutual contact. Given the difficulty in assessing a chronological sequence,³⁷ one possibility is that both Shajing and Sidaogou people might have come, at least in part, originally from the western Saka territories, either in different times and with different modalities or subsequently west to east, carrying with them a similar cultural baggage, that of the proto-Scythians, which eventually superimposed pre-existing Machang-Majiayao cultures, further absorbing stimuli from the surrounding areas.³⁸

Apart from the funerary painted pottery, finer grey bodied vessels made on the wheel and decorated with cord impression vertical patterns are also rarely found (5%), their decoration being very similar to Qin pottery of the Warring States period, probably traded from the Central Plains.³⁹

Baifu

Among the large number of metal vessels found in this site in Hebei, the presence of two ceramic *li*-tripods (one in M2 and one in M3) would point to a connection with Zhukaigou and earlier Longshanoid cultural pottery [Fig.16]. The vases were both placed in the upper left corner of the burial compartment and contained unidentified animal bones possibly sacrificed during the funerary ritual. Their affinity with Zhukaigou examples could also provide the proof for cultural continuity from Zhukaigou to later Maoqinggou ceramic tripods.



Fig. 16 *li* tripod from Baifu [Beijing shi wenwu guanlichu 1976: pl.7]

³⁵ See Li Shuicheng 1994: fig.5.2 , p.512.

³⁶ Chen and Hiebert 1992.

³⁷ Sidaogou has been loosely dated 11th to 3rd century BCE, whilst Shajing date ranges from 10th to 7th century BCE.

³⁸ Other elements of cultural connection with the west are provided by catacomb tombs, which are very similar to those of the Siba-Huoshagou culture of eastern Xinjiang and definitively originated in the western regions. Furthermore, as we will see, bronze assemblage also strongly points to connections with eastern Xinjiang and the Turfan basin, especially Alagou and Subashi sites.

³⁹ Although Qin intrusion could also depend on the affinities between Xindian and the Xi Rong tribes to whom Qin might have been in turn related.

Yet in general terms, the lack of ceramic containers and the striking prevalence of weapons and horse fittings, together with the absence of female burials within the complex would seem to indicate a military-oriented group of people, perhaps mercenaries coming from the north who often intermingled (both in good and bad terms) with their neighbours to the east.⁴⁰ In this case, the presence of small ceramic containers would only reflect the local production, incorporated in the assemblage for utilitarian purposes (sacrificial food containers) with no explicit ethnic connotations for the occupants of the tombs.

Chawuhu cultural horizon

Ceramics at Chawuhu in Xinjiang reveal some distinctive features. In cemetery IV, amongst the 2000 objects brought to light, numerous were the ceramic vessels. Traces on their spouts and on their bottom point to a long usage before being interred. Therefore one can argue that they were not made on purpose for ritualistic aims but had a very mundane connotation. All ceramics were handmade by coiling. Only 10% of all ceramics found at the cemetery are polychrome. Portable single handled spouted *guan*-jars and *bei*-jugs, spouted *fu*-vases with two handles, double looped *guan*-jars, long-necked vases, small *guan*-jars without handles, short-necked vases, small

mouthed round bellied jars, ladle cups and many more have been found [Fig.17]. Most of the time they are fitted with just one handle (a feature of nomadic portability).

Furthermore, 40 spindle whorls have been found associated with female burials, or at least multiple mixed burials.

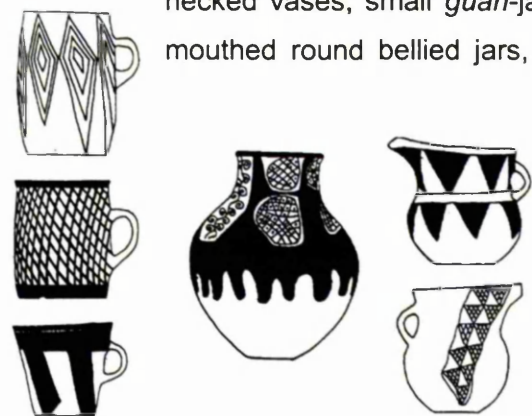


Fig. 17 Selection of painted pottery from Chawuhu Cemetery IV [Wang Mingzhe1999: 97-136].

Ceramic vessels represent the most often found funerary objects in cemetery I in a greater proportion in comparison with cemetery IV, yet manufacturing technique, painted decoration and typologies (single handled vases) are identical to cemetery IV.

The only peculiar decorative pattern, which has been found exclusively on one painted spouted jar, is represented by a row of seated camels, the only instance of zoomorphic

⁴⁰ The absence of evidence for sedentary life could further reflect a group of 'scouts' or 'pioneers', young men, often mercenaries, who ventured into new territories at the forefront of a demic migration [Burmeister

decoration. The presence of camels, apart from indicating the presence of such animals within Chawuhu natural environment, would suggest a particular attention to this animal. Camels are usually portrayed on bronze plaques from later periods (mid first millennium BCE) and rarely found on utilitarian ceramic vessels.

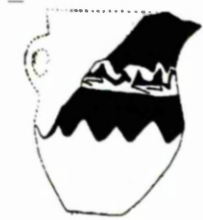


Figure 18 Spouted jar with camels, found at cemetery I [Wang Mingzhe 1999 :193, fig 147.4].

Ceramics found at the related site of Qunbake share many stylistic similarities with Chawuhu: shape and decorative patterns of single handled spouted jars and bowls find counterparts in Hejin county.

Tomb typologies,⁴¹ burial customs and funerary inventory⁴² are reminiscent of Chawuhu and therefore can be ascribed to the same cultural horizon, although certain differences subsist. Indeed, only at Qunbake one can find the signs of ceremonial combustion on the wooden cover and camel's head pits (although evidence of camels at Chawuhu could be reflected in the decorative pattern of a row of camels found on a spouted jar in cemetery 1).⁴³

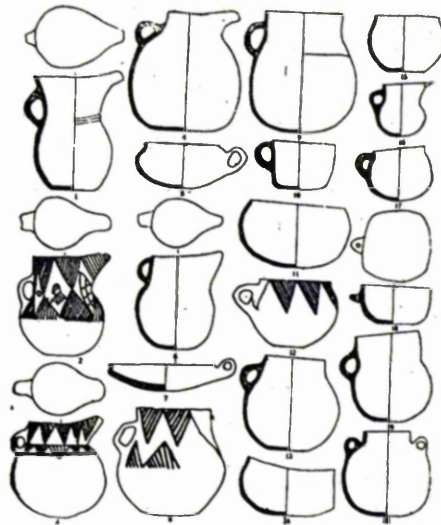


Fig. 19 Pottery vessels from Qunbake [Sun Bing-ge and Chen Ge 1987: p. 361, fig 9].

Sidaogou cultural horizon

Pottery at another relatively close site, Mulei xian Sidaogou, is relatively scarce and not very distinctive. The vessels are primarily handmade sandy red wares. Both round [Fig.20] and flat-bottomed vessels are encountered, ranging in shape from jars with strap handles, bowls, basins, and cups and cooking vessels. Occasionally, the rims and shoulders are perforated.

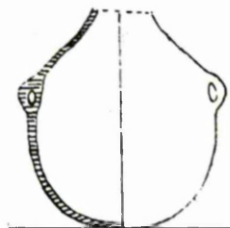


Fig. 20 Sidaogou jar with two small loop handles on the sides [Yang Yiyong 1982: 123, fig. 8.4].

Unpainted ceramics sometimes bear comb-incised or cord-stamped decorations, and a few vessels have an applied clay band around

2000].

⁴¹ Although in the case of Qunbake the mound is made of earth and not of stone pebbles.

⁴² Pottery typologies, stone spindle whorls and golden earrings.

⁴³ The Bactrian camel was originally domesticated in the 3rd millennium BCE in South-Central Asia and maybe also in East Iran. The figurines of draught camels and camel's bones in Andronovo settlements prove that.

the neck. Some grey pottery has also been found: a boat-shaped vessel from Shirenzi has a form that is similar to Neolithic pottery from Shanxi province (4000 BCE). The small percentage of painted pottery is usually red slipped and has red and black painted motifs including curved and dentate designs, stippled solid triangles and net-like designs. Small-necked double-looped *guan*-jars, cylindrical *bei*-vases, certain types of motifs as well as the manufacture of bone arrowheads can find counterparts in Gansu Shajing culture,⁴⁴ whilst spindle whorls, grinding stones and stone chisels seem to be influenced by the Neolithic culture of metropolitan China. The small ceramic fragment of a three-dimensional dog head, one of the earliest examples of ceramic figurines in Xinjiang, represents an exceptional discovery.⁴⁵ A similar one is now kept in the Aksu district museum (found in Keping xian Jilangxiang, western Xinjiang in 1989).⁴⁶

Certain elements of Sidaogou material culture would suggest an incipient contact with western people, proto-Saka/Scythian or late Andronovo. One has to bear in mind that the presence of Iranian-speaking tribes called Saka from Sogdiana in Central Asia is attested –archaeologically- between the Yili valley (in Xinyuan county) and the Tianshan mountain range only from the 5th to the 3rd century BCE. On the same line stands the written source: according to the *Han Shu*, the Yili valley and the Pamir mountains were two major regions inhabited by the Saka people before the end of the 3rd century BCE, but Ban Gu does not indicate further back in time their position. Previous to the 5th century BCE, however, the interaction of Andronovo and Saka cultural groups in the Yili region with the Sidaogou culture seems nevertheless evident. Evidence for interaction between the highlands and the oasis includes similar motifs, such as an applied clay band around the neck, encountered both on Sidaogou pottery and Saka ceramics from the Yili valley.⁴⁷ At the same time, Sidaogou unpainted ceramics were recovered from a Saka burial again in the Yili region at Dacautan, Miqian xian.⁴⁸ Bronze arrowheads are also very similar in shape to those from Saka remains.⁴⁹ These recoveries reflect the extent of interaction between these oasis farmers of Mongoloid origin and the highland settlements of people from the west (of Andronovian and 'Mediterranean' types). The shift of rich inventories from the oases to the highland during the beginning of the 1st millennium BCE would indicate a change of economy from farming agricultural

⁴⁴ Yang Yiyong 1982: 127.

⁴⁵ Urumqi 1999: 294.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*: 253.

⁴⁷ Similar applied bands are also encountered in few sites on the southern rim of the Tarim basin, namely Xiangbaobao and Shanpula that, regardless of their actual dating, do exhibit a strong link (both based on genetic origin and artistic production) with Saka groups to the west, in the Pamir, reinforcing the idea of a migratory trajectory from southern Kazakhstan towards China during the 1st millennium BCE [see Chen and Hiebert 1995 and Bunker in Keller and Shorta 2001].

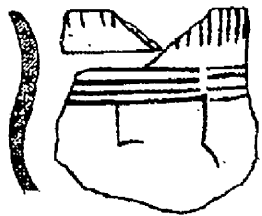
⁴⁸ Zhang Yuzhong 1986: 36-38.

⁴⁹ Kuzmina 1998.

economies to more nomadic strategies of subsistence based on horse domestication and riding. It has been suggested that indeed the Saka language may have come to Xinjiang as early as 1000 BCE when this fundamental change took place in the economy of the region.⁵⁰ At that date not only horse nomadism spread out, but iron metallurgy also diffused westwards. The absence of horse harnesses and related accessories in Sidaogou may have been due to different factors, not the least the perishable nature of certain media used for this purpose. Bone and wooden horse psalias may have just simply not survived to attest their use within Sidaogou culture. However, further investigation within Sidaogou-related cultural sites would certainly contribute to shed some light on its cultural identity.

Wupushuiku

At Hami Wupushuiku unfortunately the majority of burial objects have been disrupted and fragmented throughout the various levels of interment. Very few objects have come to light intact. Pottery shards speak out of hand-made vessels (mainly single-handled *guan*-jars) with very few examples of painted decoration based on simple geometric patterns, such as criss-crosses, vertical lines and undulating bands.



In particular there is a shard bearing a distinctive pattern, also paralleled in the Yanbulake culture, which would indeed reminisce of southern Siberia ceramic production (Andronovo).⁵¹

Fig. 21 Pottery shard with Southern Siberian pattern from Wupushuiku [Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1992: fig. 4.3].

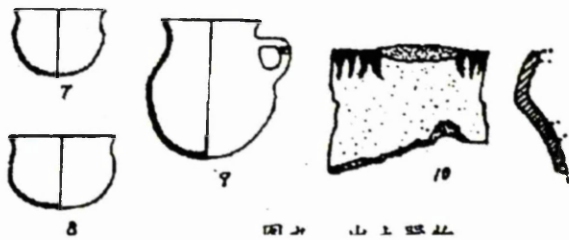
⁵⁰ Parpola 1998.

⁵¹ Chen and Hiebert 1992.

Zahongluke

At the Zahongluke site in Qiemo county, some of the pottery typologies encountered show similarities with some specimens from Chawuhu, such as the spouted single-handled jar [Fig.22]. On the other hand, most of the vessels, both spouted handled jars and jars with no handles, do not bear any kind of painted decoration –unlike their

Chawuhu counterparts-, and present a plain black or reddish surface. This kind of ceramics seems ubiquitous in southern Xinjiang during the latter part of the 1st millennium BCE, especially single handled spouted jars, which have been discovered



also at Shanpula (2nd c. BCE).

Fig.22 Pottery types from Zahongluke [He Dexiu 1992: 330, fig 9.1-7-8-9].

Alagou cultural horizon

Pottery vessels at Alagou I are all handmade by coiling and consist of *guan*-jars, bowls, pots, small *bei*-cups and *dou*-bowls with pedestal,⁵² many painted with a red slip and red or black triangles, net, whorl and pine needle patterns, suggesting a connection with the pottery culture in the Turfan basin (Aidinghu site). Some other authors suggested a possible connection with the earlier Huoshaogou culture of western Gansu, as similar double handled *guan*-jars and single handled small *guan*-jars with triangular patterns may resemble ceramics from there [Fig.23].⁵³ Of course this connection would not be that implausible, given the confirmed contacts between Huoshaogou (Gansu) and Yanbulake (Xinjiang) cultures already during the first half of the 1st millennium BCE. Alagou indeed must have deeply felt the influence of the longstanding pottery tradition of the Hami area, which carried on certain stylistic elements drawn from Huoshaogou. Some pottery jars contained crop seeds such as flax, a cultigen of western origin already encountered in Chawuhu.

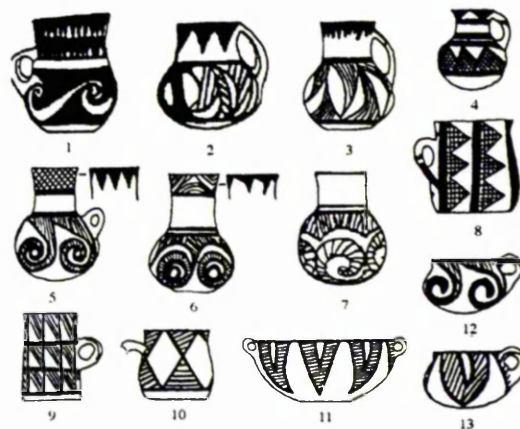


Fig. 23 Alagou I pottery repertoire [Mei 2000: fig. 2.46]

⁵² In later tombs.

⁵³ Gansu Sheng bowuguan 1979: 172.

The greatest part of the burial items at Dongfengchang consists of coarse sand pottery painted with red slip and black or red drawings of triangles, trellis patterns, whirls, waves, vertical and diagonal lines. Single lopped *guan*-jars, long-necked *hu*-vases, *bo*-bowls, *fu*-vessels, *wan*-bowls and *bei*-cups, *pan*-basins are amongst the typologies; two *dou*-cups with a high pedestal are quite distinctive and unique [Fig.24]. It is found both here and at



Alagou (M18) and it is strongly reminiscent of the Yanbulake and Wupushuiku *dou*-cups. Most typologies present one handle only, a feature found mostly in nomadic style containers.

Fig. 24 *Dou*-cup found in M 18 at Alagou I, reminiscent of Yanbulake and Wupushuiku examples [Urumqi 1999: pl.423, p.164].

In the case of the four elite tombs of later date discovered at the close-by Yuergou-Alagou II site,⁵⁴ few ceramics (9) have been retrieved [Fig.25].⁵⁵ In general the inventory included the following typologies: small beakers, small portable cups and trays, mostly *hu* spouted vases, *pan* basins and, in particular, amongst the trays, the one found in M31 presents three flat feet attached to the base, a unique feature never found elsewhere, but that can be partially due to the influence of bronze trays in Saka style unearthed at the site.⁵⁶ The ceramic is quite fine and smooth, and was probably

fired at quite a high temperature, burnished to a glossy surface and then coated in red. The inventory of these four tombs reflects the shift from pottery oriented to metal oriented assemblages, typical of almost all sites along the north-western area during the last half of the 1st millennium BCE.

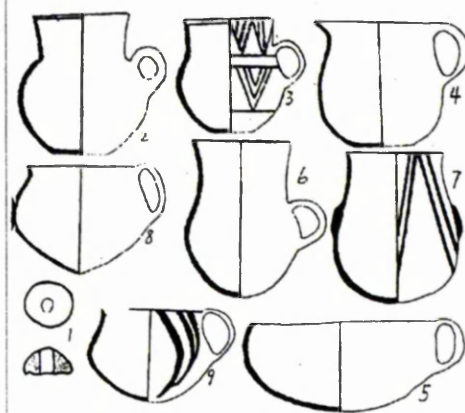


Fig. 25 Alagou II pottery [Tulufan diqu wenguan 1991: pl.1]

⁵⁴ Xinjiang Junge'er ziqu Bowuguan 1979: 172.

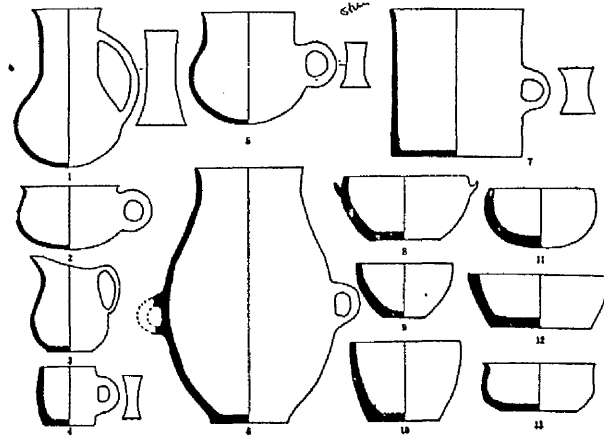
⁵⁵ Wang Binghua 1981.

⁵⁶ A painted ceramic '*ding*' tripod found at Turfan Aidinghu site (M40) might provide an interesting comparison [Tulufan diqu wenguan et al 1982: Pl. 6.4, p. 316].

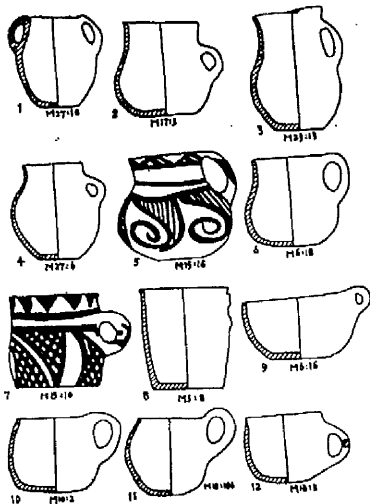
Subeixi lies in Shanshan county inside the Turfan depression, close to Alagou and Dongfengchang and can be ascribed to the same cultural context. Cultural affinities are expressed in terms of bronze inventory, burial structure and pottery manufacture. The majority of items found in burials (as no residential compounds has been detected so far linked to the cemetery) are utilitarian in nature, such as the great number of monochrome pottery *guan*-jars, *pen*-basins and *wan*-cups, which feature simple surface treatment and mostly one single strap-handle.

Fig. 26 Subeixi pottery typologies [Tulufan diqu wenguansuo 1984: fig 4].

Vessels are either round or flat-bottomed, including jars with spouts, cylindrical *bei*-cups and oblong *guan*-jars with loop handles. The last two typologies are indeed paralleled in the



ceramic inventory of the Shajing culture (10th-7th c. BCE) in the Hexi corridor area of Gansu province, to the east. And furthermore, the oblong jar seems also quite similar to the example recovered at Mulei xian Sidaogou [Fig.20], a site located to the north. In all, there seems to be a link connecting Gansu province and the Shajing culture, with eastern and northern Xinjiang, through Alagou, Subeixi and Sidaogou, further pointing to the west. Similar pottery vessels are indeed specific of the Ili valley in eastern Kazakhstan, linked to the Yili valley of western Xinjiang.⁵⁷



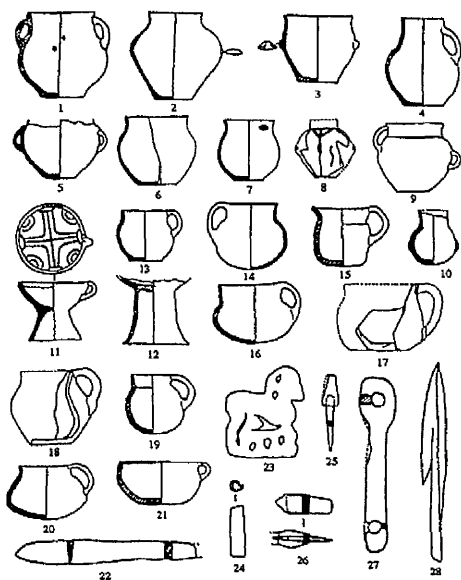
Pottery is present in large number (around 80 items) also in the latest cemetery to be excavated at Subeixi (cemetery III); the majority are just plain red *wan*-cups, *guan*-jars with one or two handles, a small number of beakers, shallow cups with one handle and *hu*-vases, and just one *dou* high cup [Fig.27].

Fig.27 Subeixi Cemetery III pottery typologies [Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1992: fig 13].

⁵⁷ Baipakov et al 1998: no.454-5.

Hanqigou

Closely connected to Yanbulake ceramic typologies are the findings from Hanqigou, again in Hami County [Fig.28]. Amongst the handmade ceramic items, jars, cups, footed bowls, bowls and pots have been recovered, of which only a small percentage was painted, but all resembled Yanbulake examples, confirming the continuity in pottery production in the Hami area, according to Yanbulake tradition. Certain typologies, like the single handled *dou*-pedestal cup and *guan*-jars with handles are also featured at Shanshan Subeixi and at Alagou Dongfengchang, signalling the extent of their transmission within Xinjiang. The strong stylistic similarities with Yanbulake culture, envisaged not only in ceramics but also in the funerary attitude, would suggest that Hanqigou could be a later, Iron Age, development of Yanbulake or a regional variant of



the late Yanbulake culture (400 BCE-0 CE).⁵⁸ Craniometric analysis indeed revealed a mixed Mongoloid-Europoid group, similar to group C at Yanbulake.

According to the excavators though, this site should be dated between the late Spring and Autumn Period and the early Warring States period, that is 6th-5th century BCE, slightly earlier than the date proposed by Mei.

Fig. 28 Burial inventory including pottery, bronze and bone items [Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1997: figs 4-6].

Ordos cultural horizon

Liangcheng xian Maoqinggou cemetery yielded 79 tombs, of which only 47 had significant furnishings, including metal ornaments and ceramic jars, torn on the wheel (grey coloured) or coiled by hand (red coloured). Typologically, the assemblage in burials is restricted to the single *guan*-jar, with sporadic findings of *li*-tripods and *pen*-basins.⁵⁹ The typical jar (*guan*) found in burials of the first period featured a small mouth, round belly, round bottom and sometimes two handles on the shoulders. Subsequent periods, characterised by the gradual intrusion of more nomadic elements, included similar jars

⁵⁸ Mei 2000: 23.

⁵⁹ Whilst in the residential compound close by other shapes such as cups, basin and vases have been found.

with a flat base instead. Surface was generally decorated with simple cord patterns mostly concentrated on the shoulder and the body.

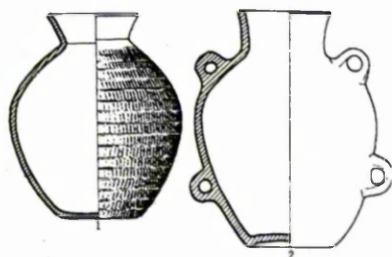
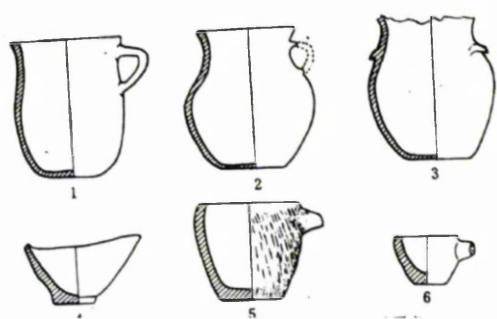


Fig. 29 Ceramic jars from Maoqinggou cemetery [Tian and Guo 1986: pl. 29, p. 256]

In particular ceramic vessels have so far provided the tool for the 4-phases chronological sequence on the entire cemetery. The scheme is based on radiocarbon dates from ash heap containing shards near the three kilns found at the distance of 5 m from a tomb.⁶⁰ These kilns are grouped together close to a small settlement; according to stratigraphic analysis it seems that the kilns were operational for quite a long time, from the Spring and Autumn period onwards, producing artefacts possibly intended to satisfy the demand over a large territory.⁶¹ Pottery production at Maoqinggou provides the evidence for cultural continuity within the Ordos area from Neolithic times into the Warring States period. Furthermore, it also highlights the extent of cultural diffusion along the Northern Zone during the Bronze and early Iron Age periods, since Maoqinggou-related typologies are found migrating westwards into Ningxia and Gansu provinces during the mid-1st millennium BCE.

From the analysis of the 7 vertical shaft tombs at Taohongbala and Gongsuhao adjoining sites, it seems that a small pottery single-handled *guan*-jar was customarily placed behind the head of the deceased (M1). *Wan*-cups were also identified from the shards. All examples are handmade and fired at low temperature, and of small size. However, the pottery found here, and in particular the brown single-handled *guan*-jar shows continuity with other slightly later sites of the Warring States period, scattered in the



area, such as Xigoupan and Aluchaideng, which present a type of grey pottery that seems a more refined development of the earlier reddish-brown variety [Fig.30]. Eventually, typologies and manufacture would point to a connection with Maoqinggou early period ceramics.⁶²

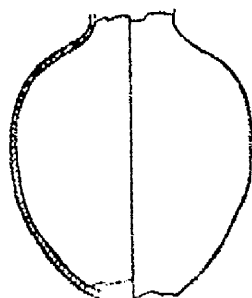
Fig.30 Pottery typologies at Taohongbala [Tian and Guo 1986: pl. 9, p. 216].

⁶⁰ Tian and Guo 1986: 287-96.

⁶¹ The production of the kilns would have been greater than the community of Maoqinggou cemetery could have consumed [Psarras 1994: 8].

⁶² Höllmann and Kossack 1992.

At the site of Nianfangqu, close to Dongsheng city no tomb was detected, although the objects found might have originally belonged to one person only, and precisely a woman.⁶³ Amongst the twenty articles recovered from the cache, which would belong to the Ordos cultural horizon of the second half of the first millennium BCE, a single broken ceramic *hu*-vase with small rim and globular body was included [Fig.31].⁶⁴ The vessel does not present handles and this lack of portable (utilitarian) features could suggest its exclusive use as burial container for afterlife gifts (beads and other small adornments). The simple typology, with plain surface decoration, a small rim and a globular grey body, handmade and finished at the wheel, fired at quite a high temperature could also be related to Liangcheng xian Maoqinggou later ceramics. In fact, most of the sites sharing affinities (similar metal inventory mostly) with the Ordos cultural horizon when featuring ceramics in their burial inventories suggest a link with the widespread pottery tradition of the Maoqinggou culture, which produced both early red-low fired ceramics and later grey, high fired ones.⁶⁵ Indeed the three kilns excavated in the proximity of Maoqinggou



cemetery were certainly used over a very long period of time, ranging from the late Spring and Autumn period (6th-5th c. BCE) to the Western Han (3rd c. BCE) and would have produced a far greater number of vessels than those just for the consumption of the immediate community, probably supplying the entire region and beyond, towards the Ordos region.⁶⁶

Fig. 31 Chipped jar unearthed at Nianfangqu [Yikezhaomeng wenwu gongzuozhan 1991: fig 3.10, p.406].

Inside each of the three earthen pits with vertical shaft discovered at Xigoupan, in Inner Mongolia and roughly dated to the 5th-3rd century BCE, a single-handled guan-jar, handmade and with plain surface decoration was found [Fig.32]. As in the case for the other Ordos-related sites analysed so far, the percentage of pottery specimens in burial assemblages is quite low when compared to metal objects. When and if present, ceramic vessels are quite often reduced to a single specimen per tomb, used possibly just to contain other burial gifts.⁶⁷ As such, ceramics do not seem to yield a symbolic

⁶³ Yikezhaomeng wenwu gongzuozhan 1991.

⁶⁴ Related to the inventories yielded at Aluchaideng and Xigoupan sites, datable to the 4th-3rd centuries BCE roughly.

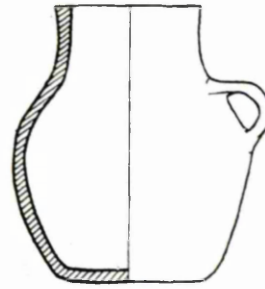
⁶⁵ Psarras 1994.

⁶⁶ Psarras 1994.

⁶⁷ Shihuigou site in Yijinhuoluo Qi, Inner Mongolia for example, although related to other Ordos sites in terms of metal inventory, yielded no ceramic specimens whatsoever [Yikezhaomeng wenwu gongzuozhan 1992]. Yulongtai site in Jungar Qi, Inner Mongolia yielded a single tomb with no ceramics [Nei Menggu Bowuguan

connotation. However, at present, there is no evidence coming from residential sites (only burials and hoards have been associated so far with the Ordos cultural horizon) and it is thus impossible to discern vessels for everyday use and/or for interment.

Fig.32 Guan-jar from Xigoupan [Tian and Guo 1986: pl 11, p.363].



Not very far from Taohongbala, on the same plateau, lie the two rich tombs of Aluchaideng. At roughly 500 metres from the tombs, the report briefly mentions the discovery of a Warring States site that yielded, besides huge quantities of animal bones, also quite a few piles of disintegrated pottery vessels.⁶⁸ What is particular about these fragments is their surface decoration, featuring zoomorphic drawings,

especially phoenixes and deer [Fig.33]. These shards were once part of round-bellied jars and such designs would have been applied right onto the globular body.

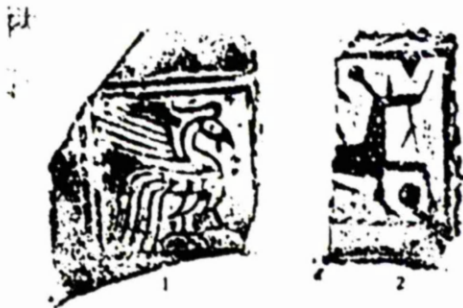


Fig. 33 Pottery shards illustrating a phoenix and a deer found at Aluchaideng [Tian and Guo 1980: p.337].

Similarly decorated shards have also been found in the burial inventory together with gold, silver, bronze and semi-precious stones, according to the first archaeological report.⁶⁹ From what is apparent in the illustrations provided by the excavators, these animal designs were confined in a squared frame, a composition never seen before in Northern Zone ceramics, but only in metal plaques. Furthermore, apart from zoomorphic compositions encountered on pottery vessels from Shajing and Xindian in Gansu province and Chawuhu in Xinjiang, datable to the first half of the first millennium BCE, painted ceramics from both frontier areas, during the Warring States period, seem quite restrained and feature very simple decorative patterns, including for the most part, cord impressions, triangles and vertical lines.

In fact, this type of zoomorphic decoration could have been drawn from design compositions embroidered on silk and woollen garments. Also the squared frame could

et al 1977]. At Sujigou site again in Jungar Qi, Inner Mongolia only a cache of bronzes was found [Gai Shanlin 1965]. Nalin'gaotu, Lijiapan and other small sites in Shenmu xian, Shaanxi province, which have been associated with the Ordos cultural horizon in terms of metal inventory, did not yield any single pottery item [Dai and Sun 1983].

⁶⁸ Tian and Guo 1978: 333-338, 364.

be reminiscent of appliquéd patches so often used for example by the Scythian people of the Altai region.⁷⁰ Although at the present, no textile evidence has survived from the Ordos region datable to the Warring States period, it is likely that, like their neighbours to the west, they would have worn quite elaborate garments, with leather and felt appliqué works, embroideries, and tapestry-woven coats. The same evidence of the use of 'lost wax - lost textile' technique in the casting of metal ornaments would signal familiarity with the medium.

Otherwise, animal designs could have been inspired by the artistic repertoire of metropolitan China, although produced *in loco* given the evidence of piles of ceramic shards of the same type in the site nearby. It is indeed proved that by the 3rd century BCE (Aluchaideng tombs dating), contacts with the Central Plains were already established and items were exchanged. So it should not be surprising that certain Chinese artistic elements drew more than others the attention of local manufacturers, especially when considering that at that time most of the nomadic people along the Northern Zone, with the exception of Maoqinggou would not think of ceramics as a major medium for consciously transmitting artistic and ethnic messages.

Yanglang cultural horizon

The Yanglang type of sites is prevalently represented by metal inventory, as to date, ceramics are virtually non-existent in the funerary assemblage. As in the case of the Ordos sites, with which they share similar metal assemblages, also at Yanglang Mazhuang ceramics are the least present group within the burial inventory and they are usually found in the burial mound, not even inside the chamber. The cemetery comprises 49 tombs of mostly catacomb type dated to the Warring States period, which yielded a total array of almost 3000 items.⁷¹ Besides the 743 bronze objects, 36 iron artefacts, 151 bone ornaments and 35 gold and silver accessories and myriads of beads and tubular fittings, only six ceramic specimens were unearthed [Fig.34]. They are either single or double handled *guan*-jars featuring a coarse reddish body with a restrained form of relief string decoration or cord pattern around the neck.

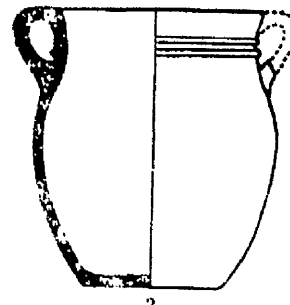


Fig.34 *Guan*-jar from Yanglang [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1993: p.48, pl.28.2].

⁶⁹ Tian and Guo 1978: 337.

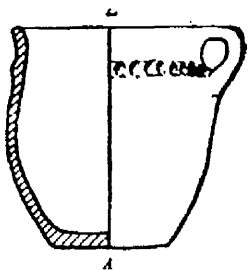
⁷⁰ Kimball et al 1995, fig 12, p.289.

⁷¹ Other three burials have been identified and dated to different periods, according to the official report [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1993: 13].

Although rarely found, this type of pottery *guan*-jars, with a red coarse body, flat or round bottom, simple vertical lines and horizontal bands in relief on the neck and shoulders has been detected throughout the region at other sites dated to the Warring States period.⁷² Eventually it could be connected with mature Liangcheng xian Maoqinggou pottery, like the Ordos examples already proved to be.

The site of Pengpu, Yujiashuang is located in a strategic passage to the northwest, a narrow corridor across Ningxia and Gansu, which connected the oasis of the Tarim basin with the Wei River valley in central China.⁷³

The 22 tombs excavated⁷⁴ yielded 7 *guan*-jars in total, with only one double handled and the rest with one handle.⁷⁵ The former, the unique double handled jar, presents a grey coarse ceramic body, whilst the latter –all single handled- are all red. Handmade by coiling, they all feature quite an imperfect shape and a simple surface decoration, either plain or with fine saw-tooth or vertical lines on the neck.



Signs of combustion are present on the bottom, signalling either their quotidian use or a ritual use related to the interment rite. They have been found both in vertical shaft pits and catacomb tombs, transcending any possible ethnic variation linked with burial typology. As such, they probably did not retain any conscious ethnic valence.⁷⁶

Fig. 35 *Guan*-jar with single handle (M10 Yujiashuang) [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1995: 86, pl.10.4].

If these ceramics too followed the development of Liangcheng ceramics, then the grey double handled jar would be earlier than the other red vessels with one handle, signalling also a shift of preference from double to single handled typologies. To add evidence to the Liangcheng connection, the analysis on physical data of the skulls found at Yujiashuang reveals that its ancient inhabitants belonged, beyond doubt, to the North-Asian Mongolic type, similar to the inhabitants of Mongolia and Siberia many of whom had already completed their transition to pastoral nomadism.⁷⁷ This type is different from the East Asian Mongolic type, which was instead predominant in Ningxia and Gansu

⁷² Yang and Qi 1999, Yan Shizhong 1992 and 1994, Zhong Kan and Han Kongle 1983 for a list of sites inventories in Guyuan, Pengyang and Xiji counties of Ningxia province, all related to the Yanglang Mazhuang cultural sphere.

⁷³ Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1995: 79-107.

⁷⁴ 28 tombs in total, six vertical shaft pits and the other catacomb burials constitute the cemetery. Yet given the disruption at the site, only 22 of them were scientifically excavated.

⁷⁵ in M4, M5, M10, M17, SM1, SM2.

⁷⁶ Another evidence for the lack of symbolic value would come from the various hoards (such as Goukou Baicaowa, Yaoguan Baicha, Gucheng Dianwa) found in Ningxia always yielding bronze fittings and horse accessories and never ceramics [Yang and Qi 1999].

⁷⁷ Han Kangxin 1995: 109-125.

regions during the Neolithic times.

The inventory is comparable with Bronze Age sites in the neighbouring areas, such as Yanglang Mazhuang, in terms of burial type and inventory (including the almost non-existent pottery). The evidence points to the existence of a rather homogeneous pastoral and militant culture, distributed across the north-western provinces of Gansu and Ningxia, but which also shows connections with sites in Inner Mongolia (Maoqinggou) and, to a lesser extent, in the province of Shaanxi. In fact, the system of interment of the body, and some of the bronze ornaments found at the site of Liujia in Fufeng county (Shaanxi) are similar to Yujiazhuang. Yet Liujia is regarded eight to four centuries earlier than Yujiazhuang and by some considered one possible origin for the Yujiazhuang people. However, other sites in Shaanxi area, datable to the late Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods reflect a possible link with the northerners, in terms of metal inventory, both bronze and iron, as we shall see ahead.

Conclusions

Ceramics are, at least in the form of sherds, virtually indestructible, and offer almost infinite potential for cultural expression; for these reasons, they are the class of artefacts most intensively studied by archaeologists. However, in the context of Chinese archaeology, a major emphasis has generally been placed on ceramic artefacts as *categories* and on their formal variation, thus basing their interpretation of change on typological seriation.

But little attention has been drawn to their organisation of production as well as their consumption, distribution, trade and exchange - important aspects that would provide insights into the nature of these ancient societies. Ceramic vessels have been often analysed in their own technical and stylistic contexts, ignoring their interaction with the environment and other media of cultural expression and their implications from the perspective of craft specialisation and labour division based on gender and age.

The archaeological evidence -albeit organised and presented in such a confined mode- has certainly shown that ceramic vessels, handmade by coiling rather than thrown on the wheel, were almost ubiquitous throughout the north-west during the Early Bronze Age period.

Similar typologies, such as double handled *guan*-jars and *li*-tripods with snake decoration, are found in sites all along the frontier suggesting an incipient form of cultural diffusion based on long-distance trade, rather than hinting to a common cultural background.⁷⁸ Cultural diffusion traits are further visible when analysing other types of materials, which are not consistently homogeneous in style -functional and not-⁷⁹ through space.

Li-tripods in particular were possibly produced in the Zhukaigou area and exported throughout the Northern Zone. Evidence for a small number of strikingly similar snake-patterned *li*-tripods found exclusively in residential stoves in Shajing sites would seem to purport the hypothesis for trading diffusion, with none or little symbolic connotations. The same phenomenon may have re-occurred later on at Maoqinggou, since some of its distinctive typologies are to be found further to the west into the Ordos and Yanglang groups of sites. As such, ceramics are hardly found to express subliminal ideas of ethnic affiliation, whilst they help to define the extent of interaction between different groups at a super-regional level.

⁷⁸ Even if Qijia cultural influence was probably felt over a large territory, from Qinghai, Gansu and Ningxia to Shaanxi province.

⁷⁹ Following Sackett's idea of *isochrestic variation* [Sackett 1977].

By analysing the context of the findings, the function of ceramics in society has been sometimes inferred through discrepancies between residential (when available) and burial specimens. Apart from Lijiaya where a clear role demarcation between domestic/pottery and funerary/metal was rather explicit, other groups of sites did not show a consistent behavioural pattern in the choice of materials for daily and after life. Even more, in the majority of cases, undecorated and painted vessels were used rather indiscriminately, though an exception is provided by Siba-Huoshagou contexts. Here, utilitarian containers exhibit a plain surface whilst burial vessels are almost always painted over with various geometric designs, showing that they may have been used as social markers in funerary settings.⁸⁰

The same attitude is also shown in Shajing contexts at a slightly later date, again suggesting a special affiliation with Siba-Huoshagou sites further to the west. In the case of Shajing, the identification of discarded ceramics left adjacent to the citadel's walls has also allowed some discussion on the extent of mobility of Shajing people through time.⁸¹ Yet, in both contexts no studies have been provided on possible gender or age connotations in the use of specific ceramic typologies, whilst more attention should also be paid in the future to the role of ceramics in communicating social messages.⁸²

Indeed, changes in pottery typologies and in their burial occurrence helped to pinpoint the emergence of pastoral nomadism in most sites dated to the 1st millennium BCE. Starting with Chawuhu, ceramic vessels seem to gradually lose their pre-eminence in burial contexts, whilst retaining their mundane utilitarian nature, visible from the preferred single handled spouted containers, which are more suitable in a mobile lifestyle.

Beside the transmission of specific shapes, pottery surface decoration can also be informative of particular aspects of cultural diffusion. During the 2nd millennium BCE certain decorative elements found parallels beyond the frontier area, as in the case of Andronovo pine needles and hanging triangles designs encountered in Yanbulake and Huoshagou ceramic vessels. Although this type of evidence if taken alone may be not so convincing, if observed together with other aspects of material culture it may help to corroborate the hypothesis of cultural diffusion and/or demic migration of Andronovo-related people from southern Siberia into Xinjiang and Gansu during the late 2nd millennium BCE.

Should distinctive pottery typologies and decorative patterns such as the oblong vase

⁸⁰ In fact, tombs with large quantities of pottery are also the richest in terms of precious materials, signalling the prestige of the deceased.

⁸¹ See discussion at pp 62-63, Ch.2.

with shoulder loop handles, the hanging triangles design and the collared jars, proved to be of western (Andronovo and proto-Scythian) origin, Andronovo elements may have intruded in the Turfan area in eastern Xinjiang, at Chawuhu, Subeixi, Sidaogou, and later at Alagou, but also further to the east in Shajing, by the early 1st millennium BCE.

We will see in the course of this investigation how other elements of material culture can be used to complement and strengthen this conjecture.

⁸² Wobst 1977:317-342.

Chapter 4

Metals: Objects of Prestige

2nd Millennium BCE

Siba-Huoshagou cultural horizon

Gansu can be considered one of the richest provinces of non-ferrous metal ores in China. Ancient sites have been found often in the proximity of copper, tin, lead and arsenic copper deposits. Thus ready availability could have been one of the igniting factors for the local development of metallurgy at an early date. In fact, most of the artefacts unearthed in Siba-Huoshagou contexts are made of either simple copper or arsenic copper, reflecting local metal sources. Three Siba-Huoshagou related sites are noteworthy: Donghuishan, Ganguya and Huoshagou.

At Donghuishan fifteen metal items have been brought to light together with a unique gold earring [Fig.1].¹ Arsenic copper artefacts are present from early on (18th c. BCE), and from the spectrographic analysis on 15 of the 16 objects and their dating,² it seems that the content of tin tended to increase with time, suggesting a transition to a new bronze metallurgy during the late phase of Donghuishan (15th C BCE). At Donghuishan craftsmen shifted from red-copper to arsenic copper and finally to bronze, which is indeed fully exploited at the later site of Huoshagou. Tools (knives, awls) and ornaments (bracelets, earrings and small roundels) are amongst the most frequently found items. The majority of them contain in their alloy percentages of arsenic ranging from 2 to 6 %. Metal-smithing techniques included forging by heat and in some cases (6 pieces) also finishing by cold hammering. It is interesting to note that these metal characteristics are mostly encountered in Western Asia, southern and northern Europe during the 3rd millennium BCE and are rarely seen in metropolitan China. Indeed such arsenic copper artefacts can be considered the earliest examples found in the Chinese context.³ Considering the strategic location of all Siba-Huoshagou sites along the Hexi corridor, it is logical to think of a west-east connection. The evidence for carbonated wheat grains and adobe bricks collected from Donghuishan further suggests the western connection, via Xinjiang.⁴

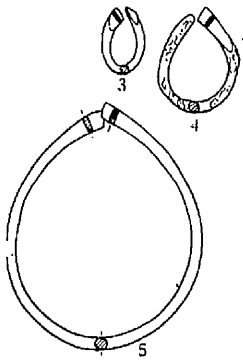
¹ Xu Yongjie 1989.

² Gansu sheng kaogu wenwu yanjiusuo 1998.

³ Li and Shui 2000.

⁴ Indeed Mei [2000] has proved that two metal samples from Wupushuiku (1400-1100 BCE) were arsenical copper with 3-4% of As. They are slightly later than Siba-Huoshagou, but related to the late phase of

Fig. 1 Metal ornaments found at Donghuishan [Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1998: p.93, fig 69].



At Ganguya forty-eight metal artefacts have been unearthed,⁵ including both copper and bronze with various percentages of arsenic, tin and lead in the alloy. For instance, arsenic in bronze ranges around 6%, whilst tin is generally between 2 and 10% (a percentage similar to bronze alloys found in Xinjiang at Tacheng site and in Andronovo contexts⁶). The specimens have been either forged or cast, whilst only a limited number of forged items present traces of finishing by cold hammering.

Whilst at these two sites metal findings are relatively scarce, Huoshaogou site yielded a vast array of bronze and other metal artefacts, all of them consistently small in size. The metal inventory comprises more than two hundred objects including axes, pick-axes, hammers, triangular-section arrowheads, semi-spherical disc ornaments, tubular instruments, knives and round buttons of various shapes including one that could be considered a small mirror [Fig.2.1].⁷ Although the earliest mirrors are those of the Qijia culture found in Gansu and Qinghai and dated to 2000 BCE, this small round mirror with a central knob on the back would rather resemble earlier examples from eastern Xinjiang. In fact similar knobbed plain mirrors have been recovered from the Yanbulake cultural horizon in Xinjiang [Fig.2.3]. The earliest one comes from Tianshanbeilu cemetery [Fig.2.2], dated to 1900-1100 BCE, providing further evidence of the contacts between Yanbulake and Huoshaogou cultures, during the mid 2nd millennium BCE. Originally this type of mirror may have come from further west, since analogous artefacts are encountered in Andronovo sites.

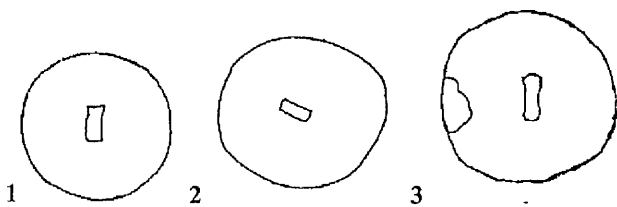


Fig. 2 From left to right: bronze mirrors from Gansu (1-Huoshaogou) and Xinjiang (2-Tianshanbeilu and 3-Yanbulake) [Mei 2000: fig 3.14 and 2.10].

Yanbulake cultural horizon. Thus the link between Yanbulake and Siba would be further confirmed.

⁵ Li 1988.

⁶ A number of bronze awls discovered in Siba-Huoshaogou contexts may be related to similar examples unearthed in Andronovo sites located in the Minusinsk Basin of Southern Siberia [Li 1993].

⁷ Li and Shui 2000.

Fig. 3 Bronze knives from Huoshaogou [Li and Shui 2000: fig 1.1-3].

Huoshaogou ring-pommel knives show a clear northern steppe style, already encountered at Zhukaigou and Lijiaya, and reminiscent of Andronovian prototypes, perhaps spread from Siberia, through Xinjiang, into Gansu [Fig.3].

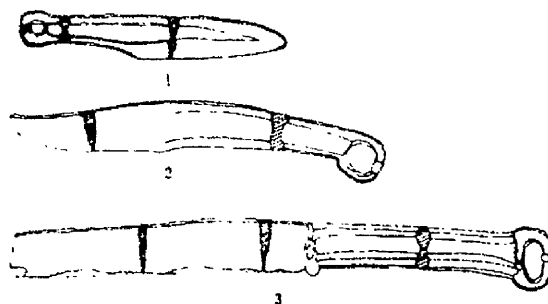
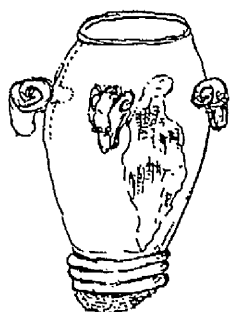


Fig. 4 Bronze mace from Huoshaogou site [Barnard 1986: 3-48: fig 4, p.12].



An object, probably a bronze mace, stands apart from the rest: decorated with four three-dimensional goat heads on the sides, it was realised by casting rather than forging, thus representing the earliest example of inlaid bronze cast in a piece mould ever discovered in the Chinese territory [Fig.4]. Mould marks visible within the shaft hole indicate that the piece was actually cast by piece mould technique, whilst cast-in perforations around the projecting animal heads could be the marks of hard soldering.⁸ Traces of fossilised fabric (in simple tabby weave technique) that may have functioned as a wrapper are still visible on the surface, whilst material in the socket is what is left of the wooden pole once supporting the mace head. Not only its technical features but also its shape appears to be of alien nature. The design of this mace head seems to relate to prototypes further to the west, in the Bactrio-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC, 2000-1750 BCE) and the Middle East.⁹ Although evidence of cultural transmission between these regions is difficult to substantiate, yet, the extent of the expansion of Central Asian desert oases cultures, such as the BMAC, has been already attested by the discovery of BMAC ceramics in northern Kazakh steppes. In many cases, Namazga VI (BMAC period) ceramics are imitated in local handmade wares. Actual wheel-made Central Asian ceramics and other oasis products have been found and in addition, technology has been exchanged, including agricultural techniques, metalworking and architectural traditions¹⁰ Similar small mace heads are also found in the bronze inventory of Elam, southern Luristan in Iran, dated to the 2nd millennium BCE.¹¹ Thus western flavour is also visible in the

⁸ Bunker 1998: 604-18.

⁹ Chase 1981.

¹⁰ Shishlina and Hiebert 1998: 222-237.

¹¹ Mahboubian 1997: pl.171, p. 165.

craftsmanship of ornaments and accessories in bronze and gold, especially earrings, as it will be explained further on.

The inventory, apart from the small dimensions of the metallic ornaments and the total absence of large containers, comprises various artefacts usually made in bronze or copper, featuring signs of either casting or forging.¹² For instance the wand unearthed from M79 has been subjected to microscopic analysis, which has evinced that the piece was forged and finished by cold hammering [Fig.5].¹³



Fig. 5 Bronze wand discovered in tomb M79: 9 at Huoshaogou [Sun and Han 1997: pl. 5].

There seems to be a preference in the medium used for ornaments and for utilitarian tools: whilst the majority of utensils have been produced in copper, a larger number of ornamental items have been made in bronze. In the starting phase of piece-mould casting at Siba-Huoshaogou sites, the various bronze alloys employed show significant content of both tin and lead, a combination that is considered prerogative of metropolitan China casting alloy. The alloy thus shows affinities with contemporary centres in the Central Plain. Yet many are the differences between the two productions. At Siba-Huoshaogou sites an extremely large number of copper tools and weapons was included in the metal inventory, whilst bronze was reserved for ornaments and personal accessories, seemingly employed as social markers in funerary contexts. Artefacts are usually small in size and do not comprise the large bronze vessels, diagnostic of Shang production. Furthermore, both at Ganguya and Donghuishan sites several metal objects containing residual arsenic have been detected since the early phase of production. So far no examples of arsenic bronze have been found in metropolitan centres, although this technical idiosyncrasy may in part reflect local metal resources, since ores of arsenic copper have been located in Gansu.

Some of the metal artefacts of the Siba-Huoshaogou culture such as the mace head analysed above and especially conic penannular earrings betray a nomadic origin, related to the steppe world further west.

Earrings can be considered a diagnostic artefact of Huoshaogou site since they have been discovered in the majority of the tombs. To date, they are the earliest gold and

¹² Although in the case of Huoshaogou, the forged items are just a small percentage of the whole group and ceramic moulds for arrow heads have been brought to light [Sun and Han 1997: 78].

¹³ Sun and Han 1997: 78.

silver artefacts discovered in present-day China (early 2nd millennium BCE).

Gold and silver were the favoured media conveying the ideals of prestige, wealth and power throughout the northwestern Eurasian continent, stretching from northern Europe to northwestern China. In particular, gold was apparently readily available in China since ancient times. Alluvial gold, in placer deposits, washed down the mountains in streams may have been the major source.¹⁴ On the other hand, natural silver in China does not occur in placer deposits. Instead it occurs in subterranean veins up in the mountains in northwest China, in Ningxia, Gansu and Shanxi provinces. Yet it can be easily extracted from silver-bearing ores (such as galena) via cupellation, a complex method of extraction employed in India and the Middle East, and allegedly employed in metropolitan China only by the 1st millennium CE.¹⁵

Huoshagou earrings have been unearthed especially from graves with a single occupant where various combined sets of funerary personal accessories were interred. The occupant could be buried adorned with a silver-copper or gold nose ring and a pair of bronze earrings, or with only one or two bronze earrings, or with only one or two made of gold. Most of these items were forged and then finished by cold hammering. Two gold penannular earrings with a single flaring end were apparently cast, using a natural gold alloy containing 93% gold and 7% silver, and not strip-twisted [Fig.6.1-2]. Such earrings made in copper and bronze are also found further east at Zhukaigou, in Liaoning province at Pingdishan, Fuxin [Fig.6.3], near Beijing at Fangshan, Liulihe, and in southern Inner Mongolia, Aohan qi, Dadianzi.¹⁶ The shape of these earrings is also reminiscent of Andronovo examples from southern Siberia and may have originally spread from there.¹⁷

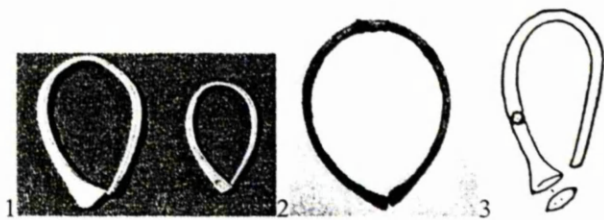


Fig. 6 Penannular rings 1-2 Huoshagou M79 [Han 1993]. 3- Pingdingshan Fuxin [Bunker 1993: 37].

¹⁴ There is little evidence in ancient China before the Tang dynasty for any gold extraction from vein rather than placer. However in the *Yantielun* (Discourses on salt and iron) it is stated that “they bore into the rocks to get gold and silver...” suggesting that some form of gold mining was practised as early as the Western Han period [Golas 1998].

¹⁵ Bunker 1994a. The occurrence of silver artefacts in Xinjiang, Gansu and the Ordos region could shift back the date for the use of cupellation in China to the 1st millennium BCE, although only a detailed analysis of the lead content could dispense any doubt. According to Craddock, early silver containing more than 0.05 % of lead would have been cupelled rather than native [Craddock 1995:213].

¹⁶ Beijing 1993.

¹⁷ Bunker 1998.

A nose ring made in a silver-copper alloy represents the only silver artefact from Huoshaogou site. It is penannular in shape with two flaring ends. Other nose rings, made of gold and copper, have been discovered in Huoshaogou-related contexts. It is interesting to note that nose rings are practically absent in the inventories of both Central and East Asia artistic production and it is thus difficult to trace back a close prototype for the Huoshaogou examples. It has been suggested that they may derive from the Near Eastern areas or Egypt, where nose rings were apparently fashionable during the Bronze Age period.¹⁸ Apart from the Huoshaogou example silver is conspicuously lacking at Chinese sites datable to the Bronze Age period. Its presence at Huoshaogou may hint to some long-distance contact with the Oxus Civilisation (2300-1800 BCE) of Central Asia,



where small silver ornaments and bronze mace heads representing symbols of power have also been discovered. The special location of Yumen xian in the Hexi corridor, at the end of the grassland strip between the Nanshan valley and the Gobi desert, may have represented an ideal place for cultural exchange between east and west.

Fig. 7 Silver nose ring found at Huoshaogou site [Han 1993].

Technically speaking, the three sites analysed so far yielded few evident discrepancies. At Donghuishan for instance arsenic metal is predominant amongst the findings, whilst its presence decreases in Ganguya and is almost irrelevant at Huoshaogou. This technical difference in metal composition could depend upon many factors such as time, ethnicity, and availability of natural resources and, consequent variations in economic prerogatives and social structures. The three sites yielded rather contemporary dates, ranging from 2000 BCE to 1500 BCE,¹⁹ and their geographic location, along the northern foothills of the Qilian Mountains, provided similar ecological conditions and access to natural resources. The longer period of habitation and the higher social stratification reflected in Huoshaogou site, when compared to Ganguya and Donghuishan, would seem to indicate its central role in the region. It may have represented the neuralgic centre from which Siba culture irradiated. Hence it may have had access not only to local raw materials, but also to alien materials and ideas, for instance, tin-bronze metallurgy.

According to Li Shuicheng,²⁰ the area was continuously inhabited throughout the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods by the same ethnic group of the Mongoloid family,

¹⁸ Nose rings have been mentioned in the Book of Genesis as being among a lady's ornaments [Bunker 1994b: 73-78].

¹⁹ Li 1988, Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1998 and Yang Jidong 1998.

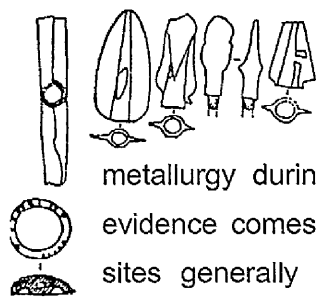
²⁰ Li 1993 and 1998.

without any demic intrusion from the west.²¹

The discrepancy in burial arrangements and attitude towards death could be partially related to the difference in metal production and both aspects may reflect different approaches to external stimuli and subsequent time lapses. For instance, the prevalence of cast bronzes at Huoshaogou site could point out to a closer relationship with centres of bronze production further east within metropolitan China, whilst the preference for forging and cold-hammering encountered at Donghuishan may signal a preferential channel with cultures further to the west. Chronologically, the western stimulus seems to be earlier than the eastern one, thus confirming a sequence starting with Donghuishan and Ganguya early periods and terminating with Huoshaogou late phase and Yingwoshu, where tin bronze technology replaced fully arsenic copper.²² Evidence of the far-reaching influence of Huoshaogou culture to the west is partially provided by archaeological material coming from the Hami region in Xinjiang at Tianshanbeilu.

Yanbulake cultural horizon

Fig. 8 Copper and bronze ornaments from Yanbulake site [An 1998: fig 3-4, pp.50-1].



As mentioned earlier, the eastern part of Xinjiang, especially the Hami basin and its complex of oases, seems to have played an important role in the development of copper alloys metallurgy during the later part of the 2nd millennium BCE. Archaeological evidence comes not only from the site of Yanbulake but also from the other sites generally related to this cultural horizon, such as Lafuqiaoke²³ and Yamansukuang Yalinban²⁴ all in Hami county. Regrettably, among them only the Yanbulake site has been fully reported, where 94 copper and bronze artefacts were unearthed from the graves, whilst a further 18 were collected from surface recognition [Fig.8].

In Yanbulake, the inventory includes 10 knives, 9 arrowheads of different shape, awls, 4 small mirrors of round contour with a central loop on the back, plates, a spindle whorl, needles, imitations of *astragali* goat, tubular fittings and various accessories such as finger rings and 16 earrings of three different shapes [Fig.9]. Some of them feature two

²¹ Apparently, to date, no evidence of proto-Europoid presence has come to light in Gansu province. Han and Pan 1984.

²² Li and Shui 2000: 43.

²³ Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1984.

²⁴ Also known as Tianshanbeilu cemetery [Mei 2000: 11 and Chang E. 1989].

meeting extremities; others display the two extremities overlapping each other, yet others present a round iron pendant or a penannular pendant. One is left to wonder whether such objects functioned as markers of social status, seen the paucity of their recovery in burial contexts.

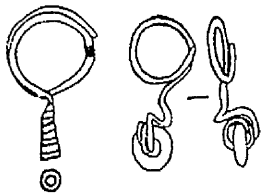


Fig. 9 Three different types of earrings from Yanbulake [An 1998: fig 4, p.51].



Rings were made of bronze for the most part, although few golden examples have been also found. Golden artefacts comprise one finger ring (found in M68), one ear pendant made with gold thread

and a red agate bead, and a flattened gold piece 5 cm long. Small gold and bronze rings such as the one from M48 [Fig.10] have been variously described as finger rings, yet they strikingly resemble the silver nose ring unearthed at Huoshaogou, and they could originally be associated with Andronovo examples. This similarity suggests the possibility that some of them, at least the smallest ones (ranging around 2.5 cm in diameter) may in



fact have adorned the nose rather than the earlobe, like in the case of the silver ring from Huoshaogou.

Fig. 10 Bronze 'nose' ring from Yanbulake M48. [Mei and Shell 1998: fig 6.1, p.590].

Also at Tianshanbeilu, the metal repertoire comprises ornaments and small implements, especially earrings, tubes, buckles and a mirror that are very similar to Huoshaogou examples.²⁵ Silver hairpins are also found, earliest evidence for silver in Xinjiang and possibly even earlier than the silver nose ring from Huoshaogou, should C14 dates from Tianshanbeilu be considered sound (1900-1200 BCE).²⁶

The large assemblage of copper and bronze items discovered within this cultural horizon suggests that Yanbulake people must have been familiar with metal working techniques, especially metal-smithing methods such as annealing and hammering of soft metals. Twisting and rolling techniques are used in the production of earrings and tubular ornaments. The former is a single or multi-layer ring shaped by twisting copper or gold wire, employing a technique present in the artistic repertoire of various people along the Chinese Northern Zone, possibly also in Lijiaya although at a later date (14th –13th century BCE); the latter is a roll made of sheet copper.²⁷ The later presence at Lijiaya (if

²⁵ Mei 2000: 63.

²⁶ Mei 2000: 11.

²⁷ Tubular ornaments made of copper sheet have been unearthed not only in Yanbulake contexts but also at the later site of Chawuhugoukou, demonstrating that copper was used in the early period (Chalcolithic era),

confirmed) would corroborate the eastward migration of the strip-twisting technique. Further investigation on Lijiaya filaments is thus needed.

Cast mirrors have been also found in Yanbulake contexts, confirming the employment of casting in the production of metal artefacts, although no moulds have been found to attest local production. As already evinced in the analysis of the Huoshaogou small mirror, such typology could have been influenced by the Andronovo culture.

A few iron objects (7) have been detected: besides those whose shape is yet to be identified, a small knife, an object similar to the point of a short sword, a pair of pendant earrings and a finger ring were recovered [Fig.11]. On a visual analysis the investigators surprisingly proposed that the knife and the sword point would have been cast rather than forged, though they failed to produce further technical evidence to confirm this assumption.²⁸ These iron items also appear to come exclusively from the first type of tomb, i.e. the earliest (M31, M72 and M75). And curiously enough, in other sites such as Wupushuiku and Lafuqiao, which can be associated with Yanbulake later period, no iron tools have been reported at all. Should these artefacts be proven cast, they would represent the earliest cast iron specimens in Xinjiang (possibly earlier than Chawuhu examples) and at a much earlier date than any examples from Central China dating to the 5th c. BCE.²⁹ This could suggest a western migration of iron technology. Yet further technical investigation is strongly needed to ascertain such a claim.

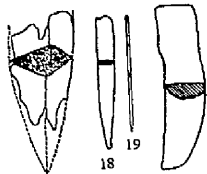


Fig. 11 Iron objects from Yanbulake site [Mei 2000: fig.2.15, 17-20, p. 91.]

In metal inventory is thus evident the connection between Siba-Huoshaogou and the Yanbulake culture of eastern Xinjiang, especially through the comparative analysis of Tianshanbeilu-Yalinban cemetery. Such link would further imply an eastward migration of Andronovo-related cultural elements. As Mei already pointed out in his analysis of Xinjiang metallurgical remains,³⁰ many are the elements in northern and eastern Xinjiang, which possibly came from Andronovo. Indeed, pottery in Tianshanbeilu-Yalinban features hanging triangles pattern that can be affiliated to Andronovo. The same pattern has been found in BMAC pottery. Following Kuzmina's hypothesis,³¹ the Andronovo people during the 2nd millennium BCE must have been in contact with the oasis agricultural settlements further to the south, such as the BMAC and the Oxus civilisations (1900-1750 BCE). This contact became more frequent in the

yet it was continuously employed throughout the Bronze Age for its great flexibility and malleability.

²⁸ Chen Ge 1990: 368-370.

²⁹ Of non-meteoritic nature [Han Rubin 1988: 87-96 and Wagner 1993].

³⁰ Mei 2000.

mid 2nd millennium BCE as considerable evidence for Andronovo presence in Central Asia, in Tianshan and Ferghana Valleys has been found, suggesting a southward migration of steppe tribes into the region. It was probably during this time that the Andronovo culture spread eastward in Xinjiang (mid 2nd Millennium BCE) and then in Gansu province.

If the dates given by Chinese archaeologists such as An Zhimin were appropriate, golden and silver artefacts from this region would also represent the earliest examples found so far within modern Chinese boundaries, even earlier than the examples from Huoshaogou.³² Unfortunately, the C14 obtained dates for Yanbulake (1900-700 BCE) are often dismissed by the excavators as too early when compared with associated material from the same site, therefore it is still premature to assess any chronological precedence.³³ At any rate, the fact that gold and bronze rings similar to the ones unearthed in Gansu have been brought to light in Yanbulake contexts provides a further evidence of cultural contact between the two areas. Still to determine is the direction of this cultural migration, to be assessed only after a definite chronology of Xinjiang archaeological map will be finally agreed.

Zhukaigou cultural horizon

The first evidence for bronze in Zhukaigou comes from level 3 (mid Xia period, second quarter of the 2nd millennium BCE), where a needle, an awl, a bangle and an earring were excavated together with Qijia-related pottery typologies.³⁴ These small metal artefacts abruptly appeared in the funerary inventory, suggesting the adoption from an outside source, perhaps related to the Qijia culture of the upper Wei river valley, the Yellow river region of Qinghai, Ningxia and western Inner Mongolia, where similar items have been excavated too.

Up to this level the archaeological evidence, including various stone digging tools and sickles, spoke out of an advanced, well-established farming society, with a great level of involvement in animal domestication, prevalently pigs and sheep. Animals, present in the form of their lower jawbones, as well as humans were selected for ritual purposes and interred with the deceased as sacrificial victims. In this context, the infiltration of different ethnic entities from Qijia, further to the west, and their successive adaptation to the local pre-existent social context could have encouraged the process of ritualisation of the

³¹ Kuzmina and Vinogradova 1996: 29-54.

³² An Zhimin 1998:45-62.

³³ Based on Tianshanbeilu uppermost limit and Yanbulake lowest limit [Mei 2000, Table 2.3, p.85].

³⁴ Only one needle has actually been found in level 3 (T 238:1). Unfortunately no visual evidence is provided in the first thorough archaeological report [Nei Menggu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1988].

social structure. Infiltration or replacement of previous ethnic groups may have also happened later on during the Shang period (level 5, end of 14th century BCE), when new architectural features and bronze forms appeared on the scene. During the latter periods, in fact, rectangular vertical tombs oriented to the north-west, which have been ascribed to the local elite,³⁵ have yielded various 'new' bronze items: *ding* and flatten-based *jue* vessels bearing *taotie* masks and *leiwen* decoration on the surface, together with *ge* daggers, which are datable to the Erligang period. Beside the distinctively Shang ritual bronzes, were found also bronze daggers with a ringed pommel and a twisted rope-pattern on the hilt flanked by two protruding extremities, all features reminiscent of the Karasuk material culture of Southern Siberia [Fig.12].

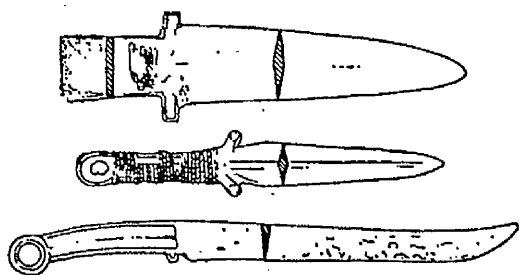


Fig. 12 Bronze weapons from Zhukaigou level V (M1040). From the top: Shang *ge* dagger; nomadic short sword (first such example found in the steppe area of the Northern Zone); nomadic knife of Karasuk style [Nei Menggu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1988: fig 29].

The short sword, the earliest example from the Northern Zone, features two protruding flanges on the hilt, which could be considered the early prototype for later '*antennae*' short swords from the same area, a typology found at Changping Baifu in Hebei, later on in great number at Liangcheng xian Maoqinggou cemetery and widespread throughout the north-western sector of the Chinese borderland during the mid 1st millennium BCE. The ring-pommel and the drooping hilt of a knife from M1040, but also the reinforced midrib on the dagger from the same tomb, as well as the shell-shaped plaque found under the head of the occupier of tomb M1080,³⁶ can be compared to Karasuk models from the Gorno-Altayskaya region.³⁷ Such examples have been dated between the 11th and 8th century BCE according to Russian traditional chronology, yet the examples found in Zhukaigou tombs should be antedated to the 15th-14th centuries BCE, since they have been discovered together with Erligang bronzes, thus subverting traditional Karasuk bronze chronology. This discovery would in fact corroborate Chlenova's previous hypothesis of a 15th century BCE date for the first Karasuk pieces.³⁸

The edges of the weapons and tools were either annealed after casting or finished by hot hammering, two techniques alien to the Chinese metal smiths, but popular among the

³⁵ M1052, M2012, M1083, M1040 in Nei Menggu Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1988.

³⁶ In the excavation report this plaque has been misleadingly interpreted as a helmet, but both dimensions and the flatten shape would exclude its use as a proper helmet, more likely as a funerary headrest.

³⁷ Chernykh 1992: 266-7, figures 91-92.

³⁸ Chlenova [1976] *contra* Chernykh [1994: 268 ff].

steppe populations. In addition to it, an axe mould has been discovered at the site: such discovery would infer that weapons were manufactured locally, rather than imported. Local exploitation is further witnessed by a major consistency in manufacturing technique in the 15 bronze objects from the site analysed by Han Rubin.³⁹ Even the composition of the bronze alloy in *ding* and *jue* vessels seems not to match contemporary Shang criteria. In fact even a ceramic mould for a vessel has been found among the debris, further confirming the existence of a local casting centre.

Lijiaya cultural horizon

Burial inventories from Lijiaya culture usually comprise bronze weapons such as axes (*yue*), hafted battle-axes (*guan qiong fu*) and axes with curved blades (*qi*) that can be compared with similar objects unearthed from Shang tombs. They may have been imbued with a special meaning, as objects of prestige signalling a preferential connection with dynastic China.

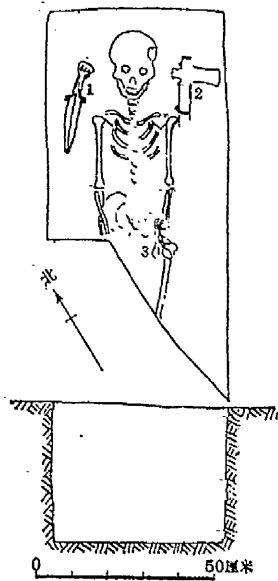


Fig. 13 Jixian tomb [Jixian kaogu yanjiusuo 1985: pl 2].

One example is provided by the single rectangular vertical tomb oriented to the northeast excavated at Jixian, Shangdoncun in Shanxi province,⁴⁰ which belonged to a belligerent male buried supine with limbs extended furnished with a simple attire of four bronze objects [Fig.13]. A battle-axe was placed on the left side of his skull, whilst a jingle-pommel dagger was discovered on the right side, and two spoons on the left side of his waist. This

tomb represents just an example of the sort of funerary assemblage one may expect to find in Lijiaya; typical Shang socketed *fu*-axes are found together with pommel daggers of local nomadic flavour, especially in Shanxi province. In particular, socketed *fu*-axes found in the Central Plains are also believed to have originated in the northern territories.⁴¹

Curved daggers with rattle or animal pommel usually carry a double-edged blade.⁴² Their body curves gently on one side and is divided into four main sections: pommel, grip, guard and blade, which have been cast together. The grip is usually oblong in section, whilst the blade features a raised median ridge running longitudinally. It is interesting to note that rattle-pommel daggers have been found both in several Lijiaya contexts, at

³⁹ Han Rubin 1992.

⁴⁰ Jixian Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1985: 848.

⁴¹ Chen Fangmei 1997: 318.

Shilou xian Caojiayuan,⁴³ Liulin xian Gaohong,⁴⁴ Baode xian Linzheyu,⁴⁵ Ji xian Chengguan⁴⁶ and at Qinglong xian Chaodaogou,⁴⁷ but also, at Yijinhuoluo qi Zhukaigou in Inner Mongolia [Fig.14]. However, the similarity between Lijiaya and Zhukaigou may not signify a direct connection between the two areas but rather an accidental occurrence, especially since the discovery of a single example in Zhukaigou cannot be quantitatively appreciable when compared with the large distribution rate encountered in Lijiaya territory. The development core for this type of rattle-pommel dagger is to be found in Shanxi province, since the majority of such examples have been recovered from this region.⁴⁸

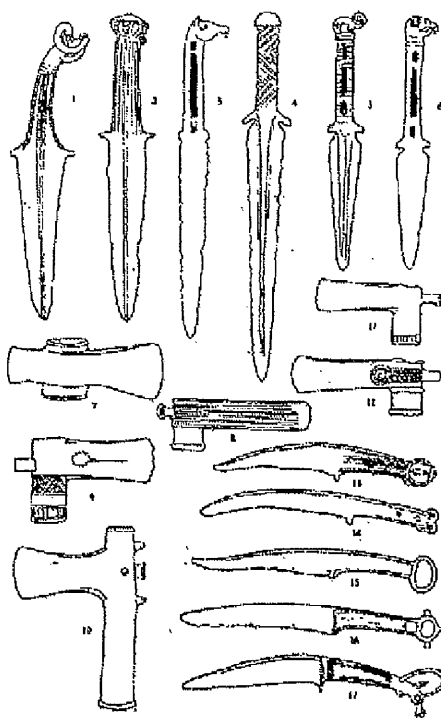


Fig. 14 Bronze daggers from the Lijiaya cultural horizon and beyond. 1.11.13.15.17 –Qinglong xian Chaodaogou (Hebei) 2. Baode xian Linzheyu (Shanxi). 3.4.6. Baifu Changping (early Western Zhou period). 8.9. Liaoning Xingcheng. 16. Shilou xian, Erlangpo (Shanxi) [Lin 1986 fig 49].

Intimately related to this typology are the daggers displaying animal-shaped pommels. They are similar in terms of chronology, space configuration and stylistic preferences: apparently they only differ in the choice of finial, which can be either animal- or rattle-shaped, whilst the grip, the blade and the guard do follow the same patterns. Similar animal pommel curved daggers have been found in Mongolia, Transbaikalia, Tuva, the Minusinsk Basin and the Altai dated to the mid Karasuk period (12th century BCE).⁴⁹ Lijiaya examples from Shanxi and Hebei would apparently predate those from further west, as they can be dated to the 14th –13th centuries BCE. Yet the discovery of the ring-pommel dagger from M1040 at Zhukaigou unearthed from level V (15th century BCE) would cast some doubts on the actual provenance of such bronze typology.

Furthermore, the two spoons found at Ji xian Shangdongcun display similar shapes with

⁴² Such as the ring-pommel dagger discovered in Zhukaigou M1040.

⁴³ Yang Shaoshun 1981b.

⁴⁴ Yang Shaoshun 1981a.

⁴⁵ Wu Zhenlu 1972.

⁴⁶ Yan & Lu 1988:103-4.

⁴⁷ Li 1962: 644.

⁴⁸ Chen Fangmei 1997.

⁴⁹ Lin 1986: 237-73.

their handles bearing an animal-shaped finial carved in the round and loops attached to the handles bearing small pendants. They too betray a nomadic northern artistic peculiarity rather than following Shang standard bronze iconography. In fact, similar spoons with jingles have also been excavated from tombs located in Jungar Qi (Inner Mongolia), in the Zhukaigou sphere of cultural influence [Fig.15].



Fig. 15 Jingled spoon (Jungar Qi, Inner Mongolia) [Tian and Guo 1995: 15, pl 173].

The myriad of small jingles found attached to weapons and vessels represents a common *leit-motif*. small jingles are suspended from a bronze bell from Shilou xian Caojiayuan,⁵⁰ from a bronze *dou* vessel unearthed at Baode xian Linzheyu and from a *gu* beaker from Shilou xian Taohuazhuang.⁵¹ Since these sites are all culturally related to Lijiaya, the choice to use bronze jingles may be diagnostic of Lijiaya culture. These ingenious devices may have meant to sound when hitting the surface of the bronze, producing a special vibrant note. Rattles and bells also feature predominantly in cultures in which shamanistic rituals and some forms of animism are practised.⁵² Yet the use of jingles is remotely reminiscent of Luristan bronze art, on the Iranian plateau, dated to the late 2nd millennium BCE, although the connection between the two cultures would be difficult to ascertain. Jingles apparently prevailed only within the nomadic Lijiaya ritual context, since they do not occur in the bronze inventory of metropolitan China. They thus would have played a special ritualistic role within the society of this northern tribe.

It is anyway interesting to note that these pendants have also been found on bronze typologies that are exclusively Shang in nature. The stylistic syncretism could suggest a process of gradual absorption of the ritual message connoting Shang bronze vessels. Another example of this phenomenon comes from Lingshi xian Jieqi in northern Shanxi province. In a grave, a set of Anyang bronze vessels - probably the share of the spoils of war,⁵³ has been recovered bearing different clan signs. In another burial at Jingjie, also in Lingshi xian, a wild ass has been depicted on the underside of a *gui*-vessel,⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Shanxi Bowuguan 1980: no.57.

⁵¹ See Wu Zhenlu 1972: p. 4 fig 4; Xie and Yang 1960: p.51, fig 1.

⁵² Eliade 1964.

⁵³ Lin Yun 1986: 240.

⁵⁴ See Fig.5, Chapter 6.

suggesting that the vessel could have been made for a non-Chinese client to whom the animal had a major symbolic or tribal affiliation meaning, in a context of friendly interaction with the Shang.⁵⁵

In Shaanxi province, other important sites showing cultural similarities with Lijiaya, contemporary with the Yinxu phase of the Shang dynasty have been discovered. At Suide xian Matoucun an alligator wand has been unearthed together with Shang bronzes [Fig.16].⁵⁶ This peculiar bronze typology occurs both in Shaanxi and Shanxi provinces in Suide and Shilou Counties,⁵⁷ whilst it is almost unknown in Shang archaeological contexts, thus suggesting a northern origin.⁵⁸ In particular, the confined presence of this type of artefact in these two counties, known to have been in hostile relationship with the Zhongyuan, would further point to its distinctive nomadic sphere of action.⁵⁹

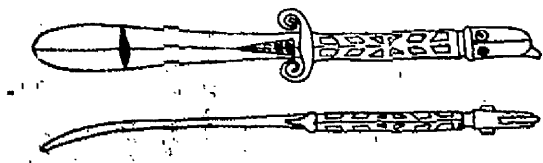


Fig. 16 *Qi*-wand from Suide xian Matoucun [Tian and Guo 1995: pl 67].

The wand may have had a special ritual connotation at Lijiaya, as it may –similarly to the bronze jingle pendants- have been used to produce a distinctive rattle noise when shaken.

Suide xian Hourenjiagou and Qingjian xian Xiejiagou sites both in Shaanxi province further witness the extent of the influence played out by Lijiaya culture on the other bank of the Yellow River.⁶⁰ For instance, a *pan* water basin from Shilou xian in Shanxi province resembles in shape another *pan* basin with tortoise and fish designs unearthed at Qingjian xian Xiejiagou, whilst it displays round whirls motifs encountered on another *pan* basin found at Qingjian xian, Zhangjiagua.

Qingjian xian Xiejiagou yielded a few interesting bronze pieces that manifest a rather strong nomadic flavour in their artistic rendition. A bronze *dou* ladle bears a finial in the shape of a goat head and a three-dimensional scene of a tiger chasing up a dog [Fig.17].

⁵⁵ Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1986: pl.1. p. 4-5; Li Boqian 1998: 167-184.

⁵⁶ Shaanxi sheng bowuguan 1975.

⁵⁷ At Shilou xian Houlanjiagou [Guo Yong 1962], Shilou xian Yidie [Wu Zhenlu 1972] and Shilou Chujiayu [Yang Shaoshun 1981b].

⁵⁸ On the contrary, Lin Yun [1986: 261] argues that the *qi* wand may in fact represent a nomadic interpretation of the Shang *bi* bronze tool.

⁵⁹ Li Boqian 1998: 167-184.

⁶⁰ Suide xian Bowuguan 1982: 41-3.

Fig. 17 Bronze *dou*-ladle from Xiejiagou [Tian and Guo 1995: pl 175].

Although the shape of the ladle can be ultimately ascribed to metropolitan Shang China (the *dou* dipper, an important ritual object in Shang culture), the style is reminiscent of Ji xian Shangdongcun bronze spoons, with the lively description of animal motion, retaining a northern nomadic flavour.

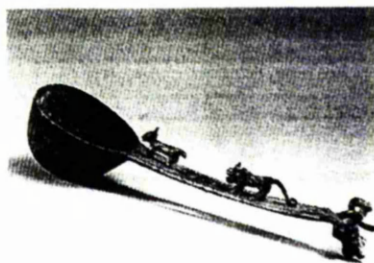
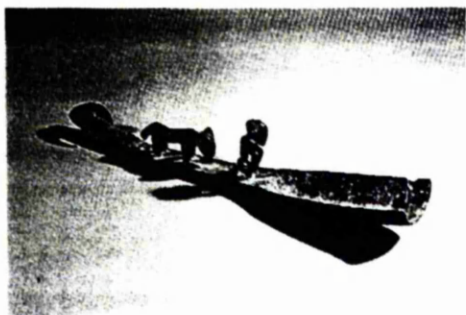


Fig. 18 Bronze wand depicting a human sacrifice [Tian and Guo 1995: pl 66].



A wand unearthed in Shaanxi province (at Yanchuan Yongdou) bears on the handle another three-dimensional scene depicting a different subject matter, whose stylistic treatment recalls the Xiejiagou ladle [Fig. 18].⁶¹ The bronze wand with a goat shaped pommel is somewhat intriguing as it apparently portrays a dramatic scene: a man is kneeling down in sacrificial posture, behind him a ferocious tiger whose pelt has been rendered with neat diagonal intaglio lines.⁶² It would be tempting to link these artefacts with ritual sacrifices and perhaps identifying the tiger and the caprid as Lijiaya symbols of appurtenance and the prey (either a dog -which curiously enough frequently occurs in Shang tombs- or a human) as their eastern neighbours in the Central Plains, although this kind of narrative interpretation is too far to corroborate. Indeed, the subject matter (the human sacrifice performed by a tiger) could belong to a well-rooted tradition of pictorial representation, known through the petroglyphic art of the eastern Eurasia steppes datable to the Neolithic and Bronze Age. The immediate source for the predation scene on the ladle may in fact derive from the deer stones disseminated throughout Mongolia and southern Siberia, linked to the Karasuk culture.

⁶¹ Tian and Guo (eds.) 1995: pl 66.

⁶² Here too a remote connection with Luristan is hinted. In fact, a bronze wand with an aggressive tiger devouring a small prey on top has been found in Adzerbaijan, dating from the early 1st millennium BCE [Mahboubian 1997: pl.262]. However, in this case, the object has been described as a possible back scraper, quite differently from the Yongdou wand.

Fig. 19 bronze tubular axes from Yulin (Shanxi) [Tian and Guo 1995: pl 59].



Another three-dimensional scene of animal predation comes from Yulin, again in Shaanxi province [Fig. 19]. This time the personages have been placed on top of a battle-axe tubular socket: a tiger is chasing up a dog, between them, a jingle pommel has been attached. The zig-zag lines and dots on the tubular handle are too reminiscent of Mongolian deer stones and appear also on the hilt of bronze knives and daggers from Mongolia, eventually drawing their inspiration from Karasuk prototypes. Shapely volute-like tips and three perforations at the centre of the blade distinguish this axe. A raised

collar encircles the perforations. Similar axes have been recovered only in the territory to the west of the Taihang Mountains, especially in Lijiaya area, with related types extending as far west as Qinghai province.⁶³ Its unusual shape and surface treatment may have been inspired by a prototype that could have been more easily hammered rather than cast, following a metal-smithing technique that was favoured by this nomadic tribe, particularly in the creation of golden artefacts.

Another bronze that could be ascribed to the Lijiaya context is the so-called bow-shaped object [Fig. 20]. It is formed by a decorated central straight bar and two lateral curved sections as to resemble a bow. It is depicted frequently at the waist of human figures on the deer stones from Mongolia, but its function is yet to be ascertained. Karlgren argued that it could have been used as a kind of yoke;⁶⁴ Loehr related it to bow equipment.⁶⁵ On the other hand, Lin Yun has suggested that it could be used as a “rein holder” used by drivers of horse drawn chariots and horse drivers.⁶⁶ However, the iconography of the deer stones does not show it in combination with chariots or horses and according to Sun Ji this curious object could be regarded as a double hook used for hanging and carrying things.⁶⁷

⁶³ In Chunhua County, Shaanxi province [Yao Shenming 1986:p.13, fig. 9].

⁶⁴ Karlgren 1945:101-44.

⁶⁵ Loehr 1949: 126-43.

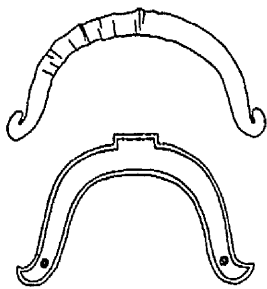
⁶⁶ Lin 1986: 263.

⁶⁷ Sun Ji 1993.

Fig. 20 Bow-shaped object from Dasikongcun, Yinxu [Lin 1986, fig 56:3].



Although the bow-shaped tool occurred mainly in Shang tombs of the Yinxu phase, indeed this type of bronze object has been found in an archaeological site from the Lijiaya area at Lingshi xian Jingjie, and its decorative features strongly point to a nomadic origin. Often, it displays rattle terminals at either end and is decorated with raised parallel lines and sometimes an eight-pointed star motif in the centre. In particular, the two rattle-terminals strongly recall the spherical jingles found at Baode xian Linzheyu. The rarity of bow-shaped objects in Lijiaya could be explained in the choice of medium: the bow-shaped object could have been originally made of perishable material (i.e. wood) and further enhanced with individual bronze jingles at either end, in the nomadic context. However, a similar bow-shaped object, yet with no rattles at the ends, was excavated from the Askysz Kurgan belonging to the Karasuk culture, suggesting a place of origin further west.⁶⁸ Finally, given its unusual curved shape and rattle finials, it may in fact have been part of the ritual paraphernalia, rather than a utilitarian object.



Another object made in both bronze and in gold, again of curved shape and unknown function has been recovered both in Shilou xian Chujiayu,⁶⁹ Caojiayuan⁷⁰ and Houlanjiagou,⁷¹ and in Baode xian Linzheyu [Fig. 21].⁷²

Fig. 21 Arch-shaped ornaments [Lin 1986: fig 50: 2-3].

Lin Yun has considered it some sort of head ornament.⁷³ However, as in the case of Baode xian Linzheyu, the golden arched ornament has been often discovered in burials placed on the chest of the deceased rather than in proximity of the skull.⁷⁴ Its symbolic placement may suggest a ritualistic connotation, perhaps related to the bow-shaped ornament discussed above. It is interesting to mention that in Mongolia, during the Neolithic period, moon-shaped bone ornaments, with perforations on the points were apparently used for shamanistic rituals.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ Chernykh 1992: p.267, fig 11.

⁶⁹ Yang Shaoshun 1981b.

⁷⁰ Yang Shaoshun 1981b.

⁷¹ Guo Yong 1962.

⁷² Wu Zhenlu 1972.

⁷³ Lin 1986: 249.

⁷⁴ Wu Zhenlu 1972: 62-66.

⁷⁵Novgorodova 1989.

Gold ornaments are also a salient feature of Lijiaya burial contexts [Fig. 22].⁷⁶ In particular flat golden earrings have been found in several graves, reflecting their role as social markers.



Fig. 22 Golden earrings with turquoise beads from Shilou xian Houlanjiagou [Lin 1986, pl 50: 4-5].

Golden earrings have been unearthed throughout the Lijiaya territory, along either bank of the Yellow River. At Houlanjiagou and Taohuazhuang in Shilou xian and at Yonghe xian Xiaxinjiao (Shanxi province),⁷⁷ but also at Qingjian xian Siyan and Chunhua xian Heidouzui in Shaanxi province. All these ornaments are technically consistent, being made by hammering a single piece of gold, which is then chiselled out to acquire a definite shape. This technical procedure can be considered diagnostic of Lijiaya culture. Hammered gold foil was indeed used also in the Central Plains during the Shang period: in general, gold was beaten into extremely thin sheets of foils which were then applied to objects made of other materials for decorative purposes.⁷⁸ Remnants of gold foil to enhance wood and bronze artefacts have been recovered from Xiaotun and Houjiazhuang in Henan province.⁷⁹ The use of gold though seemed limited to the application of foil to produce contrasting colours. An ancient textual reference to 'stags of gold' presented to the Caonü people by Zhou Muwang in the 10th century BCE cannot be substantiated archaeologically, but it curiously brings to mind the typical southern Siberian and Central Asian wooden stags covered in gold, related to the Scythian macro-culture.⁸⁰ In addition to these golden ornaments, at Suide xian Linzheyu 6 golden filaments were recovered from the only tomb.⁸¹ Their technical realization is not reported in the archaeological survey, and it is thus difficult to ascertain whether they were made by strip twisting or drawn. In ancient times, generally, a thin sheet of hammered gold was slowly twisted until it formed a wire with a round cross-section.⁸² Such technique can be traced back to the 3rd millennium BCE in southwest Asia.⁸³ Fine necklaces made with twisted golden filaments are also found in the inventory of oasis dwellers from the Bactrio-Margiana Archaeological Complex (2000-1750 BCE). If so, Linzheyu filaments would represent the earliest instance of strip-twisted golden wire in both the Northern

⁷⁶ Lijiaya golden items are composed of gold (85%) and silver (15%).

⁷⁷ Guo Yong 1962: 33-4.

⁷⁸ A process defined as *baojin* in current technical terms.

⁷⁹ Barnard and Tamotsu 1975.

⁸⁰ For instance, the wooden stags found in Pazyryk and Filippovka kurgans, although dated much later (6th-4th century BCE) probably spoke of a long-rooted tradition.

⁸¹ Wu Zhenlu 1972: 64, fig 9.

⁸² Ogden 1991: 95-105.

⁸³ Bunker 1997.

Zone and the Zhongyuan, being datable to the 14th –13th centuries BCE.

Numerous pastoral nomadic groups culturally different from dynastic China used to adorn their bodies with metal jewellery frequently made of gold, bronze and occasionally silver, a custom not traditionally encountered in the Central Plain, where jade was the favourite medium of adornment both in life and in death.⁸⁴ Personal ornamentation is one of the cultural features that mostly reflect the social structure of a given society.⁸⁵ Archaeological investigation traditionally based on burial typological seriation must be integrated with the study of the attitude towards adornment meant for the afterlife. In this respect it is clear that Lijiaya burial furnishings provide an interesting example of how culturally different pastoral nomadic groups could be from the state-level Shang society. In particular, amongst several nomadic groups identified in the archaeological records of Chinese Northern Zone, Lijiaya golden pieces stand out unique both in terms of shape and metal-smithing technique, from all the other examples which will be analysed further on in this study. It is also important to note that none of these objects bear zoomorphic motifs incised on the surface, which is generally left undecorated or sometimes punctuated by rows of simple dots incised with a chisel. Importance seems to have been laid exclusively on the choice of the precious material and the arched shape of the object. The lack of interest in surface decoration seems rather unusual, if compared with other bronzes from the Lijiaya context.

⁸⁴ Bunker 1993.

⁸⁵ Hodder 1982 and Clark 1986.

1st Millennium BCE

Xindian cultural horizon

Remains of the Xindian culture have been found in more than eighty sites scattered along the lower reaches of the Taohe, Daxiahe and Huangshui rivers, all tributaries of the Huang He, extending into Qinghai and Gansu provinces. However, systematic excavations have been conducted on a very limited number of sites.

Xindian sites all yielded a vast array of ceramic vessels and decorations, whilst bronze specimens can be counted on the fingers of two hands. Of course, the great majority of metal items find counterparts in the standard Northern Zone assemblage, with small tubular and button-like ornaments and few curved knives.

In Huizi, a bronze knife with thickened back and handle deeply decomposed was found in two halves a little more than a metre apart [Fig. 23]. The shape is strikingly similar to nomadic specimens from the Ordos region, especially the back curve. Some twin-buttons have also been recovered, although highly corroded.



Fig. 23 Fragment of bronze knife from Huizui [Andersson 1943: fig 52, p. 171].

Also at Lianhuatai in Linxia County a small number of bronze ornaments comprising tubes of various sizes and buttons were found interred with the deceased male in tomb M16 [Fig.24].⁸⁶ According to the archaeological report, they were originally placed around his neck, possibly arranged to form a necklace. M16 is the only burial in the entire cemetery where bronze items were actually found, confirming the rarity of bronze within Xindian.

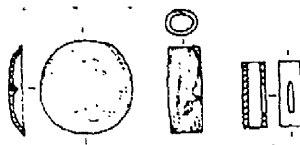


Fig. 24 Bronze tubes and buttons from M16 at Lianhuatai [Gansu sheng wenwu gongzuodui et al 1988: p.15, pl.12].

At Shanjiatou few small round bronze balls and a highly corroded ornament described by the excavators as a belt hook [Fig. 25] were found among the assemblages of 33 tombs, confirming the scarcity of metals.⁸⁷ Should this object really be a belt hook, it would probably be considered one of the earliest examples ever found within China. Yet its

⁸⁶ In Gansu province, in Linxia county at Lianhuatai a cemetery associated with Xindian material culture was partially excavated, revealing 18 tombs, some of them in catacomb style [Gansu sheng wenwu gongzuodui et al 1988].

⁸⁷ Qinghai sheng wenwu guanlichu 1992.

uniqueness would suggest an alien produce rather than a local manufacture. By looking at its shape -round body and elongated hook- a parallel with later *pipa*-shaped belt-hooks unearthed in Gansu and Ningxia from sites dated to the mid to late 1st millennium BCE seems appropriate. Indeed the shape has been accredited to Chinese ingeniousness rather than to northern prototypes, based on the earliest examples from Qin-related sites dating to the late Spring and Autumn period (6th c. BCE), hence later than the Xindian finding.⁸⁸ One has to wonder whether this type of belt hook may have originated within the Northern Zone and only later incorporated into the Chinese repertoire. At the moment further evidence is needed to substantiate this theory.



Fig. 25 Bronze item resembling a belt-hook from Shanjiatou [Qinghai sheng wenwu guanlichu 1992: pl. 21, p.30].

No metal recovery has been reported so far from the Jijiachuan site, where only bone, ceramic and stone artefacts dominated the scene.⁸⁹ It is also probable that, due to the intrinsic fragility of copper-laden bronze alloy, the metal objects have indeed disappeared from the archaeological record, rather than never having existed, as the highly decomposed knife from Huizi proves.

At Zhangjiazui (phase 3 site) a fragment of bronze vessel rim, a spearhead, and two pieces of bronze slag were discovered [Fig. 26].⁹⁰ Their bronze alloy consists of copper, tin and lead. From the metallographic analysis it appears that the alloy composition of the spearhead and that of the vessel fragment are indeed different. Whilst the spear contained relevant traces of both arsenic and antimony, the rim fragment alloy revealed no traces of arsenic and antimony at all and instead a percentage of tin and lead.

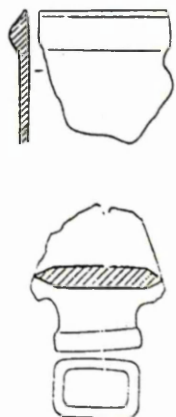


Fig. 26 Bronze spearhead and vessel fragment from Zhangjiazui [Xie Duanjiu 1980.2: fig 9].

Undoubtedly, the rim fragment presents a cleaner form of bronze alloy, but one that is partially consistent with metallurgical standards further to the East, in metropolitan China. This discovery is particularly important, for up to this point, the archaeological record of the region registered only small bronze artefacts such as awls, knives and ornamental

⁸⁸ From the Qin cemetery at Fengxiang [Zhao Congcang 1991].

⁸⁹ Xie Duanjiu 1980.

⁹⁰ Xie Duanjiu 1980: 203.

buttons as part of the metal inventories.⁹¹ The presence of a vessel (even though only a fragment), if made locally and not imported, would constitute a big step ahead for the metallurgical history of the area, implying a more developed knowledge of metal alloys and casting techniques.⁹² Furthermore, this fragment has been found within the residential area, together with utilitarian objects made of bone and stone. The context would suggest a functional connotation, rather than a ritual use. Unfortunately, the relative penury of burial metal assemblages related to this specific culture, greatly hampers a comparative analysis of bronze containers for life and the afterlife within this cultural context.⁹³

We can however argue, from the scanty material evidence unearthed from Xindian-related sites of each phase, that metal production did not constitute a primary activity within this society. The abundance of pottery, bone and stone utensils (i.e. for utilitarian scopes) would reflect a rather stable, pacific agricultural society of sedentary nature. The large number of storage facilities uncovered within the residential grounds would further confirm this economic trend. However it is arbitrary to draw conclusive assessments on Xindian culture, given the small number of the excavated sites and the few burial assemblages officially brought to light up to the present.

Shajing cultural horizon

At Shajing, bronze objects have been recovered prevalently from burial contexts and include a vast array of ornaments, buttons with decorations, ornamental plaques and tubes which bear a close resemblance to the bronze assemblage of the nomadic population of Inner Mongolia grassland [Fig. 27]. Stylistic resemblance would indicate a pattern of cultural exchange between the Shajing people and the steppe people further to the north.

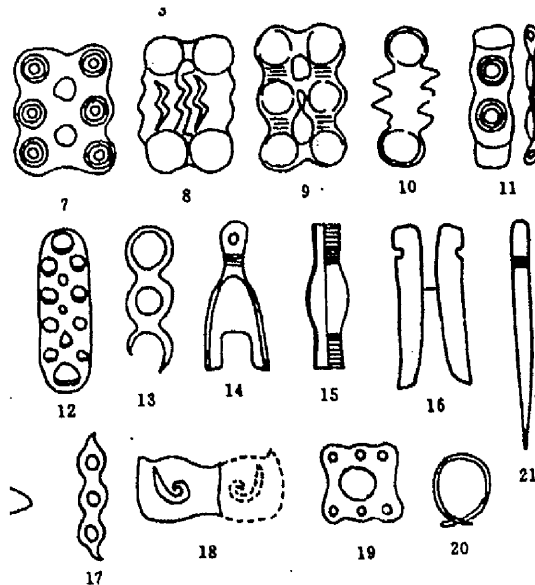


Fig. 27 Bronze multiple-convex plaques, bells, three-holed 'psalias', tubular ornaments, awls and a penannular earring from Hamadun [Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1990: pl. 19.33-18]

⁹¹ Apart from the liquid container from Baifu (Hebei).

⁹² The presence of pieces of bronze slag would indicate that these bronze objects were made locally rather than imported from outside.

⁹³ An isolated Xindian-related tomb found at Zongtai in Qinghai province featured a catacomb-style oval pit and yielded a single 45ys old male repeatedly interred, whose skull is missing, and three ceramic *guan*-jars but no metal specimens [Xu Xinguo 1986: 316].

Various button-like plaques in bronze have been found, decorated with rows of convex roundels, (in combinations of two, three, six, or nine linked together). Other decorative bat-shaped, perforated and zigzag-shaped plaques might have once embellished leather and textile clothes and belts. Tubular objects, hollow cast, crossed by leather strings, were originally inserted with a bone needle. At Sanjiaocheng some ornaments feature three rings in a vertical row.⁹⁴ The arrangement is closely reminiscent of simple horse psalias throughout Central Asia and these specimens could in fact be the remnants of simple gear for horse riding, although dimensions do not really fit the purpose.⁹⁵ On the other end, tubular fittings with a central bulge have been excavated also from Chawuhu contexts, creating a western precedent for the Shajing examples.

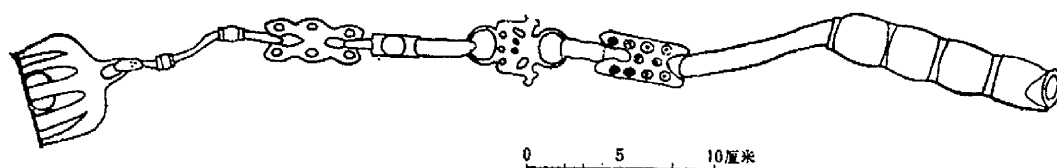
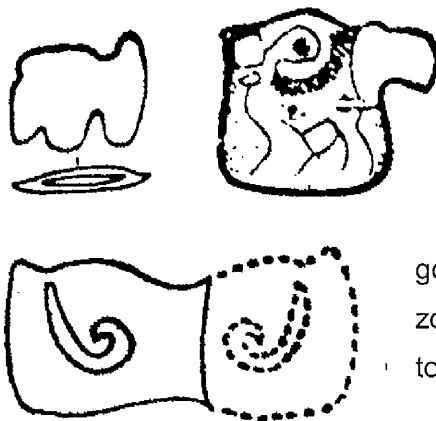


Fig. 28 Whip object found at Hamadun [Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1990: pl 20, p.229]

It is interesting to note that in addition to the scattered plaques, a whip-like object [Fig. 28] made up of various multiple-convex plaques, tubular accessories, 55 cm long, probably provided with three small bells attached to one of the plaques was discovered in M5. This finding indicates that such ornaments were indeed used together, rather than just used as belt or garment ornaments. The whip represents a unique finding, providing a hint to possible horse riding activities within Shajing.



Some zoomorphic plaques, identified by the excavators as a dog and a horned goat, were also found [Fig. 29]. Together with the latter, also a button plaque depicting an animal head with perforated eyes was unearthed. Both the goat plaque, the animal head button and a third zoomorphic plaque without a specific identity belonged to a single burial (M11).

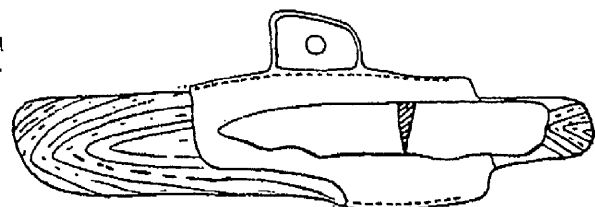
Fig. 29 From top left, clockwise: dog-shaped plaque, goat-shaped plaque and animal head with perforated eyes [Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1990: pl.19.32, 17, 10].

⁹⁴Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1984: p. 601, pl. 4.5.

⁹⁵ These ornaments are around 5 cm long.

Included in the metal assemblage were various types of bronze small bells, and also minute spherical balls, which originally covered the eyes of the deceased or embellished the head, as a sort of adornment for the afterlife. The custom of covering up the eyes of the dead is also encountered further to the west. Personal ornaments also included earrings (4) made of fine bronze wire, with one end rounded, and the other pointed, in a style reminiscent of earlier Huoshaogou examples.

In addition to the ornaments mentioned above, knives -either enclosed in a wooden case with leather strings [Fig.30]⁹⁶ or displaying an elongated shape with double cutting edge



or a curved hilt-, awls [Fig.31], arrowheads and adzes were discovered, suggesting an economy based on both agriculture and hunting.

Fig. 30 Knife in wooden case from M15 [Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1990: pl 19.38]

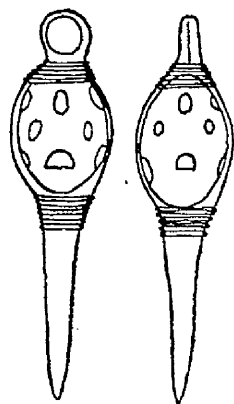


Fig. 31 Awls from Shajing [Li 1994: pl 4.21]

The abundance of bronze objects in the shape of small spherical balls, convex plaques and other ornamental accessories related to the belt speaks out of an indirect relationship with nomadic peoples further to the north, in the Ordos region, where metal ornaments of similar shapes were indeed recovered hanging from the belt of the deceased, although at a slightly later date. In particular the type of metal inventory encountered in Shajing sites resembles bronze

artefacts excavated in the north-eastern part of Inner Mongolia at Maoqinggou and Guoxianyaozi,⁹⁷ at Hushiha and Datun in Luanping xian (Hebei)⁹⁸ and western Liaoning at Upper Xiajiadian sites (dated 1000-600 BCE), where ceramic moulds for tubular fittings and other small ornaments have been found.⁹⁹ Yet belt ornaments consisting of two ball-like forms separated by a zigzag and connected semi-spherical discs plaques are found in quite great quantities from later Ordos-related sites, such as Taohongbala and Yulongtai, traditionally assigned to the mid- rather than to the early 1st millennium BCE. The occurrence of stylistically related items could reflect a phenomenon of cultural

⁹⁶ Found in M11, M15.

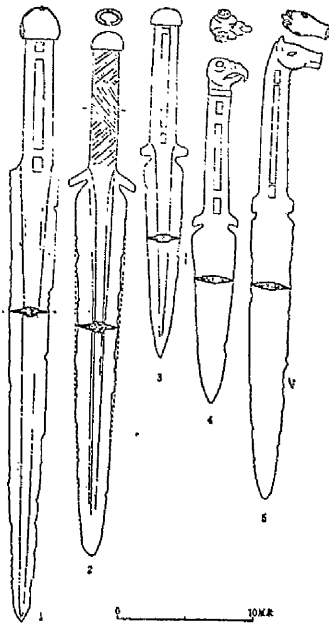
⁹⁷ At both sites such zigzag ornaments have been found in female burials only [Hollmann and Kossack 1992: fig 16.10 and Zhou Xinghua 1989: 66, fig 11.19].

⁹⁸ Bunker et al 1997: p.248, no.207.

⁹⁹Psarras 1994: 55 and pl.37b.

diffusion amongst different groups of people practising similar economic and social strategies, possibly penetrating from the west and expanding eastwards.

Baifu



The three wooden chambered burials from Changping Baifu in Hebei yielded a vast array of bronze artefacts, prevalently weapons and horse equipment, both related to the northern steppes and to China. Among the metal assemblage, of particular interest are the bronze short swords with animal and rounded finials, which betray a northern prototype [Fig. 32]. Yet, apart from curved hilt knives excavated from Lijiaya sphere of influence, these examples can be considered the earliest examples of straight short swords with lateral projections on the hilt and perforated handle with three-dimensional finial in the shape of a horse, a bird or a mushroom-like pommel, along the Northern border.

Fig. 32 Baifu bronze short swords [Beijing shi wenwu guanlichu 1976: fig 9, p.253].

As mentioned earlier, one small straight short sword with ring pommel was indeed unearthed at Zhukaigou. Although no ring-pommelled swords were found at Baifu, one of the examples did feature a cord-patterned motif on the handle similar to the Zhukaigou one, although it exhibited a mushroom cap rather than a ring. Both mushroom caps and perforated handles are encountered among the Karasuk weapon assemblages in the Minusinsk Basin of Southern Siberia, (according to Chlenova's dating of 14th -8th century BCE), suggesting a possible prototype for Baifu swords.¹⁰⁰

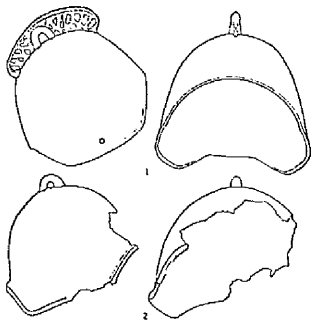


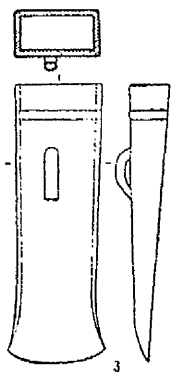
Fig. 33 Baifu bronze helmets [Beijing shi wenwu guanlichu 1976: fig 10, p. 253].

Cultural continuity from Zhukaigou 5th stratum and Lijiaya (13th-11th century BCE), to Baifu (11th-10th centuries BCE) could also be suggested by the co-occurrence of helmet-like remains [Fig. 33].¹⁰¹ Helmets are military paraphernalia for

¹⁰⁰ Chernykh 1992: figs 91-92, p. 266-7. Yet, the controversial chronological assessment for Karasuk material could also mean that Baifu swords might be earlier than the Karasuk counterparts, should one consider traditional dates for Karasuk (11th-8th c. BCE) [for a survey of past discussions see Tu Cheng-sheng 1992].

¹⁰¹ Assuming that the disc-shaped object found under the head of a deceased at Zhukaigou was indeed a helmet [Linduff 1994].

charioteers whose origin can be found beyond the Chinese border.¹⁰² In M2 the helmet was found just above the head of the deceased, whilst the other one in M3 was placed in the north-eastern quadrant, among equestrian pieces and Chinese ritual vessels. However, another helmet was also recovered from Gaochang in Liulin xian (Shanxi province) within the Lijiaya context and it was similarly interred close to the head of the occupant.¹⁰³ The shape of the Lijiaya example, round calotte and top looped finial, is strikingly similar to the one unearthed from M3, suggesting a very close connection. Similar specimens have been unearthed in various sites throughout Inner Mongolia¹⁰⁴ and one even within Chinese borders at Liulihe, close to Beijing.¹⁰⁵ Interestingly enough, an almost identical helmet was also discovered in a Scythian-related cemetery in Mongolia in Egiin Gol.¹⁰⁶ Apparently similar bronze caps, with a loop on top destined to tie panache of horsehair, were quite widespread among the western Scythians, as attested by similar discoveries in the Koban culture. It is important to pinpoint possible antecedents in western central Asia to trace the helmet transmission. Possibly the 'Koban' helmets emerged during the 9th-8th centuries BCE in North Iran, remotely



reminiscent of 3rd millennium BCE Middle Eastern helmets,¹⁰⁷ and eventually spread both to north Caucasus (Kelermes kurgan), Volga (in Gvardeskoe village on the Terek river), Kazakhstan (in the village of Kysmyči), central Asia (upper Irtiš and Altai regions) and northern China.

Fig 34 Single looped adzes from Baifu [Beijing shi wenwu guanlichu 1976: fig 13.2].

Other items associated with Northern assemblages, which were found in the main cluster in M2 and M3 together with daggers are a series of hafted implements: axes, adzes and socketed battle-axes. Adzes in particular exhibit a single loop on one side, a feature encountered also in Xinjiang both at later western sites such as Yili and Tacheng,¹⁰⁸ but also at Chawuhu (1000-500 BCE) and later within Chinese boundaries at Lingtai Jingjiazhuang [Fig.34].

¹⁰² Wu En 1985: 848-9.

¹⁰³ Yang Shaoshun 1981:211-2.

¹⁰⁴ Li Yiyu 1959.

¹⁰⁵ Liulihe kaogu gongzuodui 1990:20-31.

¹⁰⁶ Paris 2000: pl. 105, p. 119.

¹⁰⁷ Chlenova 1994: 505.

¹⁰⁸ Mei 2000: fig 3.4, p. 120.

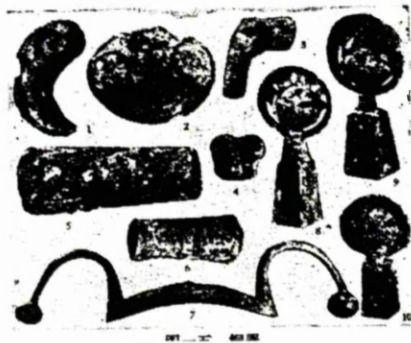


Fig. 35 Baifu bronze axle heads, bow shaped tool and horse ornaments [Beijing shi wenwu guanlichu 1976: fig 15, p. 255].

In concomitance with those hafted tools and weapons, chariot axle-heads and numerous horse fittings and ornaments (including the much-discussed bow-shaped implements) were also found. Many horse ornaments bear typical Western Zhou decorative patterns, suggesting a Chinese provenance, whilst others such as the jingled axle caps are similarly found in Ningxia province in Northern Zone contexts. It is also interesting to notice that although most of the horse ornaments have been found in contemporary Western Zhou contexts, the style of the bronze simple horse-bits and antler horn psalias found assembled together with a horseshoe-like object strongly resembles western counterparts, further suggesting a sound knowledge of horse herding and possibly riding. Indeed, these horse-bits could represent the earliest known examples within the Northern Zone complex [Fig. 36].

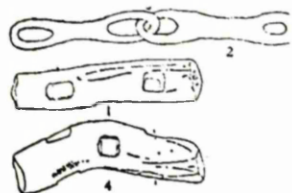


Fig. 36 Horse-bits and bone psalias form Baifu [Beijing shi wenwu guanlichu 1976: fig 18.2,4. p. 257].

Another object betraying a western prototype is the small plain mirror with a looped handle on the back retrieved from M3 [Fig. 37]. As already mentioned when dealing with Huoshaogou and Yanbulake mirrors further to the west, -which would provide an extremely close antecedent- this type of plain round mirror would find earlier western counterparts in the Karasuk culture of Southern Siberia.



Fig. 37 Bronze round mirror found in Baifu M3 [Beijing shi wenwu guanlichu 1976: fig 20.4, p. 257].

In the early dynastic Zhou period, bronze mirrors are extremely rare in the central Plains.¹⁰⁹ In the late Western Zhou and early Spring and Autumn periods there are only few examples, three from Henan Shangcunling cemetery,¹¹⁰ and a few other scattered in Shaanxi province, in Fufeng¹¹¹ and Fengxiang¹¹² counties. Bronze mirrors did not become commonplace in the Zhongyuan until the late Spring and Autumn period. But in the Northern Zone complex, bronze mirrors of the same looped type have just proved to exist long before then. Given the distribution of round mirrors within metropolitan China prevalently in Shaanxi province, Baifu and Lijiaya examples might have been instrumental in the transmission of the typology into China. Baifu burial contexts bespeak of a strong political and economic connection with the Chinese centre further south, the extent of which is partially assessed by the apparent transmission of western style mirrors.

Fig. 38 Liquid container from Baifu [So and Bunker 1995: pl.19, p. 105]



Another possible indigenous typology to have been transmitted further south could be the oblong *hu* vessel piled together with equestrian gear on the north-eastern quadrant in M2 [Fig. 38]. It features an elongated profile and a smooth undecorated surface.¹¹³ The fitted lid, when inverted would have served as a goblet. Rope or leather strapping would have been made to pass through the tubular handles on the sides, down through the holes on the base and up through the holes on the stem of the lid, to secure the vessel for travel. A similarly shaped liquid container has been recovered also from a Western Zhou culturally mixed context at Rujiazhuang, Baoji xian, again in Shaanxi province.¹¹⁴ Early Chinese examples emerging during the 10th century BCE, tended to exhibit a plain surface, in accordance with northern prototypes. It was only later that the same typology would have been decorated with traditional Western Zhou motifs and dedicatory inscriptions. Jenny So suggested that later Eastern Zhou vases with rope-cage pattern would have been inspired by this early typology.¹¹⁵ This *hu*-vase would represent the first large bronze container encountered along the Chinese border. It is in fact quite unusual throughout the 2nd and 1st millennia BCE to find large bronze vessels

¹⁰⁹ Wang and Cao 1979: 90-91. Song 1997: 147-169.

¹¹⁰ Beijing 1959: pl.23:1-2.

¹¹¹ At Rousu Pailongcun, at Liujia reservoir and at Huangdui [Song Xihu 1997: 150].

¹¹² Wang and Cao 1979.

¹¹³ The vase measures 41 cm in length.

¹¹⁴ Beijing 1988.

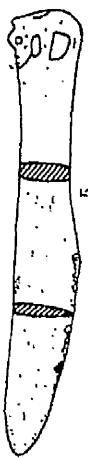
¹¹⁵ So and Bunker 1995: p.105.

in burial contexts in northern contexts.¹¹⁶ It would seem more appropriate to think of it as an outcome of the cultural syncretism occurred between Northern and Chinese cultures. Northerners may have ultimately conceived the shape but neighbouring Chinese casting centres preferred the use of bronze rather than more perishable organic materials.

Chawuhu cultural horizon

At Chawuhu, burial assemblages from the cemeteries I, IV and V would date back roughly to the same period, that is 1000-400 BCE. They all yielded a large amount of copper and bronze artefacts, in a good state of preservation. The assemblages included knives, awls with a wooden or a bone handle, horse bits, axes, mirrors, ornamental tubes, plaques, and arrowheads. Bronze artefacts represent the second greatest category of relics unearthed at the site, after ceramics. Differently from the overall homogeneity of pottery types and its decorative patterns, bronze knives, drills, bird's heads buttons,¹¹⁷ round flanged mirrors with a loop on the back,¹¹⁸ curb bits for horses and arrowheads mostly show close stylistic affinities with the metal repertoire of the northern steppe lands.

Fig. 39 Bronze knife with boar-shaped pommel from Cemetery IV [Wang Mingzhe 1999: pl 95.5, p. 137].



A bronze knife was often placed above or inserted into lamb (*ovis sp*) ribs ritually sacrificed to the dead on pottery and wooden basins. This type of knives seems to belong to the long artistic tradition of the northern steppes, with long curved edge, ring finial or animal pommel. The knife illustrated [Fig. 39] features a pommel representing a small boar. The small boar seems portrayed on the tips of its toes, a manner distinctive of the early stage of the Scytho-Siberian art style, especially of the Tagar cultural horizon in the Minusinsk Basin of Southern Siberia.¹¹⁹ Yet the boar was also a major motif for the Saka of Kazakhstan, sometimes metamorphosed with a cervid and other zoomorphic forms, in pure Scytho-Siberian style and realised as pendants (amulets) or golden appliqué-works.¹²⁰ Even boar fangs were used to make bridle ornaments and amulets, confirming its widespread presence and symbolic value among the Saka. Yet again according to the Scythian tradition, this particular posture seems sometimes to

¹¹⁶ The only exception being the bronze cauldrons of Saka origin, found in Xinjiang and in later Xiongnu burials along the Chinese border.

¹¹⁷ Similar 'coma'-shaped buttons have been detected in the Aral Sea region, according to Clénova, *ibidem*.

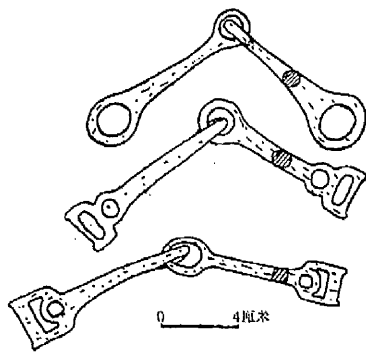
¹¹⁸ Clénova 1994: 503-4.

¹¹⁹ Gryaznov 1984.

¹²⁰ Davis-Kimball et al 1995: 201-230.

indicate a dead animal, symbol of the adversary animal world, or perhaps identified as the earthen level of existence, in opposition to birds and cervids, considered celestial symbols.¹²¹ Such system of beliefs is very much expressed in later southern Siberian art, as seen in Pazyryk felt appliques dated to the 5th-4th centuries BCE.

Two-holed rod-shaped horse bits have been discovered only in three out of 150 tombs at cemetery IV [Fig. 40].¹²² Cheek pieces and other bridle ornaments complete the assemblages also in cemetery V. The few horse bits discovered feature different finials; either ring-shaped or stirrup-shaped which are also similar to Saka trappings found throughout Kazakhstan. All the bits are bronze cast and have jointed mouthpieces. Using

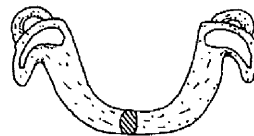


the holes at the end of the mouthpieces as parameter, O.A Vishnevskaya established a typology for the bridle bits.¹²³ Whilst simple loop-ended bits could be considered the earliest examples, stirrup-shaped ends, the ends pierced with an additional hole (bottom figure) are often dated to the 8th century BCE among the Saka, with comparable examples known from sites in Southern Siberia, Tuva (Arzhan kurgan complex), the lower Syr Darya River region, and the Pamir mountains.

Fig. 40 Bronze horse jointed bits found in cemetery IV [Wang Mingzhe 1999: p. 140, fig.98.6, 7, 9].

Illustrated here is a curved bronze fitting [Fig. 41], described by the excavators as a clothing ornament, although it seems it might have been used for the bow: a similar object has been recovered also at Luntai xian Qunbake, a site culturally affiliated to Chawuhu.¹²⁴ On the other hand, similarly curved accessories have been related to horse equipment, as part of the strapping, for instance in the Tuva region, at Arzhan, a complex associated with the Scythians.¹²⁵

Fig. 41 Curved bronze plaque from cemetery IV [Wang Mingzhe 1999: pl 98.17].



¹²¹ Ann Farkas et al 2001.

¹²² M 8, M 114, M 247.

¹²³ Vishnevskaya 1990.

¹²⁴ Described as such in the report [Cong and Chen 1991:290].

¹²⁵ Gryaznov 1984.

At Chawuhu cemetery I, slightly later than cemetery IV, more than half of the tombs yielded bronze pieces of similar typology and style: a large number of knives (90), quite a few awls, one horse-bit,¹²⁶ two arrows, one mirror, buttons, harness buckles and strap-guides, one belt hook, needles and tubular fittings. In particular, tubular fittings and connected semi-spherical discs plaques¹²⁷ like the ones here illustrated [Fig. 42] are found within Shajing culture further to the east in Gansu province, where they are datable to around the same time.¹²⁸

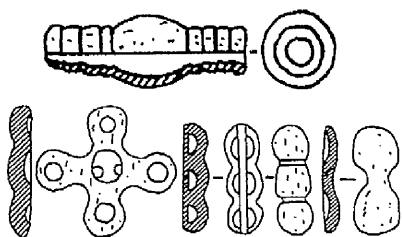


Fig. 42 Tubular fittings and connected semi-spherical discs plaques found in Cemeteries IV and V [Wang Mingzhe 1999:17, fig. 14.6-7 and p. 216, fig.163.4].

A socketed celt with a single loop has also been discovered at this cemetery. In total only three similar specimens have been found in Xinjiang, one in the Yili region and the other

in Tacheng city, both in eastern Xinjiang [Fig. 43].¹²⁹ Parallel finds of the Saka context in the Semireč'e and lower Syr Darya (where similar horse jointed bits have also been excavated) have been dated between the 7th and the 5th century BCE.¹³⁰

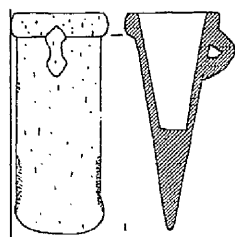


Fig. 43 Socketed adze from Chawuhu cemetery IV [Wang Mingzhe 1999: p. 142, fig. 99.1].

Amongst the findings at Chawuhu, mirrors of round shape with a knob-shaped handle on the back for suspension were included.¹³¹ Whilst the majority features a simple plain surface of the type already encountered at Yanbulake and Huoshaogou, one in particular draws the attention as it bears a zoomorphic depiction on the back, an animal enroulé around the knob [Fig. 44]. Crouched felines are traditionally believed to be a Middle Eastern invention, which crept into the Scythian repertoire and was thus transmitted

¹²⁶ Horse bits are not present in later Chawuhu cemeteries II and III. They are otherwise encountered in cemetery V.

¹²⁷ The latter found in cemetery V.

¹²⁸ At Yongchang Hamadun burial site [Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1990: fig 19:1-3]. At this site there are also peculiar three-holed bronze ornaments, which could have been used as *psalias* [Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1984].

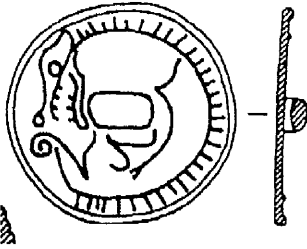
¹²⁹ Mei 2000: fig 2.32:6.

¹³⁰ Davis-Kimball *et al.* 1995: 216-218, 232-3.

¹³¹ Mirrors with loop-handles are found also in Yanbulake and bear analogies with Andronovo pieces in Kirghizia [Kuzmina 1994: pl XIII].

eastward, eventually reaching China during the 5th-4th centuries BCE.¹³² Indeed the Chawuhu example may be considered the earliest example of a feline in such a posture in the proximity of China.

Fig. 44 Mirror with animal design, paralleling contemporary Tagar examples [Wang Mingzhe 1999: pl 98.15].

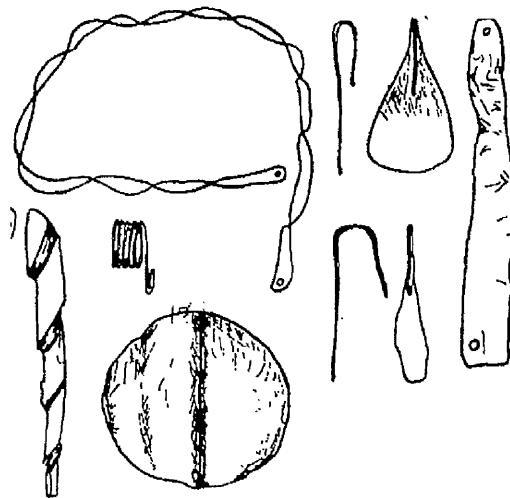


This depiction has been often associated with a Chinese counterpart excavated from a Guo state tomb at Sanmenxia Shangcunling, in Henan province. The round mirror with central loop handle discovered in 1956 in M1612 at Shangcunling, dated to the 7th century BCE, has the back decorated in bass-relief with the contours of two tigers, a bird and a deer in radial disposition.¹³³ Both the arrangement of the figures and their contours find more suitable counterparts in the mirror typology from the Altai region, also dated 8th-7th century BCE.¹³⁴

Metal thread personal ornaments are among these findings, comprising ear plaques and rings, flattened golden foils and round plaques [Fig. 45]. The majority of these artefacts have been discovered in one tomb, M208 (round plaque, golden foil wrapped tube and an ear pendant). Golden foil might have been employed in covering up wooden pole and other items in the same fashion encountered in southern Siberia and Kazakhstan. Furthermore, when analysing the golden foil necklaces, the similarities with the golden torques unearthed from Chilikta complex in Kazakhstan are astonishing.¹³⁵ The way the foil is twisted and rolled to create that distinctive effect is identical. The metal smithing techniques of Chawuhu ornaments seem analogous to their western counterparts.

Fig. 45 Silver and gold ornaments from cemetery I [Wang Mingzhe 1999: p. 221,fig. 167].

Chawuhu represents the largest cemetery site found so far in Xinjiang. Its distinctive and rich funerary inventory suggests that it may have been a regional cultural centre since the early 1st millennium BCE, closely interacting with adjacent regions, as evinced by the finds from Qunbake and later on Alagou.



¹³² Chlenova 1994, Jacobson 2000.

¹³³ Song Xinhu 1997: 152, fig 3, left.

¹³⁴ Farkas et al 2001: no.15, p. 60.

¹³⁵ Davis-Kimball et al, 1995,: 212, fig. 39.

The Qunbake archaeological assemblage is similar to the Chawuhu and the two cultures are differentiated slightly in terms of burial structure and pottery typologies. Both have multiple burials with subsidiary pits containing child burials and animal offerings around the main chambers. Metal assemblage provides evidence for horse pastoralism and the emergence of iron technology. Indeed Chawuhu cemetery 1 yielded iron rings, knives, awls, while Qunbake displayed quite a large number of iron artefacts, including knives, sickles, awls and even a short sword.¹³⁶

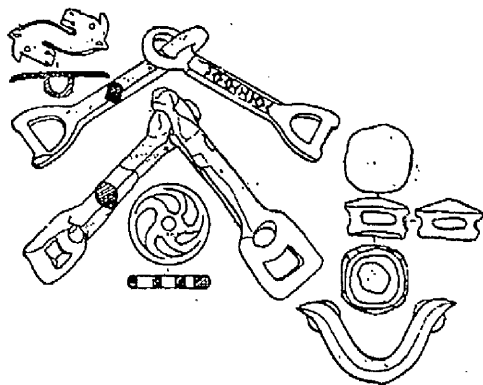


Fig. 46 Bronze horse-bits and trapping accessories from Qunbake [Cong and Chen 1991: p. 290, fig.14.1, 2,3,4,10,11].

It is interesting to notice the presence of horse bridles, *jieyue*, and bits only within section 1 of the cemetery at Qunbake [Fig. 46]. However, a great number of tombs in section 2 have yet to be excavated, which in the future could produce some evidence of horse trappings and accessories. In the meantime one is left to wonder whether some link

existed between the decline of horse ornaments in tombs and the emergence of horse sacrificial pits, which seems to have been common in section 2 (a phenomenon already encountered in Chawuhu). Only further excavations at Qunbake would help to shed some light on this issue, given the fragmentary information available so far.

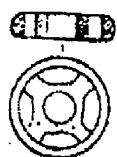


Fig. 47 Bronze circlet (spindle-whorl?) from Qunbake [Cong and Chen 1991: 290, fig 14.16].

Bronze spindle whorls like the one illustrated above [Fig. 47] are found elsewhere in Xinjiang (Hami Yanbulake late 2nd - early 1st millennium BCE) and in Gansu province within Shajing cultural horizon at Yongdeng xian Yushugou (mid 1st millennium BCE).

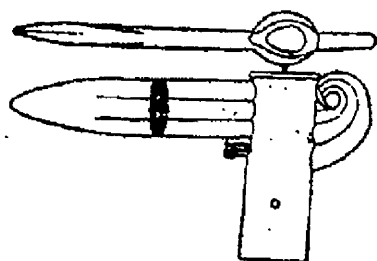
This type of object could also have been an accessory for horse harnesses. An almost identical counterpart comes from a Saka kurgan at Uisty Yar in eastern Kazakhstan, where it was found together with other horse trapping accessories.¹³⁷ If so, those discovered at Yanbulake and later in Shajing sites would suggest the emergence of an incipient form of horse riding, when horse harnesses, such as bridles and bits, were still mainly made of highly perishable materials (leather and bone).¹³⁸ The chronological sequence of these three recoveries would point to an eastward movement of such

¹³⁶ Chen 1990: 369.

¹³⁷ Davis-Kimball et al, 1995, p. 212, fig. 38.j.

bronze artefacts, probably originated in Inner Central Asia, in southern Siberia, during the 2nd millennium BCE and then transmitted eastward together with bronze technology and horse riding technique. To further substantiate the connection, a pair of horse joint bits with triangular finials (the first from the top in Fig. 46) found at Qunbake are identical to those found in the Saka Tasmola complex of eastern Kazakhstan.¹³⁹ These bits were apparently common in the 7th century BCE in the southern Russian steppes, suggesting quite a long-stretched territorial usage.

Fig. 48 Socket dagger from Qunbake [Cong and Chen 1991: 290, fig 14.9]



A socket dagger [Fig. 48] is also an interesting and rare find, because the same type of bronze weapon is commonly seen in the Bronze Age period Scythian cultures in Southern Siberia (Tagar culture) and Kazakhstan, but also in some late Shang bronze assemblages in central and northern China, within the Lijia cultural sphere of influence.¹⁴⁰



Another evidence for cultural connections with Scythian related tribes of the Tagar culture may be provided by a bone animal finial awl [Fig. 49] that has been discovered in section I of the site. Its shape resembles similar items, variously labelled as 'awls' or 'harness accessories' found among the Scythian cultures of the Minusinsk Basin of Southern Siberia (Karasuk and Tagar cultures 10th-9th and 8th -6th centuries BCE).¹⁴¹ In fact, the shape and finial choice may also be reminiscent of earlier perfume applicators found in BMAC contexts (2000-1750 BCE) further to the south-west.

Fig. 49 Bone awl from Qunbake [Cong and Chen 1991: 291, fig 15.10]

¹³⁸ See p.212 for further remarks on this artefact and the possible interpretation of their meaning.

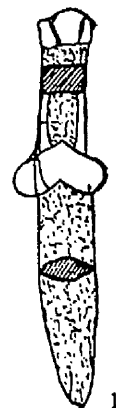
¹³⁹ Davis-Kimball et al, 1995, p. 204, fig. 5.b.

¹⁴⁰ Lin Yun 1986: 243-5. Mei and Shell 1998

¹⁴¹ Davis-Kimball et al.1995: 300-314.

The deceased were interred with bronze buckles, bronze and golden earrings¹⁴², both round and handled bronze mirrors,¹⁴³ bronze and iron knives, daggers and arrowheads. Indeed, another evidence for Tagar influence on Qunbake comes from the iron dagger with butterfly-shaped guard: its form is in fact typical of the Tagar culture [Fig. 50].

Fig. 50 Butterfly-guarded iron dagger from Qunbake [Cong and Chen 1991: pl.14.15].



Iron awls and sickles were also found. In particular, iron knives were often placed in wooden basins and associated with a string of sheep/goat vertebrae (ritual food), suggesting their use as cutting tools.

The presence of tools made of iron would indicate that such metal did not have any symbolic resonance; rather it was valued for practical scopes, mostly for hunting (knives and arrowheads), but also for basic agriculture (sickles), closely following the standard iron inventory encountered also in the Sarmatian cultures of southern Siberia of the early 1st millennium BCE.¹⁴⁴ Only later, during the mid 1st millennium BCE in the Ordos region, iron would eventually be used for decorative purposes to create small animal figurines and bronze-hilted swords of prestige.¹⁴⁵

In summary then, Qunbake and Chawuhu seem to have belonged to the same cultural horizon. In both cases, certain features highlight not only the possibility of contacts with cultures further to the west (in southern Siberia and Kazakhstan), but also their later expansion eastwards.¹⁴⁶ It is likely that in the course of this investigation further stylistic similarities will become clear in sites further to the east, which adopted or retained part of their past artistic repertoire and ethnic heritage, once originated in western countries.

¹⁴² These leaf-shaped pendant earrings are identical to Chawuhu examples.

¹⁴³ Handled mirrors come from the west too.

¹⁴⁴ Davis-Kimball et al 1995: 110-116.

¹⁴⁵ The shift in the role played by iron is further discussed in this chapter at p. 198-211.

¹⁴⁶ Within Shajing cultural sphere of influence, in Gansu and from there, to Ningxia during the first half of the first millennium BCE (Yanglang group of sites).

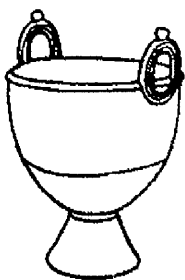
Sidaogou cultural horizon

Sidaogou sites produced smaller metal inventories in comparison with other materials. It generally includes knife blades, rings, hairpins and various other ornaments such as penannular and pendant earrings;¹⁴⁷ a mould for casting knife blades was also found indicating some local metallurgical activity.

The Sidaogou culture seems to share many features with the Xintala cultural horizon at the bases of the Tianshan Mountains, particularly in pottery decoration, stone tool typologies and bronzes such as socketed bronze celts, which have been found both at Sidaogou and Lanzhouwanzi.¹⁴⁸ Socketed bronze celt-spades have been recovered also at Xintala and at Chawuhu. According to Kuzmina,¹⁴⁹ this type of socketed celt-spade was produced in Ferghana and Kirghizia, the centre of Andronovo culture, and should be dated between the late second and the early first Millennium BCE.

At Lanzhouwanzi and Shirenzi sites in Balikun county (both culturally affined to Sidaogou) horse bone remains have been found, yet apparently no horse-related bronze accessories, such as cheek-pieces and joint-bits have been recovered. The fact that the results of physical anthropological analysis point to Mongoloid individuals rather than proto-Europoid groups would further substantiate the theory of the introduction of horse-riding economies from the west by proto-Europoid migratory fluxes.

Fig. 51 Bronze cauldron found at Lanzhouwanzi [An 1998: 52, fig. 5.2]



A single bronze cauldron identical to examples from southern Siberia has been found in Lanzhouwanzi in the upper layer inside the residential construction [Fig. 51]. The vessel was 54 cm high, with flattened rim and a pair of upright ring handles. The belly is decorated with a single band of waves. Similar bronze cauldrons have also been found at other locations close by, such as Dahe, Hongshan and Nanwan in Balikun county, close to Urumqi and at

Ka'erzi in Qitai county, which may be ascribed to the same cultural horizon.¹⁵⁰ Cauldrons in Xinjiang have been recovered always in the areas north of Tianshan Mountains, either with upright or slanting sideways ring handles, which in some instance have been found lying in the same burial context.

¹⁴⁷ A pair of bronze earrings with turquoise inlays from a burial at site B in Shirenzi represents a unique finding. The choice of turquoise once again for the pendant stone could be due to the proximity of turquoise sources, as well as to a distinctive chromatic preference occurring along the Northern Complex area (as in Lijiaya for instance), but also in Saka contexts from Tuva in southern Siberia.

¹⁴⁸ Wang Binghua 1986: 887-90.

¹⁴⁹ Kuzmina 1998.

¹⁵⁰ Wang Binghua 1996.

Similar bronze cauldrons have been usually associated with Saka sites along the Yili valley, such as Xinyuan and Nileke, and dated to the 5th-3rd century BCE on the basis of close correspondence to Saka metal assemblage found in the Semireč'e region. Cauldrons from the Semireč'e feature a globular body on a conic pedestal, or more rarely, on three zoomorphic legs. They were highly symbolic vessels, as reported by Herodotus¹⁵¹, carrying the history of the Scythian political insurgency. The connection with the Yili valley could be further supported by motifs on Sidaogou ceramics found in Saka pottery from Dacootan, in Miqian county, a Saka burial in the Urumqi area.¹⁵²

Chlenova¹⁵³ insisted on the Iranian origin for the Scythian cauldrons, focusing her attention on the Transcaucasian region and Asia Minor. Yet the cauldron from Lanzhouwanzi exhibits a pair of ring-shaped handles, a feature encountered mostly in eastern Kazakhstan. Indeed the same typology of cauldron has been found in the Minusinsk basin of Southern Siberia (Tagar culture) as well as in Mongolia¹⁵⁴. The territorial extension of such typology would suggest a centre somehow related to the Northern Zone Complex as similar cauldrons have been discovered at Yanqing xian Jundushan, north of Beijing and dated to the 7th-6th c. BCE. Indeed, recently¹⁵⁵ it has been proposed that this kind of vessel would be inspired by a Chinese prototype. Most of the specimens were in fact cast by piece mould and retained part of the casting sprues on the top of the ring handles as decorative elements. Such elements would be reminiscent for instance of earlier Chinese *jue* tripods handles with similar casting sprues incorporated into the design, developed further into mushroom-like caps. Similarly enough, later cauldrons especially related with the Xiongnu and Xianbei metal repertoire would develop similar mushroom caps, which travelled up to Eastern Europe during the first centuries CE¹⁵⁶.

Indeed, as we shall see in chapter 6, similar cauldrons were recently identified at earlier sites in Gansu province belonging to pre-dynastic Qin, providing an antecedent and a possible point of departure for this typology from the east.

¹⁵¹ Herodotus IV, 81.

¹⁵² Zhang Yuzhong 1986.

¹⁵³ Chlenova 1994.

¹⁵⁴ Chlenova 1994: 529, figs. 9-11, 14.

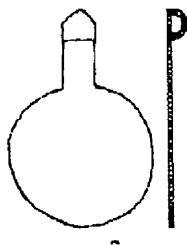
¹⁵⁵ So and Bunker 1995: fig 10, p. 97.

¹⁵⁶ Erdy 1995: 5-94.

Wupushuiku

The Wupushuiku cemetery is located at Kezierqueqia, about 55 km west of Hami city. It yielded more than a 100 tombs although no integral report has been published so far. The funerary goods reported in a brief survey are indeed quite distinctive.¹⁵⁷ Copper and bronze finds consists of small knives, earrings, plaques, small bells, buckles and mirrors, both round and handled [Fig. 52]. The use of handled mirrors became increasingly widespread by the early first millennium BCE, with the emergence of Scythian related groups and can therefore be associated with their artistic repertoire.¹⁵⁸ These specimens in particular could be compared to their counterparts from Tuva and Mongolia, suggesting an Altai connection.

Fig. 52 Bronze handled mirror from Wupushuiku [Mei 2000: fig.2.11:2]



Because of the arid climate, the wooden covers of the tombs have been well preserved. The tool marks in these solid covers made of Euphrates poplar were still extremely clear, with sharp cut incisions. Also the wood of the covers was all uniform in size and length and regular in construction. All these regular features would imply the

use of hard and sharp bronze metal tools.¹⁵⁹

The archaeological report on tombs M151 and M152 mentioned only one bronze tubular ornament found in this particular excavation and no iron items at all.¹⁶⁰ Although no illustration is provided, the metallographic analysis carried over two bronze samples (a ring and a bell) by Mei Jianjun revealed that arsenical copper (3-4 % As) was being used for the first time in Bronze Age Xinjiang (2nd millennium BCE).¹⁶¹ Wupushuiku samples are thus completely different in composition from those of Yanbulake and Tianshanbeilu, distinguishing Wupushuiku from the Yanbulake metallurgical context and somehow relating it with the Gansu Siba cultural context, where arsenical alloys were present.

Zahongluke

In terms of metal findings, the site of Zahongluke in southern Xinjiang yielded several small copper items, including mirrors, knives and earrings, some gold pieces and a few iron fragments [Fig. 53].¹⁶² Unfortunately, of the whole group, only two linear copper

¹⁵⁷ Mu Shunying 1989: 42-59.

¹⁵⁸ Jacobson 1995: 182-7, figs 72,73.

¹⁵⁹ Wang Binghua 1996.

¹⁶⁰ Apparently iron and bronze items have been found in other burial contexts from the same site.

¹⁶¹ Mei 2000: 40.

¹⁶² Mei 2000: 23.

knives, stylistically consistent with Northern steppe prototypes, have been illustrated so far.

Fig. 53 Copper knives from Zahongluke [Urumqi 1999: fig 74, p. 46]



Given the paucity of the data available regarding this proto-Europoid burial site that shows affinities with sites further to the north in the Turfan basin, additional information could come in the future from the current Sino-French investigation in the Keriya valley of a 2000-year-old ancient city (called Yuansha) recently unearthed at Niya in the heart of the Taklamakan desert. The settlement, surrounded by an elaborate network of irrigation canals, would indicate the existence of a regional centre for the production of both bronze and iron artefacts.¹⁶³ The evidence shows that an agro-pastoral economy was practiced along the lower reaches of the Keriya River over 2,000 years ago and possibly also involved the site of Zahongluke. At Yansha several relatively well-preserved corpses have been discovered, featuring round eyes, long noses, and brown hair woven into multiple braid, showing proto-Europoid features also encountered at Zahongluke. The existence of a large residential settlement possibly linked to the burial site of Zahongluke, once thoroughly investigated would provide a large amount of data, both in terms of artefacts and domestic architecture, to help explaining the role of Zahongluke in Xinjiang during the 1st millennium BCE.

Alagou cultural horizon

The Alagou complex is strategically located along the middle Tianshan range, an important corridor between the Yanqi and the Turfan basins and as such it became the ideal receptacle for western and eastern influxes. Alagou I yielded the majority of the tombs identified at the complex: eighty-one out of the eighty-five tombs unearthed feature burial chambers lined with pebbles. They substantially differ from the remaining four tombs with wooden chambers, classified as Alagou II. Clear differences in burial structures are paralleled by the funerary assemblages, which would suggest two separate cultural groups.

¹⁶³ Mair in CIAA 1999, issue 9: p. 15. The analysis of the Yuansha metal artefacts has not been disclosed as yet.

Unfortunately a full report of the pebble-structured graves of Alagou I is yet to be published and only a few descriptions are available, mentioning the recovery of small bronze and iron knives, round plates and gold earrings.¹⁶⁴ Based on stylistic analysis, findings from the Dongfengchang cemetery would be affiliated to Alagou I rather than Alagou II.

Similarly to Alagou I, small size metal objects such as horse bits, iron knives, a handled mirror (betraying a western, possibly Saka, prototype), awls, hairpins and earrings were excavated at Dongfengchang.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore the handled mirror and the horse bits find antecedents in Chawuhu and Qunbake inventories, thus reflecting a cultural link between the Chawuhu and Alagou complexes, possibly encouraged by geographical proximity.

The four tombs of the Alagou II culture were plundered in ancient times.¹⁶⁶ Hence the skeletons are generally poorly preserved either because of early looting or because the roof collapsed under the weight of the stones; nevertheless some of the funerary objects survived to the present, including three iron arrowheads and some rather thick and heavy golden beaten plaques with tigers, a pair of tigers motif, a foil in the shape of a leaping lion and many other small flakes in various patterns, probably originally attached to a leather support.¹⁶⁷ Seven unusual silver plaques with animal head design were also recovered. From metallographic analysis, it results that the silver of these items was not native, but possibly smelted from argentiferous lead ores (galena, PbS) and contained various amounts of lead, copper, tin, calcium, sodium, silicates, magnesium and bismuth,¹⁶⁸ suggesting a poor knowledge of the cupellation technique [Fig. 54].¹⁶⁹

Fig. 54 Metal inventory of Alagou II tombs [Mei 2000, pl. 2.45].



All these ornaments can be compared with similar artefacts from southern Siberia, especially from the Pazyryk complex in the Minusinsk basin, datable to the 5th-4th century BCE. The three gold plaques or foils share an important motif: animals with their hindquarters twisted 180 degrees, a typical Scythian 'animal art' requisite. This motif is also seen on a small gold plaque in Aheqi County, along the

¹⁶⁴ Ma Yong and Wang Binghua 1994: 209-225.

¹⁶⁵ Zhang Yuzhong 1987.

¹⁶⁶ Xinjiang Junge'er ziqu Bowuguan 1979: 172. and Wang Binghua et al 1981.

¹⁶⁷ There are holes at the edges and at the two ends to enable them to be sewn as ornamentation on clothes and similar examples sewn on clothes have been discovered in Kazakhstan [Baipakov et al 1998].

¹⁶⁸ Linduff et al 2000.

¹⁶⁹ Craddock 1995: 223.

southern foothills of the Tianshan range in the late 1st millennium BCE.¹⁷⁰ Although Mei believes the motif might have originated here and then spread westwards and eastwards, eventually absorbed into Chinese iconography through the fashion of garment ornaments during the last centuries BCE,¹⁷¹ the Aheqi example seems certainly later in style to analogous images found in Southern Siberia (Warring States period) and closer to Jiaohe designs (early Western Han). The bronze ritual tray, bearing two lion-like animals in the centre and a high tapering square stand, was cast in different pieces, joined afterwards.¹⁷² The censer bears close resemblance to the trays discovered in the Yili Valley of north-western Xinjiang (Xinyuan county) at Gongnaisi, as well as in Kazakhstan and Kirghizia. In Kazakhstan similar trays are datable to the 5th century BCE. Stylistically, the most interesting examples would come from the Semireč'e area, especially from Almaty and Issyk, datable to the 5th-3rd C. BCE. The censers would often depict winged felines, (with the wings united and curled upwards like in the repoussé plaque here illustrated) such as the ones on top of the Alagou censer tray. At the same time and in the same geographical area, Alagou small floret plaques and harness buttons (*jie yue*) have been unearthed from Tasmola, Issyk and Prochorovka kurgans, dated between the 6th and the 5th century BCE,¹⁷³ suggesting a strong connection between the two areas, Kazakhstan and Xinjiang and an eastward migration of the motif.

All these objects would point out a common ethnic origin or at least ritual behavioural pattern ascribed by many authors to the Saka-Scythians people. The presence of censer trays, and various animal depictions portraying twisted winged felines would reflect the shamanistic beliefs shared by many groups throughout Central Asia belonging to the Scythian horizon. Saka or *Sairen* are first mentioned in Chinese literature in the *Han Shu*, both in the *Xiyu zhuan* and *Zhangqian Guanli zhuan* chapters,¹⁷⁴ placing the Saka presence in Xinjiang along the Yili and Tianshan valleys and further south along the Pamir range.¹⁷⁵ The inventories coming from sites in Yili valley further support the idea of a Saka group migrating eastwards, with gold objects exhibiting close affinities to counterparts in the Semireč'e and the Altai. The stylistic analogies between Gongnaisi and Alagou further point to the Saka when observing the anthropomorphic statuette found at Gongnaisi which seems to portray just a *Saka Tigrakhauda* of Achaemenid memory, with his tall pointed felt cap.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁰Dated to the late Warring States - early Western Han period [Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1995].

¹⁷¹ Mei 2000: 35.

¹⁷² An incense burner cast in three parts, welded together by pouring liquid bronze onto the joints.

¹⁷³ Baipakov et al 1998

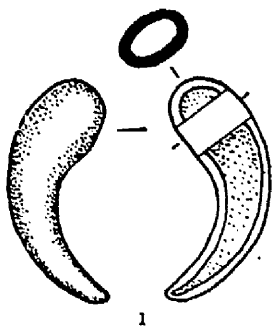
¹⁷⁴ Wang Binghua 1987: 31-44 and Yu Taishan 1992.

¹⁷⁵ Where the site of Xiangbaobao would confirm the archaeological presence of the Saka.

¹⁷⁶ Wang Binghua 1987: fig 8, p. 35.

The metal inventory at Alagou II is completed by a gold chain formed by strip-twisted wire in a 'loop in loop' construction,¹⁷⁷ a technical feature common amongst the Saka, as similar chains have been found in Kazakhstan, dated to the 6th century BCE. It is noteworthy to mention that similar double loop in loop chains have been brought to light in the Ordos region at Aluchaideng (4th c. BCE) providing a channel through which similar chains were eventually transmitted from the Saka centres further to the east in the Central Plains.

The Subeixi site yielded more than a hundred graves featuring wooden beds, in a way close to Saka customs. Funerary inventories from Subeixi consisted of objects made of ceramics, copper, iron, gold and silver, bone, wood, as well as leather and woollen fabrics. Only 6 items made of copper and bronze were found: a rectangular plaque in a tiger design, a knife, a dagger, an earring and other ornaments, mainly animal shaped plaques, such as the rare tooth-shaped copper pendant (5.2 cm long) [Fig. 55].¹⁷⁸



Curiously enough, animal teeth used as pendants (such as the fangs of the Siberian stag or the *Kabarga* and those of small beasts of prey) had a special meaning amongst the Scythians, who revered them as protective amulets. It is also noteworthy to mention that imitations of fangs, made in stone, bone or bronze were used to decorate the horse harnesses both among the Achaemenid Persians and the Scythians throughout the steppes, as similar specimens from Pazyryk witness.¹⁷⁹

Fig. 55 Subeixi bronze tooth-shaped pendant [Liu Hongliang et al 1984: fig 8.1]

In the preliminary report only one silver ring was mentioned. However, a previous report issued of a short surface recognition in 1985 listed amongst the relics in cemetery I also seven items manufactured in either copper or gold.¹⁸⁰

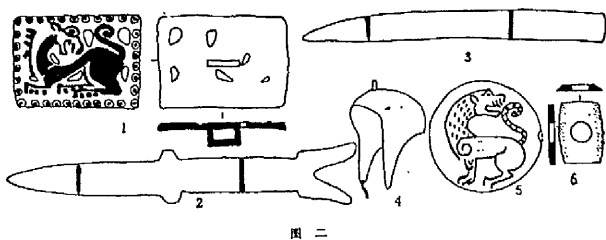


Fig. 56 Findings from the 1985 surface recognition [Tulufan diqu wenguansuo 1988: fig 2].

¹⁷⁷ Li Xiaoping 1995: pl. 65, p. 44.

¹⁷⁸ This shape also recalls the decorated pendant of the Scythian cultures of southern Siberia, made from the tusks of the boar. It is also similar to Korean and Japanese *larva*-shaped stone pendants (*Kogok* or *Magatama*).

¹⁷⁹ Davis Kimball et al, 1995: 279.

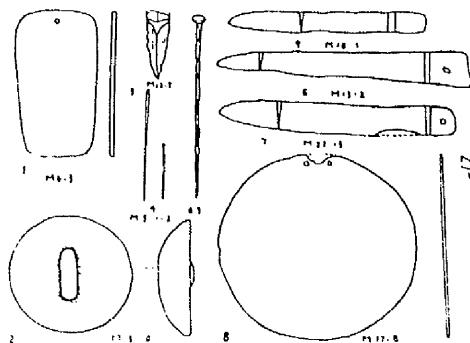
¹⁸⁰ Tulufan diqu wenguansuo 1988.

Among them are two gilded copper rectangular plaques decorated with a crouching tiger, with a small loop on the back for hanging, a golden foil roundel with again a tiger with the head turned backward impressed on the front, two copper wands, one recalling the shape of a fish, and two small knives [Fig. 56].¹⁸¹

The copper roundel is covered by gold foil, reflecting a high level of craftsmanship. The practice of covering metal plaques with golden foil was widespread among the Scythian-Tagar people of the Minusinsk basin in southern Siberia (7th-2nd century BCE).¹⁸² Yet, both technique and style of these two gilded plaques would point to a later period and ethnic appurtenance, most likely that of the Xiongnu, when rectangular gilded bronze plaques such as these ones were widespread. On the other hand most of the artefacts unearthed at Subeixi reflect Scythian cultural influxes: the shape of the copper wand for instance resembles that of a fish, a symbolism close to the Altaian Scythians of the Pazyryk kurgans and the Sakas of the Chilikta complex in eastern Kazakhstan,¹⁸³ where fish-shaped (always in bird's view portraits) wands, metal objects and leather pendants are often encountered. The meaning of such iconography is difficult to grasp, although Scythians regarded the fish as the inhabitants of the underworld, hence related to the earthly aspect of death. The felt cap unearthed from cemetery I, which recalls a similar headgear recovered from kurgan 2 at Pazyryk, further indicates a connection with the Saka-Scythian world.¹⁸⁴



Fig. 57 Iron awl with wooden handle [Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1993: fig 8.7]



The iron items collected from the burials are represented by a button, a plaque, an arrow, two awls exhibiting a wooden case like the one from Hami Hanqigou [Fig. 57], a hairpin, three knives (carving knives probably meant for cutting goat meat in the afterlife), two belt hooks, for a total of eleven pieces all of very small size [Fig. 58].

Fig. 58 Iron tools and bronze round mirror [Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1994: fig 18]

¹⁸¹ The provenance is somehow obscure, lacking the tomb number

¹⁸² Davis Kimball et al, 1995: Ch.19.

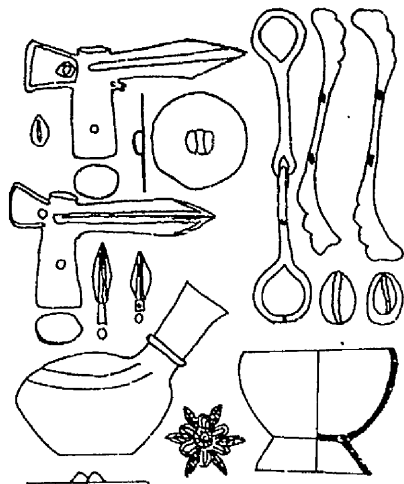
¹⁸³ Davis Kimbal et al 1985: 209-213 and Paris 2000: pl. 11.

¹⁸⁴ Rudenko 1970: pl. 155.8.

Indeed bronze comes only in the shape of a plain round mirror with no handles, but two peripheral perforations either intended for hanging or attaching a riveted handle either made of iron or wood, just like the Scythian specimens. The handle in this case might have been produced in a perishable material that did not survive up to the present, or might have been lost before interment.

Situated at Tuyugou (Tuyuk gorge) about 50 km west of Shanshan county, Yanghai cemetery yielded 82 tombs many of them plundered before the 1988 excavation.¹⁸⁵ Yanghai can be considered a site culturally related to Subeixi, as the metal inventory follows Subeixi pattern. These graves were mainly rectangular shaft-pits, while shaft-pits with an internal platform built of mud bricks were also recorded, recalling Yanbulake earlier examples. Apart from two iron horse psalias and one horse bit, one golden star-shaped button, similar to the one unearthed in Alagou II was found. This golden foil ornament in flower design is also encountered in another site, which can be culturally related to Subeixi, Aidinghu.¹⁸⁶

Two bronze axe-heads, reminiscent of Tagar examples and comparable to similar examples found at Qunbake (Chawuhu culture), were found together with a small round mirror [Fig. 59]. The two iron cheek pieces, direct evidence of the well-established use of iron in harnesses, are quite rare in the Xinjiang archaeological context, whilst they are comparable to S-shaped examples found in the 4th century BCE kurgans at Pazyryk in the Altai mountains of southern Siberia.¹⁸⁷ Even in Ningxia Guyuan xian scalloped S-shaped psalias have been found and dated to the Warring States period.¹⁸⁸ The fact that



the first examples of this kind to appear in Chinese territory during the late third century BCE are simple S-shaped cheek-pieces, like the ones survived on the terracotta horses from the tomb of Qin Shihuangdi,¹⁸⁹ would again suggest a privileged transmission channel between Yanglang zone and Qin. On the other hand, the scalloped fringe effect is first seen in China by the late 2nd century BCE, in Hebei province at Prince Liusheng's tomb at Mancheng (Zhongshan state).

Fig. 59 Yanghai bronze axes, mirror, iron horse harness, cowry shells, golden star button and ceramic vessels [Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1989: fig 6].

¹⁸⁵ Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1989.

¹⁸⁶ Li and Liu 1982.

¹⁸⁷ For a discussion of ancient bits: Sun Ji 1985.

¹⁸⁸ Yang and Qi 1999.12:89, fig.4.11.

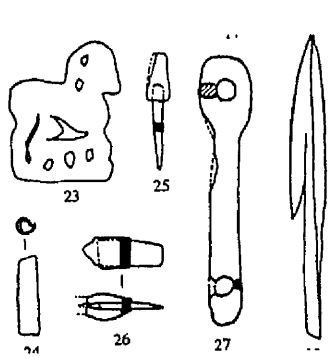
¹⁸⁹ Wen Fong 1980: pl. 102.

Also the Aidinghu site in Turfan basin can be considered culturally associated and roughly contemporary with Subeixi. Its funerary inventories mainly consisted of plain and painted ceramics and a few metal items, including a bronze mirror with two perforation on its edge (like the one unearthed at Subeixi) and some iron knives and arrows, were found together with two gold foil flower ornaments (like the one found at Yanghai and at Alagou Yuergou).

Hanqigou

The site of Hanqigou in the close-by Hami area represents the latest limit of the Yanbulake cultural horizon. In fact, its Iron Age cultural emergence possibly stemmed out from the late Yanbulake substratum.

Funeral goods unearthed from the twenty-five tombs at the site included for the most part pottery vessels, followed by bronze and bone artefacts. No iron items were found at the scene. Amongst the bronzes, a carving knife with a wooden handle, one awl with a wooden handle (like the one unearthed at Subeixi), a tubular fitting and a plaque with the scene of a female ibex with her nursing kid (M1) were reported [Fig. 60].



This ornamental plaque portraying a naturalistic scene of a female ibex standing and nursing her offspring represents quite a unique finding in the context of eastern Xinjiang. Strangely enough, two plaques with an identical design were found in a surface recollection in Inner Mongolia, in the Liangcheng archaeological area, which includes also the famous site of Maoqinggou.¹⁹⁰

Fig. 60 Hanqigou metal assemblage [Mei 2000: 117, fig 2.64]

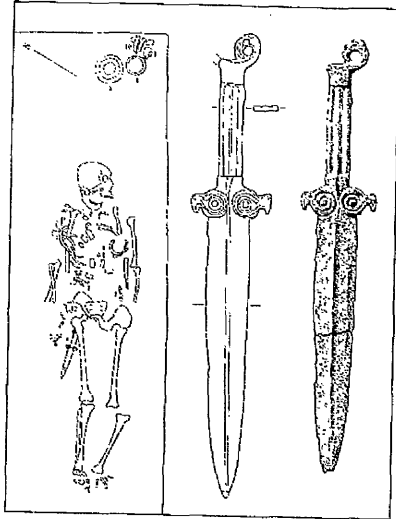
Furthermore, to date the Hanqigou plaque is the only one to have been brought to light from a dated archaeological site, providing it with a definite chronology. Unfortunately, the ibex is a wild goat that thrives in mountainous regions, quite a different environment from the local Hami area and its oasis, where the site is located. Hence, this plaque could be considered an import item from the east. One way or the other it would not change the fact that during the late Bronze Age Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia were indeed connected by trading networks that facilitated enormously the transmission of ideas and motifs all along the Northern Zone. Although the burial inventory did not feature any stylistic connection with the Scythian horizon, it nevertheless witnessed the extent of cultural transmission at both ends of the Chinese Northern Zone.

¹⁹⁰ Tian and Guo 1986: pl 116, p.168.

Ordos cultural horizon

Maoqinggou

At Liangcheng Maoqinggou, as well as at Guoxianyaozi,¹⁹¹ Fanjiayaozi¹⁹² and Hulusitai,¹⁹³ sites culturally associated with



Maoqinggou, burial gifts included short swords, crane-beak axes, belt buckles, plaques and decorative appliqué. The most distinctive artefacts are indeed the short swords with antennae pommels possibly derived from bird-head designs [Fig. 61].

However, differently from earlier sites of the region (Lijiaya cultural horizon and Changping Baifu) weapons this time were found suspended from decorated belts rather than placed around the deceased in a ritual manner.

Fig. 61 Maoqinggou M 58 with antennae short sword [Hollmann and Kossack 1992: pl.27]

Belt plaques in plain or tinned bronze, embellished with zoomorphic designs based primarily on carnivore-, raptor-, and animal predation images were profusely found [Fig.62]. The most distinctive motif represents tigers, often found at the belt of men and children, whilst rarely placed with a female deceased. The use of belt plaques as status indicators is apparently confirmed by their distribution at Maoqinggou,¹⁹⁴ whereby tinned bronze might have been considered the highest medium for expressing social welfare, displaying as well gender stratification.¹⁹⁵ Tinning enhanced the surface of bronze plaques and inhibited their corrosion. The silvery effect was achieved by either immersing the plaque in hot tin in the case of both sides tinned; or wiping it with liquid tin when tinning is evident only on one side. This process was popular among the groups west of the Taihang Mountains, especially in Western Inner Mongolia, Gansu and Ningxia regions where similar artefacts have been found in tombs dating to the Warring States period, between the 6th and the 4th century BCE. Tinning was applied not only on large plaques with zoomorphic designs, but also on double bird plaques, buttons and belt hooks. In a unique example from Gansu Yanglang area tin was applied on an iron sword hilt dated to the Warring States period, one of the earliest examples of cast iron swords

¹⁹¹ Nei Menggu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1989: 66.

¹⁹² Tian and Guo 1986: 281.

¹⁹³ Tian and Guo 1986: 224.

¹⁹⁴ Hollmann and Cossack 1992: 29.

¹⁹⁵ Only four female burials yielded large tinned bronze plaques in total.

in China too.¹⁹⁶ Analysis revealed that the alloy for the majority of these artefacts was a leaded tin bronze, with traces of antimony, silver, arsenic and iron, rather than simply a bronze with high tin content. Yet tinning disappeared by the 3rd century BCE, with the widespread adoption of mercury amalgam gilding.¹⁹⁷ Tinned artefacts have been sporadically encountered in proper China dating to the Warring States period. For instance late Warring States Chu pottery found at Changsha was indeed often tinned, by wiping the surface with liquid tin, although archaeologists insist on considering the technique a northern intrusion.¹⁹⁸ In Europe on the other hand, tinning of bronze axes and even pottery was employed to replace silverware in funerary assemblages from the 2nd millennium BCE.¹⁹⁹ It is however difficult to trace any antecedent in Central Asia which would suggest any western transmission. For the time being, the technique seems to have emerged abruptly into the artistic vocabulary of the northern steppe cultures, applied to items and iconographic motifs that betray a western Scythian prototype. The same choice for a silvery surface would point to west rather than east where silver was very seldom used as status symbol. It would be thus natural to think of it as a western intrusion rather than an endogenous phenomenon that crept into northwestern China by the late Spring and Autumn period, spread in the Warring States period to die out by the 3rd century BCE.

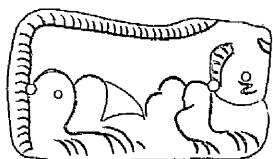


Fig. 62 Maoqinggou tiger tinned bronze plaque [Tian and Guo 1986: p. 281, fig 45.1]

Of the 79 excavated tombs at Maoqinggou, almost three quarters yielded remains of leather belts and metal belt accessories suggesting a prominent aesthetic feature within Maoqinggou society.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ Han and Bunker 1993: 80-96.

¹⁹⁷ Bunker 1990: 79.

¹⁹⁸ Han and Bunker 1993.

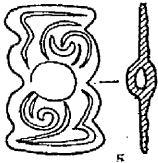
¹⁹⁹ Craddock et al 1979: 141-143; Close and Coles 1980: 228-9, Tylecote 1987.

²⁰⁰ Tian and Guo 1986: pp 227-315.

Ornaments also included belt fasteners such as the round buckle with fixed tongue [Fig. 63], very similar to bridle buckles used for horse harnessing.



Fig. 63 Maoqinggou ring buckle [Tian and Guo 1986: p.266, fig 36.5]



Less common and probably more prestigious are the large rectangular or animal shaped plaques (like the tiger plaque here illustrated) worn singly or in pairs in a mirror-image arrangement on a belt decorated with multiple small plaques with S-shaped design [Fig. 64].²⁰¹

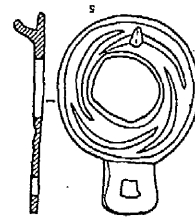


Fig. 64 S-shaped plaques [Tian and Guo 1986: p. 272, fig. 40.1 and 5]

Mirror image feline plaques later developed into a quite different buckling system by the 5th century BCE displaying one of the plaques perforated by the shoulder [Fig. 65]. This type of fastening device is also encountered among the Tagar plaques from the Minusinsk basin of Southern Siberia at an earlier date, suggesting a possible source.



Fig. 65 Belt plaque with perforation [Tian and Guo 1986: p. 281, fig 45.2]

An analogous plaque from southern Siberia features a similar animal caught up in a similar posture, reaffirming the strict link between Maoqinggou and Tagar cultures [Fig. 66]. Standing tigers on Tagar plaques are often represented walking with all four legs shown and prominent claws and fangs, in a way very similar to the Maoqinggou ones. Such posture is somewhat distinctive of southern Siberia Scythian cultures, as it is also found among the wooden carvings at Bashadar in the Altai region, portraying tigers savaging herbivores (ungulates mostly), a motif common during the 6th –5th centuries BCE. The Saka assemblages in eastern Kazakhstan provide other more distant examples at roughly the same time.

²⁰¹ Only 7 out of 75 tombs at Maoqinggou yielded such plaques [So 1995].

Such animal attack motif may have originally been inspired by the artistic traditions of Achaemenid western Asia, with their lions and panthers combats, and later incorporated into the Scythian artistic vocabulary and transformed into tigers, leopards and wolves attacking ungulates (goat, deer and sheep).

Animal predation motifs right at this time emerged also in the Chinese artistic repertoire with similar scenes appearing in inlaid pictorial bronzes of the late Spring and Autumn period (6th-5th c. BCE)

Within the context of Chinese bronzes however, the combat scenes far more frequently took the form of animals confronting each other in a whimsically formal posture, in a sort of 'pseudo-combat'²⁰². Furthermore, the choice for naturalistic scenes on bronzes can also be attributed to the steppe influence.



Fig. 66 Belt plaque with perforation from the Minusinsk Basin [Davis Kimball et al, 1995: p.312, fig 21]

Other small bronze ornaments include tubes, plaques with one or two birds [Fig. 67], and animal-head designs that are analogous to those found within Ordos and Gansu-Ningxia archaeological contexts dated to roughly the same time.

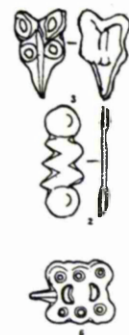


Fig. 67 Small bronze ornaments from Maoqinggou [Tian and Guo 1986: fig 43, p.277,]

Small plaques characterised by a prominent curved beak, tiny round ear and a round eye have been identified as small bird heads often associated with the Scythian cultures of the Altai in southern Siberia [Fig. 68].



Fig. 68 Bird head plaque from Maoqinggou [Tian and Guo 1986: pl. 84.2, p. 118]

These small plaques have been generally found both at Maoqinggou and Guoxianyaozi in burials dating from the 6th to the 4th century BCE. Other examples have been identified in northwestern Hebei²⁰³ and at Xigoupan in the Ordos region (5th c. BCE) fitting into roughly the same time interval. The emphasis on the head rather than the body is further represented by depictions on wood found among the Scythians of southern Siberia, around the 7th c. BCE. As such, it could be that the Scythians carried the same motif of bird-head designs from southern Siberia. However, other affined plaques used for horse trappings have been brought to light from Saka burials in Kazakhstan, both in the central

²⁰² Jacobson 1988: p.217.

²⁰³ Cui Liming 1994: 473.

region of the Tasmola complex (7th c. BCE), and in the Lower Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers regions (7th c. BCE),²⁰⁴ suggesting another trajectory further west. The original motif would ultimately derive from similar designs found in northwestern Iran around the 7th c. BCE, as attested by the Ziwiye hoard.²⁰⁵

A southern Siberia link can also be partially provided by surface findings in the Ordos area of small three-dimensional riders on horses [Fig. 69] that were probably used as amulet pendants. Should they belong to the Maoqinggou strata, they would represent the



earliest portrait of horse riders as such within Chinese boundaries, although linked to the nomadic world rather than to the Chinese. In fact horse riders pendants have been found also in southern Siberia and, interestingly enough, in Tibet.

Fig. 69 Bronze horse rider pendant [Tian and Guo 1986: pl.98.3, p. 135]

In tombs datable to a later period (4th-3rd centuries BCE), all these ornaments slowly disappeared in favour of iron artefacts such as ring-pommelled short swords, crane beak axes, *pipa*-shaped belt hooks and plaques with double bird designs.

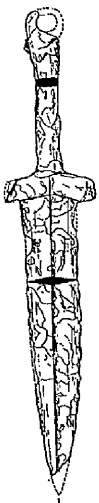


Fig. 70 Iron short sword with ring pommel [Tian and Guo 1986: p. 261, fig 32.1]

Belt hooks have been recently proved to originate in proper China, although the idea of fastening a belt with some kind of device might have come from the north.²⁰⁶ Indeed the findings at Maoqinggou were confined to a restricted number of burials, which featured a different orientation from the rest, suggesting that their occupants might have practised different burial customs originated from a different cultural milieu, possibly linked to metropolitan China.²⁰⁷ The earliest examples of the belt hook in its typical *pipa*-shape are datable to the 6th c. BCE and reflect a mundane use.²⁰⁸ These are often small, plain or with simple geometric patterns and the button is placed near the end of

the buckle opposite the hook [Fig. 71]. It was only later, during the 5th c. BCE that belt hooks became luxury items: their shape increased tremendously and their decoration became more elaborated, including sockets for semi-precious stones and inlays of gold and silver.

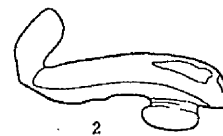


Fig. 71 Iron belt hook [Tian and Guo 1986: p. 270, fig. 38.2]

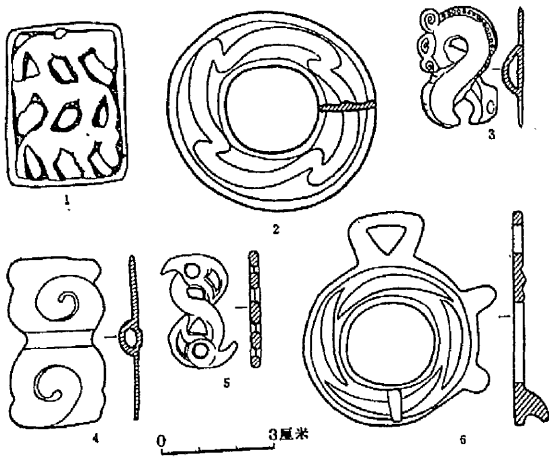
²⁰⁴ Davis-Kimball et al 1995: 201-239.

²⁰⁵ Bunker et al 1970: pl 16.

²⁰⁶ Wang Renxiang 1985: 267-312.

²⁰⁷ Tian and Guo 1986: 302-5.

²⁰⁸ Wang Renxiang 1985.



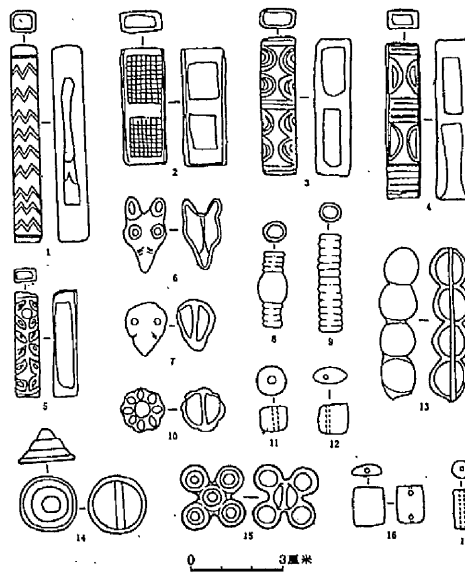
Taohongbala and Gongsuhao

At Taohongbala and Gongsuhao contiguous sites, again in Inner Mongolia, similarly to the other contemporary sites along the northern border, metal artefacts represent the greatest part of the funerary assemblage. Crane-beak pick axes, various items of horse gear, awls, three-

winged arrowheads, personal ornaments and one unique *fu* adze (M1) have been found in the tombs. However, differently from previously analysed sites further to the east, like Maoqinggou, weapons do not represent the overall majority. Instead, personal ornaments seem to be in prevalent number: bronze buttons, animal plaques, belt-hooks, roundels and tubular finials are found around the body of the deceased, evidence of personal adornment both in male and female burials [Fig. 72]. Hence, within the Ordos cultural context an emphasis on personal ornamentation rather than military prowess seems evident. Yet again differently from the findings of the Maoqinggou area, the grave goods of this area do not include large metal belt plaques or scenes of animal predation, but prevalently small plaques with double-bird pattern and single animals and various types of circular bead-shaped plaques. Among the plaques, somewhat reminiscent of earlier BMAC roundels, are those with four-lobed roundels bearing concentric ridges. On the other hand, tubular beads with a central bulge have already been detected in earlier Shajing contexts in Gansu; they are profusely found throughout the Northern Zone, as evidence come both from Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Gansu and even Xinjiang during the Late Bronze Age period, and all were supposedly meant as elements of a necklace, having been recovered around the upper body of the dead in most funerary contexts. The contemporary presence of such an accessory could suggest a remote connection with the people who first arrived in Gansu at the beginning of the 1st millennium BCE, coming into contact with sedentary oasis dwellers of the Shajing culture, hence spreading eastwards. Continuity in cultural contacts between Gansu and Ningxia provinces and the Ordos and Inner Mongolia regions further to the east is also provided by the findings at Yongdeng Yushugou, a small burial site geographically located within Shajing cultural horizon, but dated to the mid-late 1st millennium BCE, which although remotely related to Shajing cultural contexts, yielded bronze artefacts similar to those found in the Ordos and in the Yanglang area (Gansu and Ningxia) roughly at the same time.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ Further details on Yushugou are provided later in this chapter [p.212].

Fig. 72 Bronze tubular finials, double-bird plaques and belt hooks, Taohongbala [Tian and Guo 1986: pl 7, p 22 and pl 6, p. 211]



Certain belt hooks and plaques, with round buckles and s-shaped plaques with horse heads, are indeed affined to counterparts found at Liangcheng Maoqinggou, suggesting a commonality of cultural expression. Tubular finials, which may have served as awl cases, featured complex geometric patterns incised on the surface: either rows of triangles, criss-cross and

lozenge motifs and S-shaped curvilinear designs embellished these cases. Indeed similar objects have been identified among the bone inventory at Pengpu Yujiazhuang, in Ningxia province. Richly ornamented bone plates, bearing strikingly similar geometric motifs have been associated with female tombs in the eastern Carpathian basin in the Mezőcsát complex²¹⁰, in the westernmost part of the Eurasian steppe belt, datable to the 9th-7th c. BCE in an area traditionally thought to have been invaded by eastern mounted warriors of the Thraco-Cimmerian group.

Isolated from the rest stands a short sword with antenna pommel consisting of two opposing griffins, which indeed represents a unique example at Taohongbala [Fig. 73], yet comparable with other specimens from Hebei region²¹¹ and from Inner Mongolia like Ningcheng xian Nanshan'gen and Liangcheng xian Maoqinggou. At a closer inspection, it could also find counterparts in the Scythian repertoire: identical antenna-shaped short swords with opposite griffins have been unearthed both in sites from the Tagar Culture of the Minusinsk Basin in southern Siberia, in proper Mongolia and in Saka contexts in Kazakhstan.²¹² The same motif of the opposing griffins may be associated with the Scythian artistic repertoire, being present throughout the Scythian cultural horizon as a very significant motif with the highly symbolic valence.

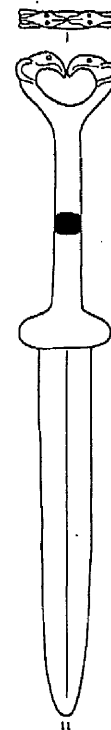


Fig. 73 Gongsuhao M1 bronze short sword with antenna pommel [Tian and Guo 1986: pl 5.11, p.210].

²¹⁰ Metzner-Nebelsick 2000: 160-184.

²¹¹ In the Shanrong area of cultural development, Hebei sheng wenhuaju 1966:241.

²¹² Davis-Kimball et al, 1995: 322.

Bronze horse harness ornaments and bridle accoutrements [Fig. 74] are comparable to specimens from Ningxia and Gansu, with similar teardrop-shaped and round bridle bits and strap guides. Although stylistically related to the teardrop shaped plaques, the ornament consisting of a round disk from which hangs a triangular pendant on a circular link is to date a unique finding. It was probably decorating the caparisoned head of the horse, since it was found next to the head of a bridled horse interred with its owner. Simple horse bits of the ring-shaped finial kind are also found.

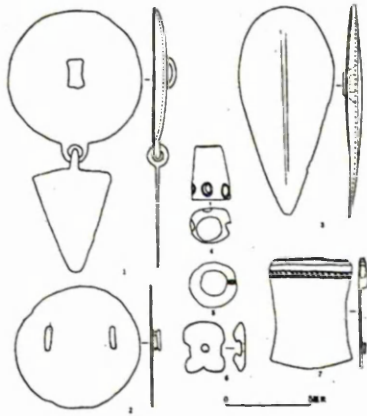


Fig. 74 Bronze harness ornaments and bone rings and beads [Tian and Guo 1986: pl 8, p.215].

Two gold earrings made of concentric spirals have also been found at the side of the skull (M1) [Fig. 75], but apart from this find, gold is nowhere else to be found within Taohongbala and Gongsuhao. The shape though is strikingly similar to the simple concentric spiralled earrings made of bronze unearthed at Maoqinggou, providing once again evidence of cultural affiliation.

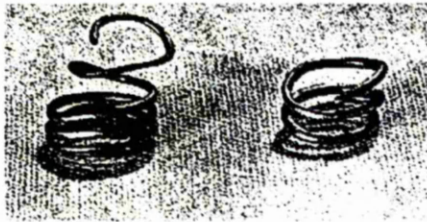


Fig. 75 Spiral-shaped earrings found at Taohongbala [Tian and Guo 1986: pl. L]

Only two simple linear iron knives with a perforation on the handle have been found both in M1 and M2 [Fig.76]. The shape is consistent with earlier northern bronze prototypes and might have been conceived in pure utilitarian terms. When considering the dating of the site, the presence of iron is thus attested slightly later than in the western regions.



Fig. 76 Iron knife [Tian and Guo 1986: pl 5.8, p.210]

Yulongtai

At Yulongtai again in the Ordos steppe land, mainly bronzes, integrated by iron, bone and semi-precious stones, constituted the funerary assemblage of the only excavated tomb.²¹³ Apart from a few utilitarian items (knives, an adze, and an arrowhead), the inventory mostly included horse harnesses, plaques and bridles, with animal decoration (also horse designs), tubular pole finials and yoke ornaments with three-dimensional animals (horses and ovine), and rings [Fig. 77]. Some bronze plaques, like those with zigzag shape and the small ornamental rosettes, have been encountered both at Maoqinggou and Taohongbala sites. A rectangular bead-shaped plaque similar to those unearthed in Gansu province in Shajing contexts and later in Maoqinggou and Taohongbala was also found.

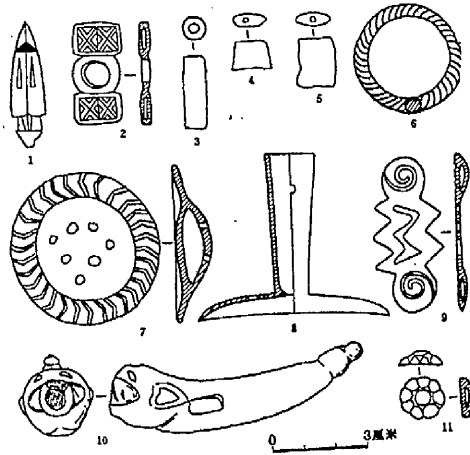


Fig. 77 Bronze, turquoise and bone ornaments. [Tian and Guo 1986, pl 3, p.369]

On the other hand bone items such as the bridle ornament in the shape of a fish are very much reminiscent of contemporary or slightly earlier Saka inventories to the west and to the north. A similar three-dimensional fish yet made of golden foil with turquoise inlays was found at Chilikta, a Saka site in eastern Kazakhstan dating to the 8th c. BCE.²¹⁴ According to the Scythian cosmogony, fish in particular were considered the symbol for the underworld, whilst deer and felines would stand for the middle terrestrial world and the rapacious birds for the upper celestial world. Fish pendants were often placed pending from the saddle of the horse. According to recent investigation, fish moreover may have represented the major source of food for most of the nomadic populations in southern Siberia.²¹⁵ Being ecologically important, fish would have played a relevant role in the collective imaginary as well.

Yet one of the most diffused zoomorphic motifs within the Ordos region must have been the ibex. Plaques and pole finials in the shape of ibex have been excavated throughout the Ordos region and in particular from Yulongtai [Figs.78-79]. The ibex-shaped pole finial unearthed at the site is similar to that found in Shaanxi province which bore an

²¹³ Nei Menggu Bowuguan et al 1977: 111; Tian and Guo 1986; Duan Shuan 1995.

²¹⁴ Farkas et al 2000: 63, pl.19.

²¹⁵ Private communication Prof. Hiebert.

inscription setting it during the Qin domain (pre-dynastic).²¹⁶ Yet Yulongtai site must have been roughly contemporary with both Maoqinggou and Taohongbala, given the stylistic affinities in burial inventory and as such, to find a similar ibex finial dated to the 4th century BCE in Qin contexts would suggest the transmission of the ibex motif and its symbolism from the Ordos into metropolitan China, via Qin.



Fig. 78 Yulongtai ibex-shaped finial (L: 19.5 cm). [Tian and Guo, 1986: colour plate 15.1].

Fig. 79 Yulongtai pole cap ornament [Tian and Guo 1986: pl 105.



Somewhat along the same stylistic choice are the characteristic hollow cast animal figures (mostly ungulates) used as yoke ornaments for funerary carts that are found in this cultural horizon, dating to the 5th-4th centuries BCE. The typology was ultimately discontinued by the 3rd century BCE when horse riding superseded chariot riding in warfare. Five deer-shaped bronze yoke ornaments, two with horns and three without, 12.5 cm high, were in fact found in the tomb at Yulongtai, together with the remains of a wheeled vehicle. In such examples the animal legs are overlapped, the undersides of the hooves (in the case of the deer) of the forelegs face up, while the hooves of the hind legs face down [Fig. 80]. Such recumbent posture is found in China in the lacquer inventory of the Qin state in the 6th century BCE.²¹⁷ Instead, a number of bronze plaques depicting recumbent deer from the Minusinsk Basin (Tagar culture, 8th-6th c. BCE) portray the animal in the same posture, with the legs overlapped and the underside of the forelegs hooves facing up and those of the hind legs down²¹⁸, providing an antecedent to the Qin lacquer ware. A similar crouching posture is again seen with the deer portrayed in repoussé on a gorytos plaque from the Krasnodar complex of the Kuban region in Russia, which is dated to the 7th c. BCE.²¹⁹ Such posture was indeed developed within the Scythian cultural horizon well before its appearance in Qin.

²¹⁶ Shaanxi sheng Bowuguan 1966.

²¹⁷ In the tomb of the duke Jing of Qin, who died in 537 BCE [Beijing 1992: 74].

²¹⁸ Davis- Kimball et al 1995: p.312, fig 21.

²¹⁹ Farkas et al 2000: p. 94, pl. 48.

Fig. 80 Yulongtai deer yoke ornaments [Tian and Guo 1986, pl 108].



On the other hand, animal-shaped ornaments that fit over the yoke of a wheeled vehicle were excavated in a pre-dynastic Qin tomb at Bianjiazhuang, Longxian, Shaanxi province, dated to the late Spring and Autumn period.²²⁰ The set of four hare-shaped ornaments found at that site resembled much larger hare-shaped vessels recovered from the earlier tombs of nobles of the Jin state, excavated near Tianma Qucun in southern Shanxi, suggesting that the yoke ornaments were a product of Chinese workshop.²²¹ Indeed, during the 4th century BCE Qin metalworkers did make yoke ornaments for frontier patrons, as it is indicated by the level and method of craftsmanship, until this typology fell in disuse with the emergence of horse-back riding.²²²

Iron items now include a zoomorphic head, a crane-axe and a horse bit. The shift from bronze to iron in the manufacture of decorative ornaments and horse riding accessories - more sophisticated artefacts than simple utensils- could signal a better understanding and confidence in the iron technology than ever before. Such a shift culminated later on during the second half of the 1st millennium BCE in the Ordos region, when iron-set gilded bronze objects eventually appeared.²²³

Silver was also found in the form of a thin foil 95 cm long. Silver so far has been identified in Yanbulake, Huoshaogou and Chawuhu sites in the shape of small penannular earrings and nose rings. These sites are all located to the west of the Ordos region and are much earlier in date, going back to the late 2nd millennium, early 1st millennium BCE. Silver in the Ordos appeared much later, around the 4th century BCE in the form of foils and not filaments.

²²⁰ Shaanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo 1988: 16.

²²¹ Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo 1994: 21.

²²² So 1995: 36-43.

²²³ Di Cosmo 1999.

In antiquity, the majority of silver would have been generally extracted via cupellation from galena (a lead sulphide ore present throughout Central Asia),²²⁴ or electrum (a natural gold and silver alloy²²⁵). Indeed although native silver is quite rare, as it does not occur in alluvial placers, it can be found in mountainous regions embedded in mineral veins, in the form of both filaments and foils. Already in prehistory substantial silver deposits were known in Outer Mongolia, in Shanxi and in Ningxia, providing a feasible source. According to Craddock, early silver containing less than 0.05 % of lead would have been native rather than cupelled.²²⁶ To this regard, only by analysing the chemical composition of the Ordos silver foil artefacts, their origin would thus be ascertained.

As a matter of fact, silver ornaments became popular among the pastoral tribes particularly during the 4th century BCE, as it is evident from findings in the Ordos region. Hence the choice of material could be either linked to a particular system of belief linked to the groups in the Ordos during the 4th c. BCE or to a convenient proximity to mineral sources in a suitable ecological environment.

Xigoupan

At Xigoupan located in the Ordos area, the burial assemblages would reflect the new shift in the choice of materials as, differently from previous earlier sites such as Taohongbala, Gongsuhao and Yulongtai, here gold represents the majority of the items, followed by silver, bronze, iron, lead.²²⁷ Amongst the golden artefacts, two golden rectangular plaques with an animal combat scene between a tiger and a boar represent a unique discovery [Fig. 81]. The two plaques constitute a perfect example of mirror-image belt buckle, since one plaque features a lateral perforation, whilst the other a loop in the back.

The exceptionality of these plaques also resides in the inscription on the back, stating in Chinese characters in archaic script (Warring States) style,²²⁸ the weight of the plaque. One reads: "Pig and Tiger- 1 *jin*, 2 *liang*, 20 *shu*, under half", whilst the inscription on the other one reads: "1 *jin*, 5 *liang*, 4 *shu*, under half". Similar inscriptions are also present in the seven bridle bits (*jie yue*) made of silver recovered from the same tomb (M2). The bridle bits also bear references to the Chinese shops or institutions for their manufacture, like *shao fu* and *bao gong* and so forth.

²²⁴ Argentiferous lead ores have been detected in Baluchistan, Bactria, Ferghana, Afghanistan, Transoxiana and the Altai [Forbes 1969].

²²⁵ Craddock 1995: 211.

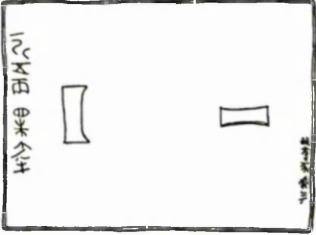
²²⁶ Craddock 1995: 213.

²²⁷ Tian and Guo 1986:353.

²²⁸ Li 1985: 335.



Fig. 81 Xigoupan M2 gold plaque [Tian and Guo 1986: pl 2, p.353].



The presence of Chinese characters engraved on the back would attest a new, stronger relationship between the northern tribes and the metropolitan Chinese. It has been suggested that these items, and similar items found also at the contemporary site of Aluchaideng, were meant as imports from China, or cast by Chinese metalworkers in local employ. Many of these pieces must have been commissioned to meet the demands and cultural requirements of their pastoral owners. The same style of

script has been noticed on other small clothing ornaments made of gold found in tomb M30 at Xinzhuangtou at the site of Yanxiadu in Yixian, Hebei, in the state of Yan (3rd century BCE). The word *shao fu* on the Xigoupan bridle ornaments would indicate a state office in proper China and unlikely an office in the nomadic north. The style of calligraphy was again the same as that found on the bronzes of the three Jin states (Han, Zhao and Wei). By the late Warring States period, the power of the state of Zhao had reached the Ordos area, and it is possible that these inscriptions-bearing objects were made by the people of Zhao specifically to be traded perhaps for horses,²²⁹ jades and felts to the people in the north. The same could have been for the golden ornaments of the state of Yan. The archaeological evidence suggests that workshops at Yanxiadu were casting luxury goods expressly to be traded with the nomads. References in the *Zhanguo ce* (The Annals of the Warring States period)²³⁰ imply the existence of large seasonal markets throughout northern China that would have facilitated Sino-nomadic trade. Clay moulds for casting 'four mountains' mirrors were also discovered in the vicinity of Yixian. A similar product was indeed recovered at Pazyryk in kurgan 6, further highlighting the connection between Yan and the northwest. This economic interaction would parallel a similar phenomenon occurred between the Scythians of the Pontic region and the Greeks.

As already mentioned, many gold and silver ornaments were either cast or hammered with repoussé relief and embellished with fantastic animals with raptor-headed appendages, similar to the caprid unearthed at Nalin'gaotu in Shenmu xian (Shaanxi), again in the Ordos area. The distinctive treatment of the mane is also paralleled on a pair of golden belt buckles excavated from Issyk (Kazakhstan)²³¹ and dated to the 5th-4th

²²⁹ Northern Shanxi was an ideal ground for horse-breeding, well situated north of Zhao and close to Xigoupan.

²³⁰ Crumps 1970: 324.

²³¹ Baipakov et al 1998: fig 305-306.

century BCE. To date the earliest example of this symbolic system occurs on a golden plaque from a 7th-6th century BCE Saka grave at Chilikta in eastern Kazakhstan.²³² The motif must have travelled through an already favoured route from Kazakhstan into Xinjiang and then into proper China, in Gansu and Ningxia. The connection with the Chilikta complex of Eastern Kazakhstan is once again suggested when talking about the Ordos artistic production during the 1st millennium BCE. Mythical animals with raptor-headed attributes are traditionally associated with the symbolic system of the Scythian cultural horizon, from the 7th to 1st century BCE. In fact similar appendages and beaks are found at Pazyryk (4th century BCE) and almost synchronously in Gansu and Ningxia (Yanglang area), before finding their way to Xigoupan and Aluchaideng (3rd century BCE).

Other golden plaques made in repoussé work with animal decoration, with confronting twisted wolves, beaked ungulates with antler tines [Fig. 82], recumbent deer, animal combats between three animals and horses, have been found all in M2, confirming the analogies with the artistic vocabulary of the Saka of Kazakhstan and southern Siberia.

Fig. 82 Golden repoussé plaque representing a beaked ungulate with antler tines [Tian and Guo, 1986: pl 4.1, p. 356].



Another stylistic connection with the west is provided by the finding of a golden torque (again in M2), composed of a simple golden thread twisted twice to form a spiral. This type of ornament played an important role as

prestige symbol amongst the Sarmatians and other Iranian peoples. Xenophont in the *Anabasi*, points out that torques and bracelets were worn by the Persian aristocracy and, together with the golden ceremonial weapons, were considered the accoutrement of a warrior. Torques were believed to possess magic powers, due to their circular shape, protecting the wearer.²³³

A pair of golden earrings was found in M2, one consisting of three and the other of two gold cones connected by a long chain to a penannular ring [Fig. 83]. The cones are made of tightly coiled strip-twisted wire that has a right-hand twist.

²³² Bunker 1992: 99-115.

²³³ Farkas et al 2000: 131.



Fig. 83 Golden earrings Xigoupan [Tian and Guo 1986: pl L.3]

As already mentioned in the context of Lijiaya golden jewellery in the late 2nd millennium BCE, strip twisting was achieved by taking a thin sheet of hammered metal and by slowly twisting it tighter and tighter. This technique has been traced back to the 3rd millennium BCE in southwest Asia,²³⁴ where it was used both as applied decoration and to make loop-in-loop chains. Later used by Hellenistic artisans the same loop-in-loop chain technique was transmitted eastwards, through the Saka-Scythians living in the Pontic regions and introduced in China around the late Warring States period. Such chains are seen, together with examples of granulations in central Asia, in Russia (Filippovka kurgan),²³⁵ in eastern Kazakhstan (Chilikta kurgan),²³⁶ in Xinjiang (Alagou, Jiaohe, Baileqier, Wulapo²³⁷), in Inner Mongolia (Aluchaideng) and in Ningxia (Guyuan),²³⁸ suggesting the same channel of transmission: via Kazakhstan through Xinjiang into Gansu and Ningxia and eventually into metropolitan China.



Fig. 84 Beaked (crane) finial from Sujigou [Tian and Guo 1986: pl 103.1]

Amongst the few bronzes including buttons, a belt hook, a knife and a short sword, a long pole finial in the shape of a beaked bird like the ones unearthed at another Ordos site, Sujigou, was found [Fig. 84]. The bizarre shape is strongly reminiscent of analogous pole caps made prevalently in bone unearthed throughout southern Siberia and Kazakhstan during the Scythian period. Such long beaked finials might have been used in horse accoutrement. The examples from Xigoupan and Sujigou strongly resemble carved bone and bronze curved items found among the Sarmatians of the Volga and Ural regions and in Kazakhstan, probably used either as bow tips, or bridle and scabbard finials during the mid first millennium BCE. In fact the curved shape could have been distantly related to one of the favorite amulet shape (that of an animal tusk), which was revered and widespread throughout the Scythian cultural sphere. Moreover, this connection is also suggested by the findings of early examples in bronze in the Semireč'e area, which copy in style and iconographic choice horn and bone pendants from the same region.

²³⁴ Chandra 1979.

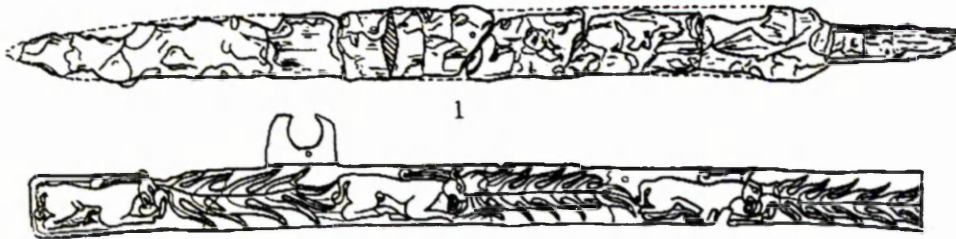
²³⁵ Farkas et al 2000: pl. 125.

²³⁶ Baipakov et al 1998: pl. 183.

²³⁷ Urumqi, 1998: 174-5.

²³⁸ Luo and Han 1990: pl. 5.6.

Fig. 85 Iron sword and golden scabbard from Xigoupan [Tian and Guo 1986: p.356, pl. 6.1-2]



Several iron objects including a ladle, horse bits, cheek-pieces and awls have been found in the assemblage, following the general trend encountered throughout the Ordos region. Of iron was also made a sword, which is now in a severe state of decomposition [Fig. 85].²³⁹ Yet its scabbard or cover made of golden repoussé foil bearing depictions of beaked ungulates among leaves has partially survived to the present, giving an idea of its magnificent past. Golden foils worked in repoussé technique and applied to scabbards or *gorytos*, were quite popular with the Scythians in Central Asia. Many similar artefacts have been discovered for instance in the Koban region of Russia.²⁴⁰ On the other hand, iron swords with applied repoussé golden foils on the edge were also quite popular: an iron short sword with opposing griffins finial from Issyk kurgan in the Semireč'e displays a longitudinal band along both sides of the edge, depicting a series of animals in procession towards the hilt.²⁴¹ The pose of the animals is strikingly similar to the pose performed by the horses on the Xigoupan sword, the animals slightly crouched with both fore and hind legs placed forward rather than overlapped, suggesting a stylistic continuity between the Kazakh and the Ordos swords.

The metal assemblage is completed by the finding of five lead plaques (possibly used as harness ornaments) in the shape of a bird, either a falcon or an eagle. Other similar plaques have been discovered made of gold. Indeed lead ornaments are quite a unique finding of the area, since lead is rarely seen in the metal inventory of other sites in the Northern Zone, if not found in unrefined state.

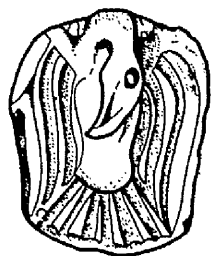
Lead is usually found in nature alloyed with silver, and indeed most of the silver is smelted from argentiferous lead ores (*galena*), which contain small amounts of silver (less than 1%) rather than from pure native veins in rocks. Then it may have come natural, in those cultures that extracted silver from lead by cupellation, also to employ lead in the manufacture of ornaments. However, Xigoupan did not yield a great deal of silver, although Aluchaideng, a site nearby, did. On the other hand, lead ores are

²³⁹ Unfortunately no metallographic analysis is yet available to assess if the sword was either hammered or cast.

²⁴⁰ In the Krasnodar district, at Kelermes, Kurgan 4 (7th c. BCE) [Farkas et al 2000: pl. 50, p. 98].

²⁴¹ Baipakov et al 1998: pl.331, p. 187.

distributed all along the Northern Zone, from Inner Mongolia to Hebei, Gansu, Qinghai and Xinjiang signifying a large availability of sources of lead.²⁴² Such environmental factor might have induced Xigoupan artisans to exploit further the metal, yet for the first time along the Chinese border. Lead jewellery, especially earrings, was a very common feature of the BMAC assemblage, although its cultural horizon spanned from 2000 to 1750 BCE, too remote in time for establishing any feasible connection.²⁴³



The falcon-eagle on the plaque [Fig. 86] is illustrated with open wings, fan-spread tail and the head lowered to the right. The motif of the frontal raptor bird (eagle) is probably of Middle Eastern origin,²⁴⁴ and was adopted by the steppe nomads, through Iran (Ziwiye).

Fig. 86 Lead ornament [Tian and Guo 1986, pl 5.6, p. 357].

The motif was known in Central Asia and India before being diffused over the Eurasian steppes. The idea of the raptor bird, as protector of the human beings, perhaps reflects the personification of a divinity or an animal ancestor. Scythians and other nomads were familiar with eagles and other raptor birds and their hunting skills. It was probably their ability in catching the prey that made the Scythians believe that they were supernatural. A similar eagle in an almost identical pose comes from the appliqué work from Bashadar kurgan 9 in the Altai Mountains (590-400 BCE).²⁴⁵ Both Pazyryk and Bashadar kurgans contained elements of Near Eastern conception and can be considered the connecting point between the West and the East in the transmission of various iconographic motifs from the Near East to the Northern Zone and eventually to China. Indeed again in the Altai region of southern Siberia, at the burial complex of Ak-Alakh the felt headdress of the Ukok priestess unearthed from kurgan II, besides the metal finial of a standing three-dimensional caprid (similar to the Nalin'gaotu example) featured small appliqués with the silhouette of a frontal raptor bird in the exactly the same posture as the lead plaques found at Xigoupan. Indeed the eagle and the goat carried a deep significance for the Scythians of southern Siberia, as evinced by findings at Pazyryk, Bash-Adar, Ak-Alak, Arzhan, Yustyd, Ulandryk and Tashanta, all located in Siberia, along the Sayan and Altai mountain ranges.²⁴⁶

²⁴² Linduff et al 2000.

²⁴³ Personal communication with Dr Madhu Ghose, Ashmolean Museum.

²⁴⁴ Probably from the III millennium BCE depiction of the mythical leonine bird.

²⁴⁵ Many are the features shared by the Gordion Tumuli in Turkey (750-600 BCE) and the Bashadar kurgans according to Leonid Marsadolov [2000: 247-58].

²⁴⁶ Kubarev 1987 and 1991.

Nianfangqu

Golden objects prevalently composed the hoard at Nianfangqu, Dongsheng city, although it contained also a few agate and turquoise stones and a small number of silver artefacts. One golden plaque with a tiger and a wolf combating (perhaps one of the first examples in this area) was among the findings [Fig. 87]. The rendering of the animals, with heavy lines, grooves and no rectangular frame, recalls carved wooden plaques from southern Siberia (Bash-Adar, Pazyryk) and closer, Yanglang examples (Gansu Ningxia) and some plaque from Liangcheng county (Inner Mongolia).

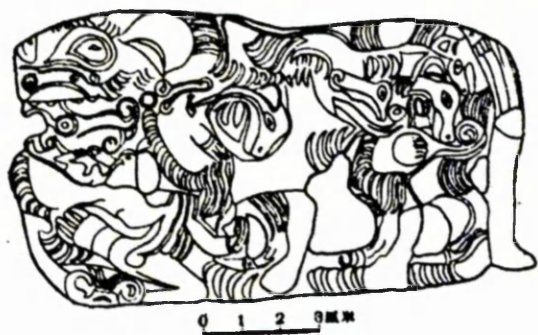
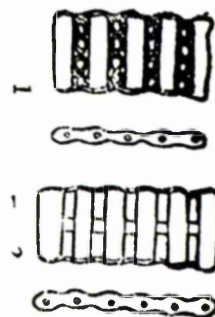


Fig. 87 Nianfangqu golden plaque with a tiger and a wolf [Yikezhaomeng wenwu gongzuozhan 1991: fig 2].

Fig. 88 Tubular ornaments in gold [Yikezhaomeng wenwu gongzuozhan 1991: fig 4.1,2].



The inventory also included a conspicuous number of golden plaques made in repoussé technique depicting double dragons [Fig. 89], golden tubular ornaments [Fig. 88] and globular spheres, silver rings, together with a huge number of turquoise stones and agate beads.



Fig. 89 Golden plaque depicting two dragons [Yikezhaomeng wenwu gongzuozhan 1991: fig 3.3].

Besides, two golden earrings with turquoise and red agate beads were also discovered [Fig. 90]; one of them displays a pendant composed by three leaves, an arrangement encountered also in the inventory of Aluchaideng site. Indeed Nianfangqu site can be confidently associated with the Xigoupan group of golden accessories, thus suggesting an analogous date (late Warring States period).

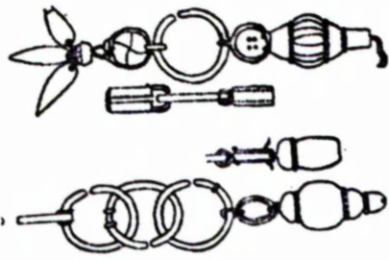


Fig. 90 Gold earrings [Yikezhaomeng wenwu gongzuozhan 1991: fig 3.1,2].

Sujigou

The findings at Sujigou, in Jungar Qi (Inner Mongolia) include only a cache of 22 bronzes from a storage pit, as no burial was discovered.²⁴⁷ It was probably intended as a hoard rather than a burial ground. The poor metal assemblage reflected the neighbouring Ordos inventories²⁴⁸: apart from the elongated crane beak finial which finds the closest counterpart in Xigoupan [Fig.84], a rather crude pole end in the form of a recumbent ram is reminiscent of similar examples unearthed at Yulongtai, which apparently were *in auge* during the 5th-4th centuries BCE and fell in disuse by the 3rd century BCE with the widespread diffusion of horse riding. These artefacts were in fact employed in the ornamentation of the funerary chariot, should one compare them with those recovered from the Arzhan complex in the Tuvanian region of southern Siberia. Following the Siberian standard six three-dimensional deer yoke ornaments were also found at



Sujigou, together with bells, plaques with animal designs (wolves, cranes, goats, horses, deer and a wild beast, the panther-like creature) and tubular fittings with three-dimensional animal finials [Fig. 91]. A three-dimensional lupine head was also found.

Fig. 91 Sujigou tubular finial portraying a panther-like creature [Tian and Guo 1986: pl 15.2]

For the first time in Inner Mongolia, the mythical creature and the recumbent horse

²⁴⁷ Gai Shanlin 1965.

²⁴⁸ The inventory is similar to that discovered at Waertugou, again in Jungar qi [Li Yiyou 1963:80-83].

appear in the iconographic repertoire. All the animals represented were cast in moulds and the signs and ridges of the casting are still visible on the back of the animal.

Nalin'gaotu and Lijiapan

As already mentioned in the context of beaked ungulates iconography encountered on Xigoupan plaques, the site of Nalin'gaotu (Shenmu xian, Shaanxi) can be associated with the Ordos sites analysed so far. Its inventory comprises gold, silver and bronze items, made in the round, in relief and carved. A gold headdress surmounted by a standing caprid represents the most spectacular artefact of the assemblage [Fig. 92]. The animal is portrayed standing with the four legs on top of a pedestal, with accentuated long curved horns in a posture already encountered in bronze standing caps from the Ordos region, which are ultimately derived from the long-standing



iconography of the Scythian mountain goat. Yet in this case, the round eyes and the exaggerated beak of a raptor, the raptor-headed tail and the ear-raptor-headed tines embellishing the horns have given the ungulate a mythical look. As mentioned for Xigoupan antler-tined ungulates, similar mythological animals appeared in the artistic repertoire of Pazyryk kurgans and can be associated with the Scythian iconography and system of beliefs.

Fig. 92 Nalin'gaotu caprid finial top of a golden headdress

[Bunker 1989: fig 3].

Such piece could have been worn as a headdress finial, like those encountered in the complex of kurgans at Ak-Alakha, a site in the Altai not far from Bashadar and Pazyryk in southern Siberia.²⁴⁹ Otherwise, mountain goat finials excavated throughout the eastern Eurasian steppes in Scythian contexts have often been discovered in horse and chariot pits. Hence, given the fact that the Nalin'gaotu ungulate was indeed discovered together with silver recumbent deer chariot yoke ornaments, the object could be related to the horse accoutrement for the afterlife. The ritual practice of adorning the chariot and horses for funerary purposes might have stemmed from Anatolia (Alaca Höyük) during the 3rd millennium BCE, spreading then into the Transcaucasian regions by the late 2nd millennium where it would have been absorbed by the Scythians and diffused further east into southern Siberia and eventually China. The piece is hollow cast, matching central Asian and southern Siberia prototypes, yet apparently it was cast in a two-piece

²⁴⁹ Polosmak 1994.

mould, whilst all western counterparts were generally made by lost wax casting. Such technical discrepancy could suggest that the piece was cast locally by someone more familiar with piece-moulding than lost wax, perhaps a Chinese artisan, proposing again the sort of economic partnership envisaged at Xigoupan, whereby artefacts manufactured by Chinese for nomadic patrons would be traded for horses and other items.

Few silver tiger plaques and a pair of gold tiger (male-female) belt plaques portrayed while walking with the four paws visible are strongly reminiscent once again of the southern Siberian tradition: the carving technique recalls the wooden coffins at Bash-Adar and similar plaques unearthed in the Ordos region. One iron short sword hilt was

also found manufactured in silver and gold, with two confronting goat heads [Fig. 93]. The style of the sword is recalling 5th century BCE examples from the Yanglang area and may have been drawn from there originally.



Nalin'gaotu [Dai and Sun 1983: fig 2, p.24].

A silver button with an enrolled caprid [Fig. 94] represents one of the first examples of crouched animal in the round of Middle Eastern origin in the Northern Zone area and belongs, together with others buttons with spiral designs found *in situ*, to the Scythian tradition.²⁵⁰ The spiral motifs on buttons are reminiscent of similar iron buttons with gold inlaid spiral pattern found in central Kazakhstan (Tasmola complex) and dated to the 6th

century BCE.²⁵¹ Quatrefoil plaques are also usually found in Scythian contexts and are later to be found in Xinjiang at Jiaohe city in Turfan basin datable to the Western Han period.

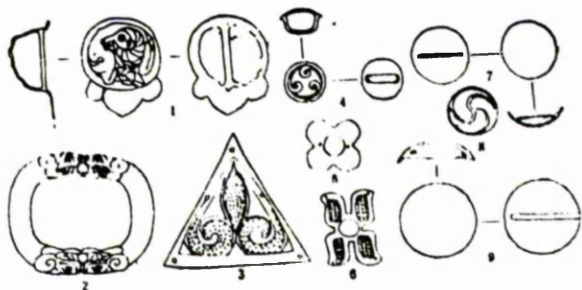


Fig. 94 Silver and bronze ornaments found at Nalin'gaotu [Dai and Sun 1983: fig 4, p.25].

²⁵⁰ Animals portraits arranged in the round were already employed in a mirror from Chawuhu, which could be stylistically related to mirrors of the Maiemir tradition of southern Siberia, nevertheless drawing its inspiration from the west.

²⁵¹ Baipakov et al 1998: p. 140, pl. 145-150.

On the other hand, triangular plaques are quite unusual in the Northern Zone complex. Gold belt ornaments in the shape of an inverted triangle have been found copiously in the Central Plains at Shangcunling, Sanmenxia (Henan), at the cemetery of the Guo state dating back to the 8th century BCE. Twelve cast gold ornaments were indeed found, representing the earliest cast gold objects as well as the earliest metal belt ornaments found in a Central Plains context.²⁵² Furthermore, the ring-shaped object illustrated above would suggest a link with the Central Plains, since similar objects have been usually found in Qin burial contexts throughout Shaanxi. It is thus possible that Nalin'gaotu people would be in contact with the Qin state at this time. Golden triangular plaques have been unearthed also at Tianma-qucun Jin site in Shanxi province.²⁵³ They were placed around the waist of the deceased in tomb I11M8, datable to the 9th – 8th c. BCE, even earlier than Sanmenxia. Indeed from the same burial context come three rabbit shaped *zun*-containers.²⁵⁴ The animal although customised to fit the recipient shape, is portrayed crouched with its ears folded backwards. The small rabbits found at a site close to Nalin'gaotu, Lijiapan, curiously propose the same posture and may have been inspired by the same source that inspired the unique Qucun examples. Other rabbits have been found at Bianjiazhuang in Qin domain (8th c. BCE).²⁵⁵ Such finding could as well provide the intermediary link between Tianma-Qucun angular containers and later Nalin'gaotu and Lijiapan examples.

At Lijiapan, a site very close to Nalin'gaotu in Shenmu xian, more than 30 items all made of bronze were recovered. Among them, zigzag bead plaques and ring-shaped belt

buckles like those encountered at Taohongbala and Maoqinggou were detected, whilst four small crouched rabbits lively portrayed in the round represented a unique specimen, seldom encountered in the zone [Fig.95]. A round plaque with the border bearing a beaded décor is also seen at Maoqinggou.

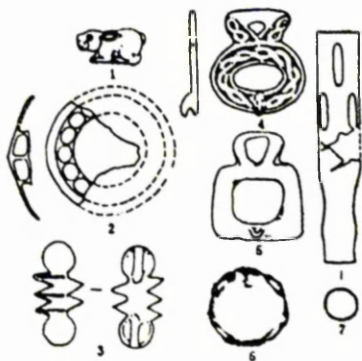


Fig. 95 Bronze rabbit, belt hooks, plaques and buttons found in Shenmu xian [Dai and Sun 1983: fig 5, p.26].

During this later period (4th-3rd century BCE) changes occurred in the quality of burial inventories: fewer chariot ornaments were discovered, whilst horse harness bridle bit and ornaments (*jie yue*) became more common, indicating a shift from driving horses to

²⁵² Beijing 1959: 23, figs 16-17.

²⁵³ Shanxi kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1994: 17, pl.20.

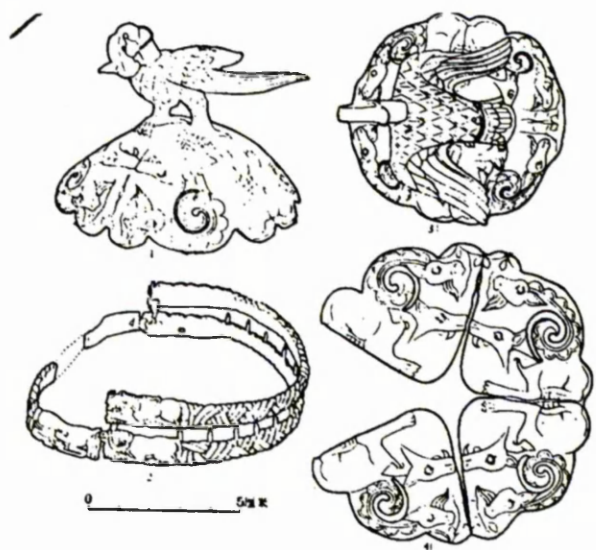
²⁵⁴ Shanxi kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1994: pl. 27, p.21.

²⁵⁵ Shaanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo 1988: fig 4:7, p. 17.

consistently riding them, and a symbolic shift as well, to a more important role of horse riders in general. Then, raptor-headed elaborations of animal figures became more numerous and complex, suggesting the adoption of different iconographic systems (from the west and from China). Finally, tinned bronze as a status marker was being replaced by silver and gold, sometimes inlaid with precious stones, recalling a taste encountered among the nomadic people of the Eurasian steppes already by the beginning of the 1st millennium BCE. At the same time, iron swords with golden appliqué work diffused among the Saka in Kazakhstan around the 5th century BCE could have inspired gold inlaid on Chinese weapons.

Aluchaideng

Aluchaideng site may as well represent the epitome for metal assemblages in the Ordos region. The majority of artefacts in fact consist of golden items, following a custom



established at Xigoupan: more than two hundred gold items and a small number of silver objects were found in just two tombs. The variety of golden artefacts implied also a great diversity in the metallurgical techniques applied: casting, embossing, hammering, twisted wiring have all been detected at Aluchaideng.

Fig. 96 Golden headdress and torques [Tian and Guo 1986, p.344, pl.1].

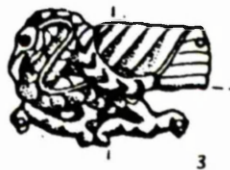
The most exquisite objects are represented by a gold torques and a gold raptor headdress calotte [Fig. 96]. The calotte is composed by bass-relief images of deer, ibexes and wolves. The beak of the rapacious bird (an eagle) is embellished with turquoise. Possibly, this type of headdress would have belonged to some high official in military dress, or perhaps even a king. During recent excavations at the kurgans on the Ukok plateau, Polos'mak and Molodin have discovered some headdresses made of felt, with a pointed cap turned forward, decorated with images of bird's heads, surmounted by ibexes and deer. This is the typical head cover of the Eurasian nomads, as illustrated in Middle-Eastern representations, such as in Persepolis and Bisutun.²⁵⁶ One material example comes from the recently excavated kurgan at Ak-Alakh close to Pazyryk

²⁵⁶ Farkas et al, 2001: 58-59.

datable to the 5th century BCE,²⁵⁷ where two felt headdresses, both with a metal top composed by a three-dimensional ungulate were unearthed.²⁵⁸

The double spiral torques instead presents three of the four original animal terminals: a wolf, a horse and an ibex. According to the Persian tradition, the animals chosen to adorn the torque played a protective role for the wearer. Golden torques have been discovered throughout the Ordos region, from Xigoupan, to Yulongtai and Waertugou, although here they were made of silver.²⁵⁹ Another bronze torques was instead found in western Mongolia.²⁶⁰ This type of personal ornamentation, common throughout the Altai region, from the Semireč'e region in Kazakhstan to the Minusinsk Basin of southern Siberia to western Mongolia, could have been transmitted from Kazakhstan, through Siberia and the Altai into the Ordos region and Shaanxi province.

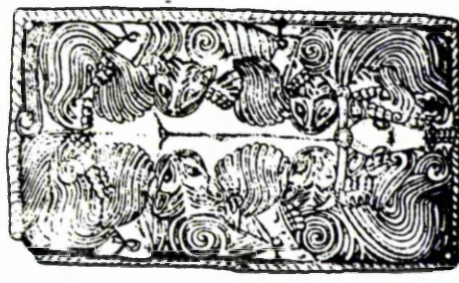
The inventory also comprises plaques with ibexes, wolves, eagles [Fig.97], as well as golden mirror-image plaques used for fastening the belt representing the attack by four



tigers on a yak [Fig. 98], stylistically related to plaques found at Xigoupan,²⁶¹ and twelve gold plaques with recumbent antlered wolves, apparently related to the symbolic system found in Nalin'gaotu,²⁶² in Pazyryk tomb n.2, and the Saka burials at Issyk.

Fig. 97 Eagle plaque [Tian and Guo 1986: pl 3, p. 346].

Fig. 98 Golden plaque with four wolves/tigers attacking a cow [Tian and Guo 1986, p.345, pl. 4].



The curvilinear grooves are reminiscent of intaglio technique on wood at Bash-Adar in southern Siberia and realised in silver at Nalin'gaotu. It is interesting to notice that the symbolic system related to the adoption of raptor-headed appendages, i.e. the Scytho-Saka-Siberian Indo-European artistic tradition, would gradually replace the original image of the Central Asian lion with the tiger in Southern

²⁵⁷ Polosmak 1991:139-144.

²⁵⁸ Ak-Alakh caps have been already mentioned for the Nalin'gaotu caprid finial.

²⁵⁹ Kept in the Inner Mongolia Provincial Museum.

²⁶⁰ Mongolia during the Scytho-Saka-Siberian period (7th-3rd century BCE) was in fact divided into two distinct ethnic groups. One situated on the north-western fringes, close to Siberia, the Altai, which yielded timber structure kurgans with a funerary inventory showing strong affinities with Tuva (Arzhan), Siberia (Pazyryk), and eastern Kazakhstan (Issyk) and with Europoid anthropological features with a light admixture of Mongoloid traits; on the eastern side, instead, a Mongoloid group which exhibited slab-grave cultural traits.

²⁶¹ This type of plaque has been recovered from the waist of the deceased, inferring its probable use as ornament of the belt. Similar arrangements have been encountered at Maoqinggou.

²⁶² Dai and Sun 1983.

Siberia and finally the wolf in the Ordos and Yanglang regions of north-west China.

The Aluchaideng plaque can be considered the point of arrival of such transformation.

This wolf displays an enormous head with twisted upper lip, soft paws and a turned-up snout, all elements that will be featured in every depiction of the wolf during this period [Fig.99].



Fig. 99 Antlered wolf plaque [Tian And Guo 1986, p. 345, pl 1].

This type of plaque was probably used in sets of six to embellish the belt. Three wolves are in fact turned to the right whilst the other three are turned to the left.²⁶³ Similar small golden plaques have been found in sets of six throughout the Eurasian steppes: six deer plaques featuring an analogous posture, three facing left and the other three facing right were unearthed at Filippovka in Russia, whilst at the Ufa Museum fifty-four similar plaques, probably belonging to nine different belts, are kept.²⁶⁴ Furthermore, the plaque has been richly embellished by turquoise and agate inlays, after the long-standing nomadic tradition of stone inlays. The tradition of inlaying stones into gold or bronze has continued from the Karasuk period (with its turquoise inlaid bronze dagger finials) to this period, as evidence from Arzhan, Chilikta and other stone-inlaid gold objects from the



Siberian treasure of Peter the Great clearly establish the nomadic mastery of inlay throughout the latter half of the 1st millennium BCE. Then, contacts between the Ordos, especially Aluchaideng and Xigoupan, and the neighbouring Chinese centres must have encouraged the revival of inlay in China, which was already used during the Shang period but inexplicably died out during the Western Zhou period.

Fig. 100 Flame-shaped awl [Tian and Guo 1986, p.345, pl.2.3].

The gold assemblage further included small roundels with the enroulé image of an ibex,²⁶⁵ six three-dimensional hedgehogs (like the ones from Shihuigou) [Fig.101] and wolf's heads (like the one from Sujigou), together with flame-shaped awls [Fig.100], and a pair of earrings, with the leafy pendant similar to those found at Nianfangqu.

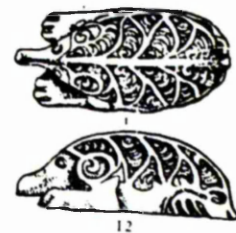


Fig. 101 Golden hedgehogs [Tian and Guo 1986, p.346, pl.3.9]

²⁶³ 12 such plaques have been found in total at Aluchaideng.

²⁶⁴ Farkas et al 2000: 247, pl. 210.

²⁶⁵ The arrangement of the animal in a crouching position is known throughout Asia, from Egypt to Iran. It was probably during the 7th century BCE that the Scythians adopted it through the intermediation of the

These earrings present on the surface little pearls of gold, caused by real granulation, a technique whereby small gold spheres are attached singly or in a pattern to a gold background by diffusion bonding without using solder.²⁶⁶ Such method originated in the west, given the fact that most of the triangular motifs executed with granulation on golden artefacts belonging to official Scythian sites in Russia and Kazakhstan would suggest a Middle Eastern Origin; it was employed then in Kazakhstan during the 7th-5th centuries BCE, at Chilikta and Issyk,²⁶⁷ possibly the source of inspiration for the Aluchaideng examples. It was only during the western Han period that granulation was finally employed in metropolitan China, possibly transmitted through contacts with the people of Aluchaideng.

Some decorative plaques present a quadri-lobed shape with four stylised birds' heads [Fig.103]. This theme could be related to an analogous plaque found at Chilikta, where the heads of the animals are much clearer [Fig.102]. In the Aluchaideng example, though, the heads have been distorted and the original motif is hard to detect, the beak curved, the ear elongated and the eye bulged.



Fig. 102 Four birds plaque from Chilikta (6th century BCE) [Kimball et al, 1995, p.221, fig.64.c].



Fig. 103 Four birds plaque from Aluchaideng (3rd century BCE) [Tian and Guo 1986, p.346, pl.3.7].

In addition to the objects seen so far, a pair of golden rectangular plaques made in repoussé work depicting a Bactrian camel attacked by two raptors was also found at Aluchaideng.²⁶⁸ These plaques, bearing a rare depiction of camels, were originally beaten on a wooden mould, as were other zoomorphic plaques found both at Xigoupan and further west in southern Siberia.²⁶⁹ In particular, camels' depictions have been found also in Ningxia and earlier on, in Xinjiang, where the camel played an important role in the economy of desert oases dwellers.

Persian artistic vocabulary.

²⁶⁶ The Chinese often used pseudo-granulation, employing solder to adhere the beads to a background. This method almost produced the look of real granulation, although in such cases the granules would appear less distinct [Bunker 1993].

²⁶⁷ Baipakov et al 1998: 98, pl. 184.

²⁶⁸ Paris 2000: pl. 114.

²⁶⁹ Tian and Guo 1986.

The graves also yielded an intricately made chain. The construction of this chain appears to be a double loop in loop in which pre-soldered links were fastened together in a complex way [Fig.104].²⁷⁰ The method implied that the first loop was compressed to an elliptical shape and folded in half, whilst the next link was similarly compressed, threaded through the looped ends of the first and in its turn folded in half and so forth.²⁷¹



Fig. 104 Loop in loop chain [Bunker 1993: fig 23, p.43]

Loop in loop chains were made already in the mid-third millennium BCE in Mesopotamia (Sumers) and Egypt. They became widespread among the Greek goldsmiths during the Hellenistic period in Pontic Scythia (4th-3rd c. BCE). Transmitted eastwards during Alexander the Great's Asian campaigns in the late 4th century BC, the technique became popular among the pastoral tribes of Central Asia. Such chains are encountered in Russia at Filippovka kurgan complex,²⁷² in Kazakhstan where pendant earrings were fashioned with a long loop in loop chain,²⁷³ and in various sites throughout Xinjiang (dating to the Warring States period up to the first centuries BCE),²⁷⁴ suggesting the transmission of the technique from the west, via Kazakhstan, to China (Ordos and Yanglang areas).

On top of such large amount of golden artefacts, only five silver objects were identified; they comprised three plaques exhibiting a combat between a wolf and a deer, and two wolf-tiger heads in the round [Fig.105]. The latter find earlier counterparts in some golden appliqué plaques from the kurgan of Issyk, in Kazakhstan (5th-4th century BCE).²⁷⁵ The motif of the wolf certainly played a symbolic role within the Ordos later sites, as evinced from similar findings at Sujigou, Nianfangqu and Xigoupan. The animal looks like a hybrid between a tiger and a wolf, being reminiscent of repoussé plaques portraits of tigers found at Issyk in Kazakhstan. The same large pointed ears and full muzzles are depicted here. A Chinese hollow bronze tiger head cast in the round by 'lost wax lost textile' technique dated to the 3rd century BCE would provide a link further to the

east.²⁷⁶



Fig. 105 Wolf head in silver [Tian and Guo 1986, p.345, pl.2.2].

²⁷⁰ Tian and Guo 1980:12.

²⁷¹ Higgins 1980 and Ogden 1982: 57-58.

²⁷² Farkas et al 2000: pl.125, p. 189.

²⁷³ In a 4th-3rd century BC nomadic grave at Issyk on the Chilik River in eastern Kazakhstan [Baipakov et al 1998: pl. 183, p.148].

²⁷⁴ At Alagou for instance.

²⁷⁵ Baipakov et al. 1998: pl 278-9.

²⁷⁶ Bunker 1989.

In addition, Aluchaideng has yielded decorative forms such as tubular and 'rows of beads' ornaments rendered in precious materials, which find their prototype in Taohongbala.

Shihuigou

Another site related to Aluchaideng is Shihuigou, in Yijinhuluo Qi, where gilded bronze ornaments with iron inlaid in the shape of a turtle, a bronze deer in the round, and several ornaments decorated with fighting tigers and repoussé hedgehogs, similar to the Aluchaideng examples, were reported.²⁷⁷ The taste for three-dimensional animals was here best expressed. The name describes not a burial but a hoard. Yet all the objects appear to have come from a single tomb now lost, given the evidence of skeletal remains accompanying the findings. The plaque of a tiger mauling a fawn finds counterpart in Nianfangqu, where a similar plaque has been excavated. The silver semi-spherical plaques with lobed edges are made of individual bird or fox heads identical to Taohongbala, yet with no ears. The arrangement of the animals around a focal point is unique. On the other hand, the yoke ornaments in the shape of a recumbent deer have their antecedents in the same area, as they are often seen in earlier sites from the Ordos, from Yulongtai to Sujigou. Likewise the elongated beaked crane finial is comparable both with Xigoupan and Sujigou, whilst the ram's head axle finial closely echoes those from Yulongtai, Waertugou and Sujigou. A cast silver plaque in the shape of a walking tiger is similar to the walking tigers carved on a wooden coffin from Bash-Adar, in the Altai Mountains.²⁷⁸ A new type of animal style motif is represented by the combat between two tigers.

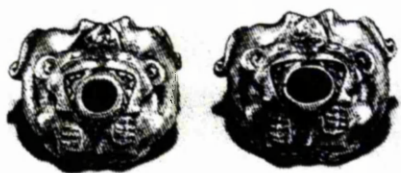


Fig. 106 Buckle ornaments from Shihuigou [Bunker 1994: p. 74, fig 2]

Spectacular buckle ornaments made of cast silver were found as well [Fig.106]. They were probably ornamental elements to insert in the belt. Similar ornaments have indeed been excavated from kurgan Issyk in the Semireč'e. There a single animal has been portrayed enroulé on each plaque rather than two as in the Shihuigou examples. However in both cases the features of the animals show strong affinities, with their round ear, open jaw with big teeth and curled tail. The Issyk animal has been identified as a panther and the Shihuigou examples seem to portray the same animal, although it would have been difficult to see a panther roaming in the Ordos

²⁷⁷ 4th 3rd c. BCE [Yikezhaomeng wenwu gongzuozhan 1992: 93].

²⁷⁸ Rudenko 1970: 268.

steppe land. Hence, the specimens from Shihuigou might have come directly from the western lands together with their wearer.

Along came a pair of boot soles made of hammered silver with chisel-out openwork designs [Fig.107]. These soles are indeed unique in Chinese Northern Zone. It is however possible that the idea of embellish shoe soles may have stemmed out of the long Scythian tradition of burial shoes made of leather with cut-out animal silhouettes made of golden foil. Indeed the golden 'man' of Issyk was wearing a pair of boot enriched with little golden appliqué in the shape of triangles (mountains) suggesting that it was not so unusual to apply gold on leather boots, and consequently silver, as in the case of Shihuigou.²⁷⁹ The practice of decorating the soles on the boots of the dead was also part of the Siberian tradition encountered at Pazyryk (5th-3rd century BCE) in southern Siberia, where in kurgan 2 a pair of soles adorned with a cut-out leather



appliqué was found.²⁸⁰ The practice seems to have appealed also the Qin aristocrats, for a pair of jade soles has been recovered from the tomb of Duke Jing of Qin.²⁸¹ At the same time, an iron chariot ornament with three fantastic gilded bronze animal heads found at the site, resembles an earlier fitting recovered at a pre-dynastic Qin site in Shaanxi,²⁸² further bringing together the two cultural entities.

Fig. 107 Boot soles made of hammered silver from Shihuigou

[Bunker 1994: 74, fig 3]

Also iron artefacts with golden and silver inlaid were discovered. According to Di Cosmo,²⁸³ although the style of such artefacts is generally consistent with the Warring States period Ordos artistic production, the specific and rare evidence of iron-set gilded bronze and gold and silver iron objects could suggest a different cultural contact, a technique probably derived from the Central Plains. He thinks that only the inlay technique was imported, whilst the artefacts themselves were made locally, further suggesting the development of steady commercial relations between Metropolitan China and the northwest. Furthermore, the employment of iron for decorative purposes appears here. Before this time, iron artefacts unearthed from earlier sites seemed to be limited to utilitarian objects, whilst bronze, gold and silver were favoured as status indicators. At this stage, instead, iron artefacts play a more symbolic role, either being embellished and

²⁷⁹ Baipakov et al, 1998: p. 180, fig 290.

²⁸⁰ Gryaznov 1969: 68-69.

²⁸¹ Han Wei 1987: 17.

²⁸² Zhao Congcang 1991.

inlaid with gold and silver or used as inlay infill for gilded bronze objects, following an aesthetic dictum generated in central China.

During this period (4th-3rd century BCE) many are the examples found in material culture of the stylistic process of absorption and modification occurred between proper China and the north-western groups, further noticeable in Aluchaideng and Xigoupan. From the comparative observation, it seems that Shihuigou would be roughly contemporary with Taohongbala, Nianfangqu, Sujigou, Yulongtai and Waertugou (5th c. BCE), hence slightly earlier than Aluchaideng, but featuring quite strong similarities with inventories in the Semireč'e complex. Hence the influence of Scythian-Saka culture could have been already present during the 5th c. BCE, roughly contemporary with the dates available for Kurgan Issyk.

Yushugou

In 1980 another site related to Shajing was discovered in Yongdeng xian at Yushugou.²⁸⁴ The excavation yielded only two burials situated on a gentle slope between two mountain ridges. The two tombs are seemingly vertical pits (2 m long), oriented to the north. Unfortunately the report does not state clearly whether they feature a catacomb structure or a plain vertical one.

On the other end, a vast array of metal artefacts has been unearthed, together with heads of sacrificed horses, sheep and cattle. Few pottery shards stylistically related to Shajing have been recovered (although in this case no dwelling remains are mentioned). The bronze inventory is particularly interesting in that it provides striking evidence of contact with the Ordos region. Hollow cast curved beaked bird-heads and deer finials [Fig. 108] are amongst the recovered artefacts.

Fig. 108 Bronze deer and bird-head finials [Gansu sheng bowuguan 1981: pl. 5]



The site has been dated around the late Spring and Autumn - early Warring States period (6th century BCE), therefore later than the classic Shajing sites. Its late date would account for the presence of such three-dimensional hollow cast animal finials. Recumbent

and standing deer yoke ornaments have been unearthed from various sites in western

²⁸³ Di Cosmo 1999.

²⁸⁴ Although Li Shuicheng (1994) considers that Yushugou cemetery should not be ascribed to the Shajing culture because the pottery evidence is insufficient [Gansu sheng Bowuguan 1981].

and south-western Inner Mongolia.²⁸⁵ How these hollow deer were employed has long puzzled scholars, until a similar artefact was found fit over the yoke of a wheeled vehicle excavated in a pre-dynastic Qin tomb at Bianjiazhuang, Long xian, in Shaanxi province.²⁸⁶ These deer ornaments were hollow cast so they could fit over a wooden yoke. With time, the wooden parts decayed leaving the bronze ornaments without support. As investigated above, mould cast recumbent ungulates have been found with the remains of wheeled vehicles in burials datable to the 5th and 4th century BCE, located in the Ordos region, such as Yulongtai and Sujigou in Jungar Qi, in western Inner Mongolia. The simultaneous recovery of six identical pieces would further confirm their use in set of six as ornaments for funerary chariots.²⁸⁷ Even more interesting are the small finials (4 in total) cast in the shape of a raptor head with a round neck that turns into a circular socket [Fig.108]. The bird has a round eye, indicated by indented marks, and a small hooked beak. Similar finials occur at several sites in northwestern China such as Guyuan xian and Zhongwei Langwozikeng both in Ningxia.²⁸⁸ A Ningxia link is further attested by the presence of flamed button plaques in Yushugou, reminiscent of plaques excavated in Guyuan xian Yanglang sites and in the Ordos.²⁸⁹

These stylistic similarities in bronze inventory related to chariot ornamentation would suggest some sort of cultural and, perhaps, ethnic bond between Gansu Shajing people and Ningxia archaeological cultures datable to the Warring States period. Since, flamed button plaques [Fig.109] and three-dimensional yoke ornaments are not found in earlier

sites of the Shajing culture, it is probable that Yushugou might have encountered later influxes from Ningxia. Alternatively it may represent an early avant-garde post of people migrating from the west, through Xinjiang, into Gansu, then Ningxia and later on into the Ordos region in south-western Mongolia, where similar objects are usually dated to the 5th -4th centuries BCE. In particular, beaked bird-heads are associated with the artistic repertoire of the Scythians, who also ritually adorned their chariots for the funerary transport of the elite.²⁹⁰



Fig. 109 Flamed plaque in bronze from Yushugou [Gansu sheng Bowuguan 1981: pl.5].

²⁸⁵ Bunker 1997: no.184.

²⁸⁶ Shaanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo 1988: p.16, fig 3:39-42, p.17, fig. 4.

²⁸⁷ Bunker 1997: no.182.

²⁸⁸ Zhong and Han 1983: fig 3.5-7.

²⁸⁹ Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1979: 159.

²⁹⁰ Watson 1971.

Fig. 110 Bronze 'spindle-whorls' from Yushugou [Gansu sheng Bowuguan 1981: pl.5].



More than 80 'spindle-whorls' made of bronze have been found at the site. Considering the fact that only two tombs were actually identified in the ground, the high number of 'spindle whorls' must have been symbolically poignant.

They represent a distinctive feature for they have been encountered in only few other sites, but located further to the west in Xinjiang. Similar specimens have been in fact discovered both at Yanbulake (dated to the late 2nd millennium BCE) and at Qunbake in Luntai xian (a site ascribed by many to the Chawuhu culture, early 1st millennium BCE).²⁹¹ Samples can be further detected in the bronze inventory of Central Asian amulets and seals dated to the 2nd millennium BCE in BMAC contexts, which have a similar decorative pattern, although they were more often made of stone rather than bronze.²⁹² A similar bronze plaque with cross-shaped decoration was also found amongst the Saka in eastern Kazakhstan at Uisti Yar.²⁹³ Beside the distinctiveness of the decorative pattern of the spindle whorls, it is interesting to notice the large number unearthed from the site. Their emphasis in burials is somewhat ascertained by their quantity, although their symbolism remains hidden. They may reflect a distinctive role played out by textiles within Yushugou society, possibly as carriers of their own cultural values, since in nomadic societies textiles often depicted poignant scenes drawn from their own cultural history. Yet, since the sex of the deceased is not specified in the report and no textiles as such have been recovered from these two burials, it is impossible to draw any conclusion of the presence and the extent of gender demarcation within the burial context.

Alternatively, these so called 'spindle whorls' might have been used as ornaments for horse and chariot accoutrements, since similar round plaques have been unearthed in southern Siberia together with other horse accessories. Should this be true, the eighty and more roundels unearthed at Yushugou would have been used as complementary ornamentation in the funerary canopy, perhaps symbolising the spoked-wheel of the horse-chariot. Indeed stylised spoked-wheel wooden roundels, reminiscent of Yushugou roundels, were found placed around the edge of the Beiram Saka mound in the Altai mountains (western Mongolia), dated to the 5th century BCE, possibly meant as votive offerings.²⁹⁴ Similar roundels were also noticed incised on rocks about two km east from the mound. What is even more interesting is that similar petroglyphs have been found

²⁹¹ Mei and Shell 1998: 591.

²⁹² Sarianidi 1981:178-9.

²⁹³ Davis Kimball et al 1995.

²⁹⁴ Davis Kimball 2000: 92.

throughout the Northern Zone, often accompanied by the designs of chariots, further confirming their symbolic connotation.²⁹⁵

A vehicle fitting, whose features are no more clearly distinguishable, made of hollow cast bronze and modelled as a recumbent animal, has been also found at Yushugou. It may have formed the ornamental end of the axle in a funerary chariot. Again, similar pole ends have been associated with wheeled vehicles in nomadic burials in the Ordos region of western Inner Mongolia, such as Yulongtai, Waertugou and Sujigou.

Too many are the stylistic matches between Yushugou, Yanglang and Ordos metal repertoires during the mid-late 1st millennium BCE, not to suggest a strong cultural connection between them.

The Yanglang cultural horizon

Several sites in Ningxia share a common cultural substratum with contemporary sites in Gansu, judging by the sort of items found in burial contexts. Weapons in general include antennae-type short swords with confronting birds heads,²⁹⁶ mushroom pommel short swords with a dense nipple design,²⁹⁷ maces, spearheads, crane-beak axes, *ge*-daggers, arrowheads and mortars, all made in bronze. In particular all the antennae short swords found in Guyuan seem to have a superficial knowledge of the motif, depicting the animals in many different ways but always missing some detail, thus suggesting that the pattern was indeed an alien adoption, probably from southern Siberia (Tagar culture). Spear points on the other hand, resemble closely those of neighbouring Qin. Agricultural tools comprise adzes, sickles, and spindle whorls. Adzes seem to have been used to slaughter sacrificial animals, according to material evidence at Caomiao Mengyuan burial site in Ningxia.²⁹⁸ Further more, this very typology, the *fu*-adze, together with the typically Chinese tanged *ge*-dagger, was also quite common in Qin, in Fengxiang County.²⁹⁹ Chariot ornaments are present in the form of bells, horse bits, psalias, plaques, yoke ornaments, bridle strap crossings, button plaques, and pole caps. Some of the psalias bear a surface decoration similar to carved bone, suggesting a prototype in that material and the subsequent translation into bronze. Plaques can be trilobed in shape, or triangular with openwork decoration, key holed or 8-shaped. Personal ornaments include all the other ornamental pieces such as plaques with animal portraits,

²⁹⁵ Cai 1995: 116-117.

²⁹⁶ For a deeper investigation on northern short sword and antennae short sword in particular see Zhai Defang 1988.

²⁹⁷ Often with a bronze hilt and an iron blade: a combination hinting at an early emergence of iron technology in the area

²⁹⁸ Luo and Han 1990: 417.

²⁹⁹ Zhao Congcang 1986.

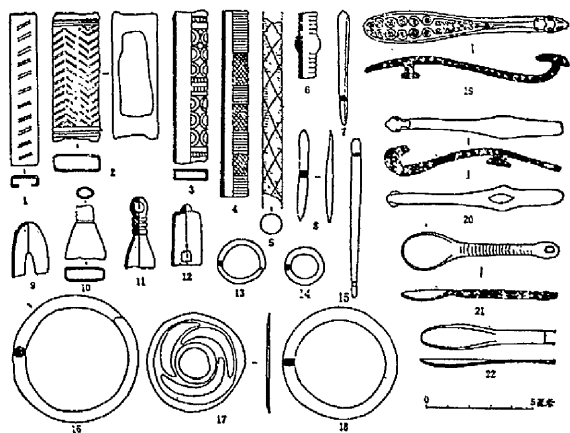
with rows of beads patterns, belt hooks, belt buckles, tubular fittings, ringlets and semi-precious stone beads.

Yanglang Mazhuang

At Yanglang Mazhuang, apart from the extremely large number of beads, bronze plaques (almost eight hundred), iron ornaments and harness accessories represent the majority. Then weapons and tools follow in numerical order. Hence burial gifts were mostly made of bronze and consisted of knives, short swords, crane-beak axes, spear points, awls, horse bits and check pieces (manufactured in bone as well) and belt accessories such as buckles, plaques and appliqués. A few three-pointed arrowheads were found on the surface. Among the utensils, three ladles were found on the surface: the handle is marked with spiral ribbing and a ring finial for suspension, whilst the scoop is elongated. According to the Scythian rite, their function could have been ritual rather than functional, as they were too small to be used, whilst they were probably suspended from the neck with some lost symbolic valence. The shape also finds close counterparts among the assemblage at Maoqinggou. According to the Scythian ritual, small spoons were used in the offerings of *Soma* to the fire.³⁰⁰

³⁰⁰ The god called *Soma* by the ancient Indian, or *Haoma* by the ancient Iranians was the personification of a hallucinogenic plant. The cult was one of the most famous among the Eurasian nomads, consisting in an orgiastic ritual libation of a sacred drink [Farkas et al, 2000: 172].

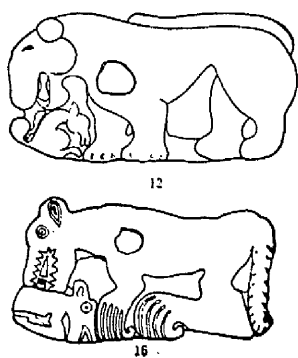
Among the ornaments were found tubular accessories –possibly awl cases- with geometric lines and criss-cross decorations [Fig. 111]. Ornaments such as these have been found also in the Ordos, precisely at Xigoupan and Taohongbala, although the Taohongbala examples would feature more curved designs, at Maoqinggou (Inner Mongolia) and at Yujiazhuang (Ningxia). Among the tubular fittings those with a central bulge and a ridged body were inventoried. Such type of hanging ornament has been



identified throughout the Northern Zone, starting with the earliest one excavated in Shajing contexts. This particular type of hanging ornament is so widespread that it might have been used as trading currency among the nomads, rather than underlining a symbol of ethnic appurtenance.

Fig. 111 Tubular fittings, bells, spoons and belt hooks [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1993: p.31, pl. 17].

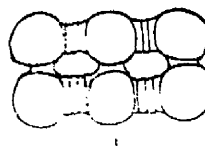
Fourteen belt buckles and eighty-six belt plaques, both depicting animal combats



between a wolf (or a tiger) and a caprid [Fig.112], argali goats, S-shaped geometric arrangements, fox-and-roundels [Fig.115] and many more others [Fig.113] were inventoried together with two belt hooks featuring a sinuous animal shape, with a *yunlei* decoration already seen in metropolitan China, at Zhaoyi.³⁰¹

Fig. 112 Bronze animal plaques depicting a tiger devouring a small prey [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1993: p.33, pl. 19,12,16].

Fig. 113 Rows of beads bronze repoussé plaque [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1993: p.42, pl. 20,12].



³⁰¹ Shaanxi sheng Bowuguan 1978.

One small openwork plaque in particular shows a stag with stylised antlers mounting a standing doe who turns back to look at the stag [Fig. 114]. The stag's antlers are shown

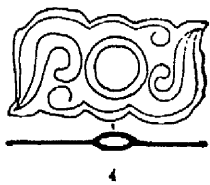


as a row of tangent circles. Although both animals are presented in profile, both ears of the doe are portrayed, whilst circular holes form the eyes of both deer. The scene is a stereotypical motif, as even slightly different versions are always shown in the same pose.

Fig.114 Copulating deer plaque [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo1995:p.94, pl.15.2].

One such example has been discovered in the Chifeng region of south-eastern Inner Mongolia, another in Luanping xian, northern Hebei,³⁰² whilst another similar plaque was found attached to a short chain terminating in a typical Chinese swivel system. Indeed the majority of such plaques, portraying copulating animals would belong to the imagistic system of the agricultural societies to the east of the Taihang mountains. The Ningxia

plaque would represent an exception and might have been imported from the eastern regions.



Some of the ring buckles present hooks in the form of recumbent deer with their heads turned back. In general the motifs and shapes encountered here partially recall artefacts from the Ordos region and Maoqinggou.



Fig. 115 S-shaped and 'fox and roundels' plaques in bronze [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1993: p.33, pl.19.4,9].

Well over five hundred chariot ornaments were counted, including horse bridles and ornaments, chariot fittings and decorations. Among these are plain round *jie yue*, just a few horse bits and psalias, (both found in the same tomb), and various round-shaped and keyhole-shaped plaques used in the accoutrement of the horse. Among this typically

nomadic inventory some cone-shaped pole bases decorated with Chinese motifs were also brought to light [Fig.116]. These bases were probably fixed to the chariot and provided the support for vertical standards.

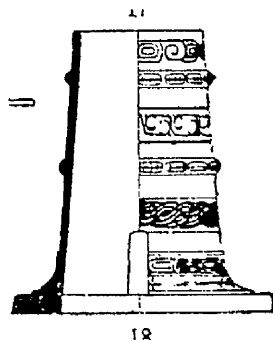
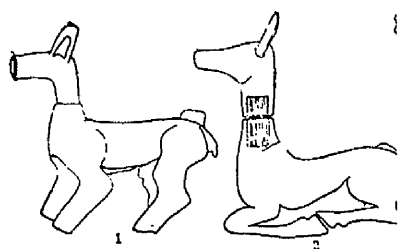


Fig. 116 Pole base with Chinese decorative patterns [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1993: p.38, pl.22.18].

Bronze yoke ornaments in the shape of a caprid (mostly rams

³⁰² So 1997: pl.71, p. 166.

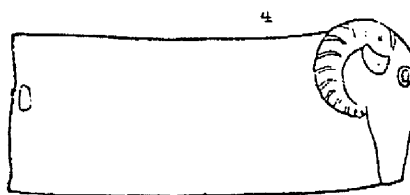
and does) are closely similar to those unearthed in the Ordos region, but also possibly to the one unearthed at Yushugou, providing a link between the two. Certain bronze items bear decorative patterns distinctive of the region (similar in fact to Yushugou repertoire), depicting animals such as sheep, deer, and wolves either recumbent or more rarely standing. The animal shaped yoke ornaments are in fact similar to those unearthed in the Ordos area, but with the slight difference of having the ends of the muzzle open and a detachable head [figs.117-118].³⁰³ Ringlets, bells, bracelets and earrings were also



included in the assemblage. In particular earrings made of gold were found in the inventories. Indeed gold at Mazhuang is quite conspicuous: ring-shaped earrings, some with pendants, a string of beads and a gourd-shaped golden flat sheet have been found.

Fig. 117 Bronze deer with open muzzle [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1993: p.42, pl. 20.1-2].

Fig. 118 Yoke ornament similar to those unearthed at Waertugou, in Ordos [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1993: p.38, pl. 22.5].



Silver ornaments, including five earrings in ring shape and with pendants [Fig.119], plus twenty-six beads, have been found. Silver is still quite rare at this stage in the Northern Zone, until the 4th c. BCE when artisans at Aluchaideng, in the Ordos area, will exploit it further.

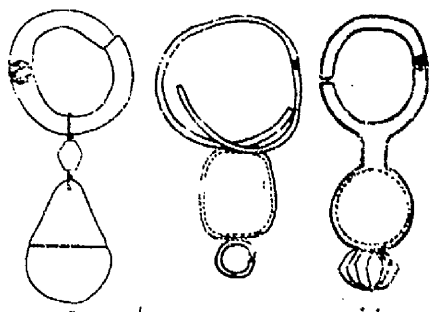
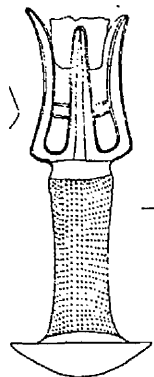


Fig. 119 From left to right: gold earring with foil pendant, gold earring with gold bead pendant and silver pendant earring [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1993: p.48, pl.28.7, 14, 8].

Thirty-six iron items have been excavated, comprising various artefacts of different nature. Weapons in the form of swords and a spearhead, tools in the shape of knives, an awl, a chisel and horse gear including a horse bit and a cheek pieces, plus some personal ornaments (thirteen plaques, six ringlets and a bracelet) were inventoried.

³⁰³ Yan Shizhong 1994 : 94

A bronze mushroom-pommelled short sword with iron blade is among the excavated swords (as in other sites of the Gansu and Ningxia), reflecting a deep knowledge of iron-



smithing [Fig.120]. In fact, almost identical pommelled short swords bearing an iron blade have been found again in Ningxia, Guyuan xian Pengpu area, at Yujiazhuang³⁰⁴ and at Jiaowa,³⁰⁵ in Xiji xian at Chenyangchuan³⁰⁶ and in Gansu.³⁰⁷ It is interesting to notice that this kind of sword with iron blade seems to be of a unique model throughout the region, with little variants among them. Such conservative attitude and uniqueness in manufacture would suggest a symbolic and ethnic connotation.

Fig. 120 Short sword with bronze hilt and iron blade [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1993: p.29, pl.16.6]

Pengpu Yujiazhuang

The very extended burial site at Pengpu Yujiazhuang may represent a sort of 'type-site' for the multitude of sites scattered in Guyuan xian and neighbouring counties of Ningxia province.³⁰⁸ Here, almost seven hundred metal pieces have been unearthed in total, including short swords, one *ge*-halberd, *mao* spearheads, knives, arrow heads, two crane-beak axes, two adzes, sickles, awls, horse bits and bridle bits, round pole finials, tubular hanging ornaments, plaques, over a hundred round plaques, ringlet belt buckles, only one belt hook, one bell, bell-shaped pendants, and deer-shaped yoke ornaments.

Amongst the pole finials, two feature a bird head sculpture [Fig.121], very similar to the one unearthed at Yongdeng Yushugou in Gansu province, and also encountered at Touyingxiang Pingle site in Guyuan xian.

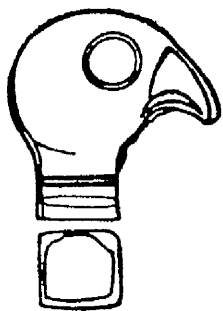


Fig.121 Pole finial [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1995: p.90, pl. 12.5].

Among the plaques, various (almost a hundred) are depicting birds in S-shaped arrangements, or rows of beads, or abstract motifs, which may have derived from previous bird depictions. On the other hand, single examples of other animals' depictions

³⁰⁴ Yan Shizhong 1994.

³⁰⁵ Luo Feng 1993b.

³⁰⁶ Luo Feng 1993b: 21.

³⁰⁷ Liu and Xu 1988.

³⁰⁸ Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1995.

have been encountered: only one plaque depicting two deer and another with the head of a horse, and one with a snake were found. Roundel plaques have been found copiously and some 'fox-heads' as well [Fig.122].



Fig. 122 Fox plaques [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1995: p.94, pl.153-4].

Pointed frontal animal heads, resembling a fox, alone or arranged in a row with rosettes have been unearthed in Yanglang zone in Gansu province, at Taohongbala in the Ordos and at Maoqinggou in Inner Mongolia. Given the large number of similar specimens placed around the body of the deceased, it can be argued that these plaques would have been worn as garment and belt ornaments. Similar garment plaques were in fact used for the golden man at Issyk, in Kazakhstan. This evidence would point to a consistent fashion originated in the west.



Solitary snake depictions are indeed quite a rarity in the northwestern sector of the Northern Zone. Apart from the long rectangular plaque made of gold foil unearthed at Xigoupan that features two intertwining long snakes, these animals were often depicted in animal combat scenes with raptor birds and wolves, but rarely as individual subjects.³⁰⁹ Several tinned bronze plaques with snakes and wolves in combats or intertwined are found prevalently in assemblages from Ningxia, datable roughly 5th-4th c. BCE, suggesting a localised production, strongly influenced by the local ecosystem [Fig.123].

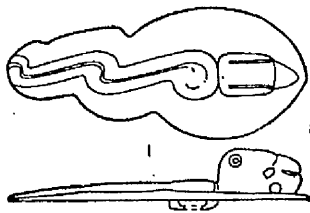
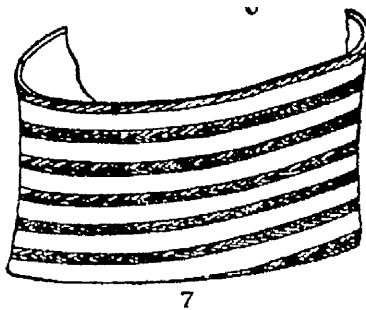


Fig. 123 Snake plaque [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1995: p. 95, pl. 16].



Another unique artefact is the tinned bronze bracelet with a distinctive decorative pattern comprising seven orders of horizontal bands [Fig.124] in a style reminiscent of counterparts found in Qin burials of the 5th-4th c. BCE.³¹⁰ This stylistic affinity could suggest a connection between the nomads of Ningxia and the Qin centres further south.

Fig. 124 Bronze bracelet [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1995: p. 97, pl. 17.7].

³⁰⁹ Tian and Guo 1986: 357, fig 5.1.

³¹⁰ Ningxia Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1995: 79-108.

Conclusions

From the analysis of the above sites, it is evident that along the southern foothills of the Tianshan, in the valleys of the middle Tianshan and the Turfan basin, several closely interconnected sites, such as Aidinghu, Alagou, Yanghai and Subeixi exhibited numerous stylistic affinities and burial analogies, as well as, to different levels, influxes from the Scythian world to the west in the Semireč'e and Minusinsk areas. Not only did they experience more or less direct influence from Scythian groups, but also possibly transmitted certain Saka-Scythians ideas and motifs further east via trading routes all along the Northern Zone. The presence of a 'Mongolian' plaque in the Hami basin would point to a migration from the north-east, whilst the presence of Scythians motifs and gold-smithing techniques, such as loop-in-loop chains and granulations, in the Ordos would confirm the geographical extent of the eastward transmission of western inputs.

One major issue about these archaeological sites is their ethnic attribution. By arguing that ethnic affinity is indeed based on the self recognition, at both a conscious and subconscious level, of similar habitual dispositions which are embodied in the cultural practices and social relations in which people are engaged,³¹¹ its relationship with material culture styles is also conceivable as shifting according to time and place, to the extent that distributions of material culture, product of a similar acculturative milieu –or common *habitus*-, would not necessarily define the boundaries of self-conscious ethnic groups in the past.³¹² In this respect, configurations of ethnicity, and consequently the styles of material culture involved in the structuring of ethnic relations, may vary in different social contexts and with relation to different forms and scales of social interaction. Yet the way in which styles of material culture are meaningfully involved in the articulation of ethnicity is not arbitrary within a particular socio-historical context. Ethnic symbolism is generated to varying degrees from the existing cultural practices and modes of differentiation, such as gender and status differentiation, or the organisation of the domestic space.³¹³ Through the analysis of material evidence, which indeed is now recognised to play an active role in the generation of ethnicity,³¹⁴ specific modes of social interaction may be highlighted.

Thus an adequate knowledge of these sites past social organisation, detecting different modes of social interaction and the distribution of material and symbolic power between groups of people could help to recognise expression of ethnic affiliation. So far the data available for these regions are mainly constituted by burials and related inventories, and

³¹¹ Jones 1997: ch.5.

³¹² Shenman 1989:19.

³¹³ Jones 1997: 125.

consequently the interpretation of any presumed social constructs is filtered –if not manipulated- by a series of epistemological limitations pertaining the interpretation of funerary material, of which one should always be aware. At this stage one may only pinpoint the commonalities of cultural expression in terms of material culture (pottery, metal ornaments and horse riding equipment). Indeed the high status position of certain women in death could reflect a specific mode of social interaction, pertaining the recognition of ethnicity. Yet the data available so far are too scarce and fragmentary to provide a more definite picture of local societies.

Some scholars have argued that whilst Alagou II would be associated to the Saka, Alagou I, Aidinghu, Yanghai would belong to the so-called Jushi people.³¹⁵ Indeed these denominations are based on historical records, which are relative in space and time. Indeed if the site of Jiaohe in the Turfan basin and its close-by cemeteries at Gouxu and Goubei are generally conceived as the remains of the Jushi people,³¹⁶ one cannot help but noticing that many of the golden artefacts unearthed seem to betray a Scythian prototype, again linking it with the Saka. Golden repoussé plaques with griffons attacking tigers, typical Scythian bowl handles in the shape of three-dimensional deer made of folded golden foil and granules, handled mirrors and bone artefacts carved and incised in the style already encountered in southern Siberian kurgans would strongly suggest a cultural stimulus from the north-west. Furthermore, apparently golden plaques in the shape of tigers, camels, birds and deer were inlaid on big copper vessels, following the Scythian custom. This technique would also be strongly reminiscent of inlaid pictorial bronzes of metropolitan China during the Warring States period, when cut-out copper silhouettes of tigers would be inlaid on a bronze *hu*-vase, in an arrangement sometimes described as a 'pseudo-combat'.³¹⁷

At the end it seems that Scythian cultural influence did permeate most of ancient Xinjiang during the early Iron Age, both directly and indirectly. Their presence is strongly attested in the Yili, Tianshan and Turfan areas by several sites datable to the Warring States period. Xinjiang played a pivotal role in the transmission of western influxes to the Northern Zone, which in turn worked as a filter for China. It is probably in this way that several ideas including some refined metallurgical techniques like gold repoussé' works, inlays, granulation and loop-in-loop chains and possibly iron-smithing, reached the Central Plains. These centres were in close contact with both neighbouring and distant cultures, and these cultures may have inspired some of the significant changes that took

³¹⁴ Jones 1997: 126.

³¹⁵ Mei 2000: 24.

³¹⁶ Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1998.

³¹⁷ Jacobson 1988.

place in Xinjiang during the 1st millennium BCE, such as pastoral nomadism and the emergence of horse riding shown by finds of horse bits and cheek pieces, the emergence of iron, the introduction of new bronze forms such as the socketed dagger-axe (from Tagar culture), handled mirrors, footed trays and tripods (from the Saka horizon), the increasing use of gold and silver, the technique of tinning and the importation of exotic goods such as silk and lacquer ware from metropolitan China, and carnelian beads from India.

Chapter 5

Wood, Bone, Leather and Textiles

Following Cribb's conception of nomadic material culture,¹ material evidence unearthed all along the northwestern border of China, although not entirely and definitely classified as 'nomadic', could nevertheless be equally analysed in ethnographic terms according to three main dimensions, which have been partially examined in the previous pages: the first dimension concerns the relationship between permanent items of the site (such as tomb structure and residential site furniture, which are indeed found to be more regional-specific) and items circulated from a site to another (small portable objects, which instead seem often to transcend regional boundaries); the second dimension considers the differences between valuable, difficult to replace or acquire items (such as precious trade items or symbolically important objects) versus expendable, easy to replace and acquire items (hence discarded, such as pottery handmade vessels).

The third dimension takes into consideration material culture in terms of durability and perish-ability: items made of non-organic and durable materials (such as metal artefacts) vis-à-vis those made of organic, hence deteriorating media (such as wool, leather, wood and bone). This dimension particularly affects the investigation of past material cultures. Highly perishable materials would have been constantly renewed -produced- closely following contemporary styles and needs, hence closely mirroring contemporary parameters for ethnic affiliation. However, perishable materials are less likely to materialise in the archaeological record since they deteriorate fast. Especially during the first millennium BCE, when movable herders emerged at the borders of China, burial inventories related to the Scythian horizon theoretically would have included a large array of items made of wood, birch bark, leather, wool and felt garments which have seldom been preserved to the present. Thanks to particular geo-physical conditions, some of these perishable items have survived to the present in few sites belonging to the Northern Zone, a great majority coming from the desert-oases of Xinjiang. The inventories included prevalently wooden articles, bone ornaments (excluding the large amount of sacrificed animal skulls) and various types of woven textiles and leather garments.

¹ Cribb 1991.

Wood

The earliest wooden articles excavated from a burial context within the Northern Zone complex come from Gansu and Xinjiang and date back to the mid to late 2nd millennium BCE. Their preservation might be due to the climatic conditions and soil composition of

the Hexi corridor in Gansu and the Hami basin in Xinjiang. Yet it is curious that the first instances of wooden articles would come from two culturally linked archaeological areas such as Huoshaogou and Yanbulake. However, we cannot exclude *a priori* that other sites further to the east, in the Ordos and Shaanxi-Shanxi areas, would not have originally included wooden artefacts in their inventories, only because of the current absence of material evidence.



Simple wooden burial furniture was apparently excavated from Jiuquan Ganguya, found in tombs datable to the 19th-16th c. BCE.² Unfortunately, the decayed state of the wooden specimens prevented their identification. It is also noteworthy to stress that fact that tombs at Ganguya also exhibited a wooden board cover and thus, decayed wooden specimens might actually have collapsed from the roof rather than intentionally placed as 'furniture'.



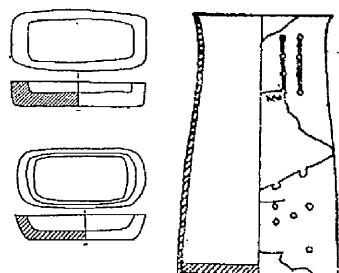
Fig. 1 Wooden figurines from Yanbulake [Mair and Mallory 2000: fig 62, p. 141]

Instead, the nine wooden figurines from Hami Yanbulake undoubtedly were intentionally made for burial purposes.³ The 'dolls' [Fig.1], clearly demarcated as male or female, ranging from 12 to 22.4 cm high, were carved out of one unique piece with precise anatomical details featuring a long pronounced nose, evident genitalia and breasts and quite long legs with no feet at all. Some of them still retained part of their overall garment: some male figurines were wearing a pointed felt cap and a fur coat with a woollen rope on the upper body, whilst the lower part was covered by brown-reddish woollen trousers in plain weave, completed by leather shoes. At the waist, the male dolls wore a leather belt on which three leather cases containing one portable bronze knife, a bronze awl with wooden handle and another carving knife with wooden handle were attached. On the other hand, female figurines would only wear a plain weave red long skirt wrapped with white, yellow and brown woollen cords, completed by two small leather shoes. The way these figurines were dressed possibly reflected contemporary fashion at Yanbulake, at the same time suggesting a western input in the style of the garments. In fact, most of

² Li Shuicheng 1993: 90.

³ Sun and Cao 1996: 8-10.

the desiccated corpses found in the Tarim basin exhibit similar choice of fur, woollen plain weave fabrics and felt caps, as well as similar colour combinations.⁴ Curiously enough, five wooden figurines were also unearthed from Gumugou along the Kongque River in the Lopnor area of the Taklamakan desert, some of them still wearing fragment of textiles and showing clearly the signs of a sharp carving knife.⁵ The site has been dated around 1800 BCE, being considered the earliest cemetery found so far in Xinjiang, hence earlier than Yanbulake, whose people are allegedly affiliated to the Andronovo culture of southern Siberia.⁶ However, the absence of anthropomorphic depictions in three dimensions among the Andronovians would suggest a local invention. Another site nearby, dated to the Iron Age period (4th c. BCE), Ordek also yielded wooden figurines comprising a man and two women with alleged proto-Europoid physiognomy, confirming the continuity through time of the same carving tradition.⁷ Another site, Jiaohe Gouxu cemetery in Turfan basin, datable to the 3rd c. BCE has yielded a number of very simple wooden figurines constituted by one single piece (a cylindrical body with a round-shaped head and no limbs) of carved wood. Intaglio lines on the head and colourful pigments were used to convey the shape of the eyes, the nose and the mouth.⁸ Indeed a similar carving tradition emerged in the Chu state of southern China (Hubei and Hunan provinces) at around the same time. Here colourful wooden figurines, sometimes with detachable limbs, richly dressed with fabric garments, were produced throughout the



Warring States period. Although very tempting, a connection between the two traditions seem quite difficult to prove, lacking the intermediary geographic links.

Fig. 2 Wooden articles from Hamadun cemetery [Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1990: 223, fig 17]

Rectangular wooden trays, arrow shafts and cylindrical containers have been found buried sporadically in graves belonging to the Shajing cultural horizon dated to the early 1st millennium BCE in the Gansu corridor.⁹ In particular, the three trays discovered at Hamadun [Fig.2], carved out of single wooden blocks¹⁰, were symbolically arranged close to the head of the deceased or just behind it. They contained the remains of goat and sheep meat, thus serving a ritualistic purpose. This custom might recall similar arrangement of wooden vessels with food among the

⁴ Such as the Qiemo Zahongluke group, or the so-called beauty of Loulan, the woman from the Gumugou cemetery along the Kongque river [Barber 1999, Mallory and Mair 2000].

⁵ Mallory and Mair 2000: 139.

⁶ Han Kangxin 1986: 361-84.

⁷ Li Xiaobing 1995: p. 50, fig 78 and Mallory and Mair 2000: 148.

⁸ Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al, 1998: pl 44.1,2,3,10, p. 56].

⁹ Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1990: 205-37.

Scythians of the Altai Mountains (8th-6th c. BCE), although a direct connection is hard to substantiate. On the other hand, cylindrical vessels were constructed with a single thin birch bark bent board and a circular board as base. Furthermore, all of them were recovered from catacomb shaped burials, hinting at a different burial attitude and possibly a specific ethnic group. Wood was also used to manufacture cases for bronze knives, secured with leather strings, in manner also encountered among the peoples of southern Siberia.

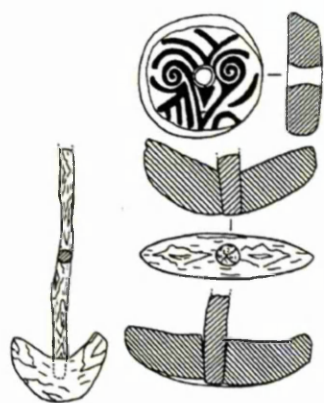


Fig. 3 Carved spindle whorls from cemetery IV at Chawuhu [Wang Mingzhe 1999: fig 103, p. 149]

In Xinjiang during roughly the same period of time, other trays, vessels and cups, together with carved spindle whorls, lighting bars, bows and arrows were found in the Chawuhu complex (Hejing xian) and the associated Qunbake cemetery in Luntai xian. The inventories were quite rich of wooden articles (more than two hundred items in total). Trays are indeed similar to the Shajing counterparts, long, rectangular and shallow. However, in this context also small *bei*-cups with a single loop-handle were discovered. Their shape in this case must have been inspired by contemporary ceramic models, which are extremely popular in Chawuhu. On the other hand, rectangular shallow trays are extremely close in shape to examples from the Tagar culture in the Minusinsk basin of southern Siberia. Noteworthy are the twenty-three spindle whorls [Fig.3] with carved decoration on top and their own wooden stick unearthed at cemetery IV, reflecting a distinctive production, both for the high perishable nature of the material and the unusual decoration partly resembling southern Siberian wooden carvings. Practically identical spindle whorls have been excavated at Zahongluke site in Qiemo xian (M2, M5) on the northern slopes of the Kunlun Mountains.¹¹ As in the case of Zahongluke, textile industry must have been quite developed in Chawuhu cultural context, as various woollen samples have been brought to light from the tombs both at Chawuhu and Qunbake. In addition to these distinctive objects, wood was also used to manufacture handles for bronze awls, a combination (wooden handle and bronze finial) quite diffused along the Northern Zone.

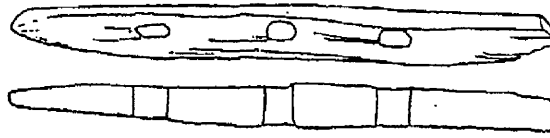
Not very far away from Chawuhu, further to the east in the Hami basin, beakers and small fragments (fire drilling bars) carved from wood have been found at Wupushuiku

¹⁰ Li Shuicheng 1994: 498.

¹¹ Urumqi 1999: 44.

(9th-6th c. BCE) a site traditionally considered the lowest limit of Yanbulake cultural horizon.

Fig. 4 Wooden psalias found at Wupushuiku [Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1992: fig 5.2, p. 115]



Apart from the five cylindrical beakers, whose manufacture recalls those found at Chawuhu, to the side of one of the male occupants in M151 one elongated bar with three longitudinal perforations was found [Fig.4].¹² At a close analysis, excavators agreed in identifying the piece as a unique example of wooden three-holed horse *psalias*. Other horse cheek pieces have been found inside the complex, although prevalently made of bone or bronze. Such discovery would also encourage speculations on the absence of horse harness equipments in certain archaeological areas due to their manufacture in perishable materials, which would not have survived elsewhere. The primitive examples found at Wupushuiku would reflect an early stage in the development of horse riding equipment. These types of bar cheek pieces were not particularly reliable for controlling the horse and probably were used only on draught animals, although sporadically shepherds may have used them for riding purposes.¹³ This type of *psalias* was indeed invented during the late 2nd millennium BCE and to find it here, in a site datable to the 1st millennium BCE, could signal a slow development of horse harnesses and horse riding practise in Wupushuiku environment.

At the same site, a tripartite disk wheel made of Euphrates poplar wood was discovered [Fig.5], showing close affinities with wheels found in Eastern Europe during the 2nd millennium BCE.¹⁴ Such discovery may provide evidence for the usage of wagons, a type of vehicle common among the Andronovo people. The large disk wheels were possibly used for the first type of wheeled vehicles. It was certainly invented earlier than the spoke wheel, with which coexisted for quite some time (2000-1600 BCE). The occupants of the tombs have been considered as belonging to the proto-Europoid group, with light hair and large noses. The hands, arms and upper backs of some of the tomb owners revealed traces of tattoos, an aesthetic practice encountered slightly later (5th-4th c. BCE) among the occupants of some of the Pazyryk kurgans in southern Siberia. A number of small wooden tables and trays found at Wupushuiku are also reminiscent of Pazyryk inventories, further suggesting a connection between the two areas.

¹² Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1992.

¹³ Bokovenko 2000: 304-7.

Fig. 5 Disc wheel [Mair and Mallory 2000: p. 143, fig 64]



During the second half of the 1st millennium BCE, a number of sites prevalently located in Xinjiang yielded quite a few objects made of wood. For instance, at Dongfengchang, a site generally associated to the Alagou I horizon, wooden objects were mainly constituted by *pen*-trays, *pan*-vessels and *shao*-ladles, spindle whorls, combs and fire drill sticks, all engraved and carved with designs comparable to southern Siberia examples, from the Pazyryk and Bash-Adar complexes.¹⁵ Rectangular and oval shallow trays, as already mentioned, were extremely popular among the Tagar people of Southern Siberia. Indeed both trays and spoons might have been very common among the majority of the cattle-breeders of southern Siberia. Ladles in particular might have reflected a Scythian practice of ritual libation in the *Soma-Haoma* cult. Many spoons with their handles finely carved with curvilinear intaglio lines and zoomorphic figures have been found throughout Central Asia and associated with the Scythian horizon. Along the Northern zone, in particular, several small bronze ladles and spoons have been unearthed from burial contexts datable to the mid 1st millennium BCE, implying their ritual connotation. However, most of the examples coming from Northern Zone sites are of very small dimensions, suggesting that they might have been symbolically suspended from the neck, rather than practically used to pour the sacred potion.

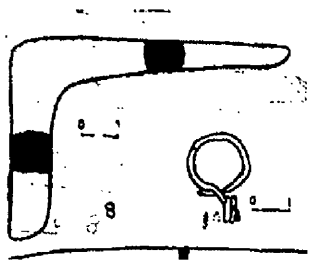
At the Hanqigou site in Hami basin, inventories would partially reflect the last Yanbulake cultural influence and partially the close connection with sites further to the east. The burial assemblages would this time include only few wooden objects and prevalently wooden cases for awls and daggers. Wooden cases for daggers have already been mentioned in the context of Shajing sites (early 1st millennium BCE), where wooden cases for bronze daggers were wrapped with leather strings. In general wooden cases for awls and sheaths for daggers can be considered extremely common during the Bronze Age period both in northwestern China and in southern Siberia, among the Scythians of the Altai Mountains.¹⁶

¹⁴ Mei 2000.

¹⁵ Ma and Wang 1994.

¹⁶ Davis-Kimball et al 1995: 289.

Fig. 6 Wooden 'boomerang' or sickle and bronze earring from Subeixi [Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1993: fig 8.8-9].



The last site yielding wooden articles within the northwestern sector of the Northern Zone is again located in Xinjiang. Subeixi in Shanshan county is indeed not very far from Alagou, being situated a bit further to the east in the Turfan basin. As such it reflected certain cultural influxes from the Alagou cultural horizon. Yet the discovery of pointed caps and various types of textiles reflects a unique flavour. On the other hand, here again the inventories included containers and utensils made of wood such as cups, beakers and ladles, similarly to Alagou I and Dongfengchang sites, plus a strange object, looking like a boomerang [Fig.6]. A similar wooden angular object was indeed found at Wupushuiku and identified by the excavators as a 'flying object'.¹⁷ In addition to these items, psalms made of wood were also found. They were placed at the side of the deceased, further attesting the importance and ritual connotation played out by the practice of horse riding among these people.

From the material evidence collected so far in Xinjiang and Gansu provinces, certain wooden typologies seem to repeat themselves throughout the territory. Square trays and cylindrical beakers, drilling utensils and dagger sheaths were indeed widespread. The stylistic similarities with Andronovo and later southern Siberia groups of the Scythian horizon would certainly confirm continuity in cultural contacts between these regions. Cultural contacts might have actually happened following different modalities, ranging from subsequent waves of demic migrations to trading negotiations.

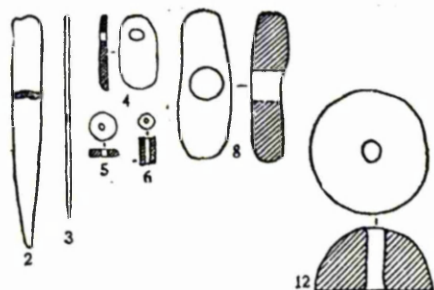
Bone

This survey would only briefly mention sacrificial animal bones placed in burial contexts; rather it will focus on bone specimens on which the hand of a carver is explicitly evident. The earliest evidence along the northwestern border of China would come from Tianshanbeilu site (Yalinban) of the Yanbulake culture (19th-12th c. BCE) in Xinjiang [Fig.7].¹⁸ From here and from the major site of Yanbulake, various bone ornaments have been excavated, including mainly ornaments and small implements such as awls and needles, spindle whorls and pins. Ornaments included polished oval shaped plaques with a central perforation that may have been used as buttons or garment appliqués, whilst the white bone beads were possibly elements of a necklace. Sheep astragali

¹⁷ Liu and Qi 1997: fig 43, p. 22.

¹⁸ Dates are according to Mei 2000: table 2.3, p 85.

bones have been found conspicuously, especially in relation to infant burials. Astragali, the anklebones from various animals (sheep, mountain goat, antelope and several bovine) must have been a highly nutritious part of the animal, as they contained the bone marrow. Indeed even nowadays Mongols would crack open and suck out the marrow in sheep bones. Current practice would thus provide ethnographic evidence that might be applied to archaeological material, not only in Mongolia but also in areas with similar eco-systems. By being a highly nutritious aliment, astragali were probably considered a precious source of food, particularly suitable for growing young children. This could explain the prevalence of astragali in children burials. Astragali have been found in great quantities at the Beiram Mound site in the Altai region of western Mongolia. The mound, specifically designed as a cultic or religious site may have belonged to the Saka macro-culture, thus dating back to the 5th c. BCE. At this site astragali represented the most dominant votive artefacts among the more than 4000 votive-type artefacts excavated.



Their amulet function is sometimes reinforced by the incision of a swastika sign, a symbol frequently found carved on rocks, and already encountered on previous Andronovo-related pottery.¹⁹

Fig. 7 Bone ornaments from Yanbulake [Xinjiang Junge'er ziqu wenhuading wenwuchu 1989: 348, pl.26]

Contemporary to Yanbulake, Siba-Huoshagou sites in Gansu have yielded small utensils of the same range encountered at Yanbulake, i.e. awls, needles, spindle whorls, together with a small flat wand [Fig.8], a curved tooth pendant and a sheep scapula. In general bone artefacts are confined to small utensils that might have been employed in the textile manufacture and do not include ornamental accessories, differently from Yanbulake.

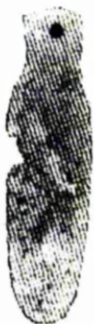


Fig. 8 Bone wand from Donghuishan [Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1998: pl XVII 10]

Quite a large number of bone artefacts have been unearthed from the sites associated with the Shajing cultural horizon, datable to the first half of the first millennium BCE. Among the objects, wands, curved chisels, tri-lobed arrowheads, small cylindrical beads, perforated plaques and also a bow fragment represent the most significant findings at Sanjiaocheng residential site.

¹⁹ Davis-Kimball 2000: 89-95.

For the most part, the objects were carved out of the animal's antlers, limbs or thorax, generally from an ovine (sheep or goat), and then polished. Apart from one single 8-shaped plaque featuring incised crossed lines on the surface, most of the objects present a plain surface, sometimes polished and bearing single or double perforations possibly for hanging (as in the case of the small wand) [Fig.9].

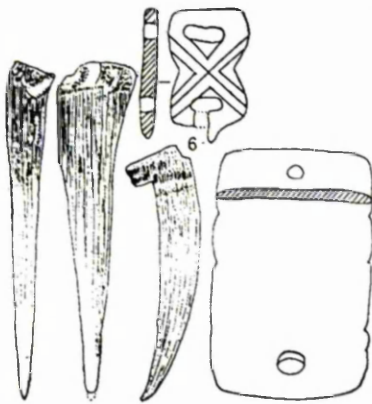
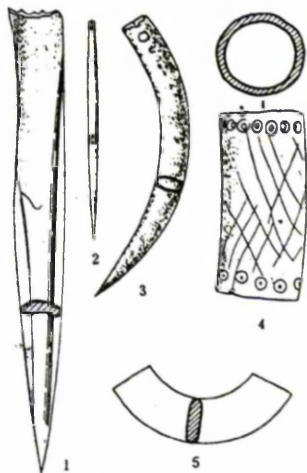


Fig. 9 Bone ornaments (plaques and pendants) from Sanjiaocheng site [Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1990: pl. 10, p. 215]

Curved pendants have also been excavated from neighbouring Xindian cultural contexts extending in Gansu and Qinghai provinces. They present a single perforation on one extremity, suggesting they would somehow hang from the neck. At Shanjiatou, for



instance bone items such as awls, needles, tubular and circular necklace beads and curved pendants were brought to light [Fig.10]. In particular, beads and tubular ornaments both made of bone and bronze were found mainly in one specific burial pit (M16), placed around the neck of the deceased, hence confirming their use as elements of an ornamental necklace. It is noteworthy to observe that in the case of Shanjiatou specimens, some would feature quite a simple but effective surface decoration composed by bands of little roundels.²⁰

Fig. 10 Bone and jade artefacts unearthed at Shanjiatou, Qinghai province [Qinghai sheng wenwu guanlichu 1992: fig 17, p. 30]

Around the same time, during the first half of the 1st millennium BCE, several artefacts made of bone were manufactured within the Chawuhu cultural horizon [Fig.11]. Both at Hejing Chawuhu and Luntai Qunbake complexes, inventories comprised items already encountered throughout Gansu like simple spindle whorls, arrowheads, tubular fittings, pendants, buttons, but also quite distinctive articles such as combs and most importantly horse bridle bits.

²⁰ Interesting enough, similar pointed roundels are also incised on a bone cylinder from Luntai Qunbake (Chawuhu cultural horizon).



Fig. 11 Bone bridle bits from Chawuhu [Wang Mingzhe 1999: 100,9,10,11,12].

Bridle bits made of bone were quite widespread throughout Central Asia during the early Bronze Age period, from the mid 2nd millennium BCE onwards. As already argued for the wooden psalms unearthed at Wupushuiku in the Hami basin, this type of simple vertical barred cheek piece was most probably intended for draught animals although they may have seldom been used for riding. In particular cheek pieces in the shape of a pendant drop were quite widespread during the Scythian period in the Tuva area (Arzhan kurgan: 9th-7th c. BCE), when horse riding was already quite established. The co-presence of several bronze and some iron horse bits with stirrup ends would further suggest that horse riding was already well established within Chawuhu.

Turning to some of the accessories included in the inventory, one comb [Fig.12] found at cemetery 1 could be indeed compared with a similar specimen found at Wupushuiku in the Hami area. The carving on the latter represents what it looks like a goat with large antlers in profile. It is also interesting to notice that both sites exhibit similar burial customs (body posture and pit structure) and apparent common racial type (proto-Europoid). Indeed bone combs were often part of the toilet articles included in burial assemblages in southern Siberia during the Scythian period. Combs found in kurgans of the Tuva area in southern Siberia for instance were quite elongated and the finials were decorated with a flame, a zigzag or a zoomorphic design, frequently comprising the depiction of a goat.²¹

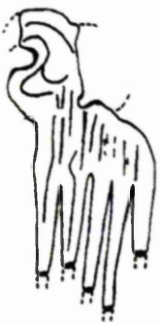


Fig. 12 Bone comb from Chawuhu [Wang Mingzhe 1999: fig 165.9, p. 219]

The unique bone animal finial 'awl' discovered at Qunbake represents another curious article.²² Its shape indeed resembles items variously

²¹ Davis Kimball et al 1995: 275.

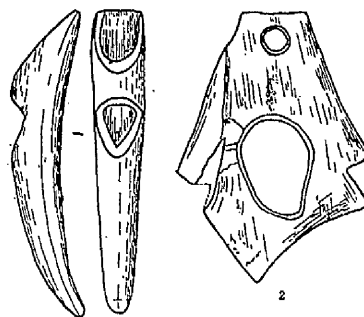
²² See Fig.49, Chapter 4.

labelled 'awls' or 'harness accessories' found among the Scythian cultures of the Minusinsk basin of southern Siberia (Karasuk and Tagar cultures). It is interesting to notice that similarly shaped artefacts were quite widespread in the Bactrio-Margiana Archaeological Complex (2000-1750 BCE), although they were conceived as perfume dispensers and were usually found inserted in ceramic containers. Indeed the same animal depiction is somewhat unique within the Northern zone Complex: a standing animal (possibly a lion, certainly not a caprid) with its head raised would be reminiscent of Middle Eastern depictions, rather than southern Siberian portraits.

Not very far from Chawuhu, at the slightly later site of Mulei xian Sidaogou, bone inventories mostly included similar artefacts: tanged arrowheads, needles, spindle whorls, combs and awls. Toys made of astragali and various other ornaments are on the other end distinctive of this site. In particular, sheep astragali bones have been unearthed from all layers at Sidaogou. Excavators agreed in considering them a sort of children constructive pastime, basing their theory on ethnographic examples.²³ Should this idea been confirmed, the astragali finds in children burials at Yanbulake site could also be interpreted as 'burial toys', so to speak, more in line with the function apparently played by astragali in Saka contexts (like at the Beiram Saka cultic complex).

During the second half of the 1st millennium BCE other sites further to the east started to yield a certain number of bone items. In the case of the Liangcheng Maoqinggou complex in Inner Mongolia burial inventories prevalently included tri-lobed tanged arrowheads, small plaques with perforations and bone tools in the shape of a horn with two perforations [Fig.13], their usage still uncertain.

Fig. 13 Bone tool from Maoqinggou [Tian and Guo 1986: pl 48.1, p. 286]



It is also important to notice that a large number of bronze cylindrical cases perhaps used for awls have been excavated from various sites scattered along the upper bent of the Yellow River, in the Ordos steppe land, and in particular from Maoqinggou. These cases feature a surface ornamentation, which would betray a prototype in much softer medium, i.e. bone or wood. Indeed bone cases and plates have been excavated throughout Central Asia, as part of long-standing tradition of bone carving. Thus Maoqinggou bronze examples could represent the final elaboration of these carved objects from Central Asia.

²³ Yang Yiyong 1982: 126.

When focusing our attention on the Ordos complex, datable to the mid first millennium BCE, Taohongbala site would represent the best example: bone and horn artefacts found at the site included bridle strap guides and other small ornaments (beads), plus an obscure object made of horn found at the upper left corner in a burial (M2). Unfortunately the piece is not properly illustrated, but from the sketched plan of the tomb, it may actually have been a sort of ritual beaker (*rython*) although seemingly small in size. In general when compared with the large amount of metal articles, bone items from Taohongbala are extremely few and confined to ornamental functions. On the other hand, the absence of a proper depiction for the horn object further prevents any comparative analysis. One would tend to find similarities with the bone curved hollow tool found at Maoqinggou or the two finials in the shape of a tapering curved fish found at another Ordos site, Yulongtai [Fig.14]. As already pointed out in the discussion on metal inventories, the shape of such finial would recall similar wands unearthed from Kurgan Chilikta in central Kazakhstan.



Fig. 14 Fish-shaped finial from Yulongtai [Tian and Guo 1986: fig 3.10, p. 369]

Yet, in the case of Chilikta, the fish was made with a bent large sheet of golden foil, to which granules and inlaid turquoises were added. In the archaeological report on Yulongtai, this bone article has been associated with horse accoutrement. In fact among the movable herders of southern Siberia during the Scythian period, fish depictions were quite favoured and can be found in the shape of leather cut-outs hanging from a saddle and in tattoos at Pazyryk. Indeed such iconographic choice could be linked to the shamanistic cosmogony of the nomads. Horse harnesses seem to reflect quite a complex mythological world based on shamanism, whose semantics are yet to be fully understood. In general terms, by analysing the iconography expressed in horse harnesses, a tripartite cosmogony seems most probable. Hence, whilst stags and birds would stand for the Upper World, the Regular World symbolically located at the chest and the saddle of the horse would be represented by the combats between non predators (ungulates, herbivores) and predators (felines), whilst the Lower World would be conveyed by the fish and the defeated animals hanging below the saddle²⁴.

²⁴ Bokovenko 2000: 304-310.

Further to the west, in Ningxia province, inventories at two major sites such as Yanglang Mazhuang and Pengpu Yujiazhuang are indeed quite distinctive and differ in terms of proportions from all the sites surveyed so far. Although beads are present in every tomb in high numbers and represent the majority of funerary pieces, carved bone items have also been found in far greater numbers than metal artefacts: more than 900 pieces have been found in Pengpu xian Yujiazhuang,²⁵ and at Yanglang Mazhuang, 151 items, including bone cheek pieces and tube-like ornaments were identified [Fig.15].²⁶

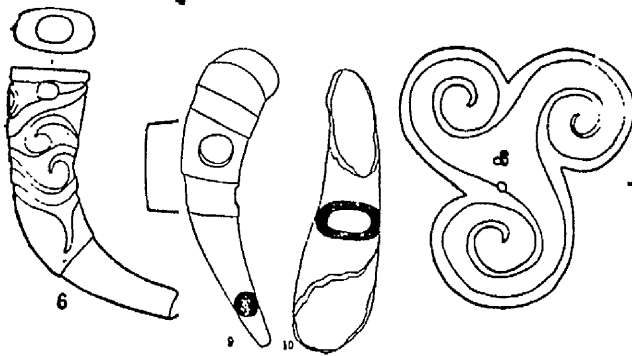


Fig. 15 horn-shaped bone ornament, bone plaque and a ‘bell’ made in the shape of a tongue at Yanglang Mazhuang [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1993: p.45, pl.26.6.10.2].

Of particular interest, one object identified as a bell in the shape of a tongue, and a horn-shaped ornament beautifully carved with curvilinear motives. The tongue shaped item could be compared to the horn-shaped items just mentioned above when talking about Maoqinggou and Taohongbala. It is noteworthy to observe the bone ornament in the shape of a horn. Being hollow on one end only, it might have served as the kind of chalice symbolically revered by the Scythians. Its shape was ultimately inspired by the Greek and Achaemenid *rython* beakers. According to the Scythian system of beliefs, the horn beaker was used in solemn celebrations of the Great Mother, who is identified as both mother earth and the other world, and perhaps also with the passage from life to death. In traditional portraits, two male warriors both accompany her, lifting a horn *rython* in their hands.

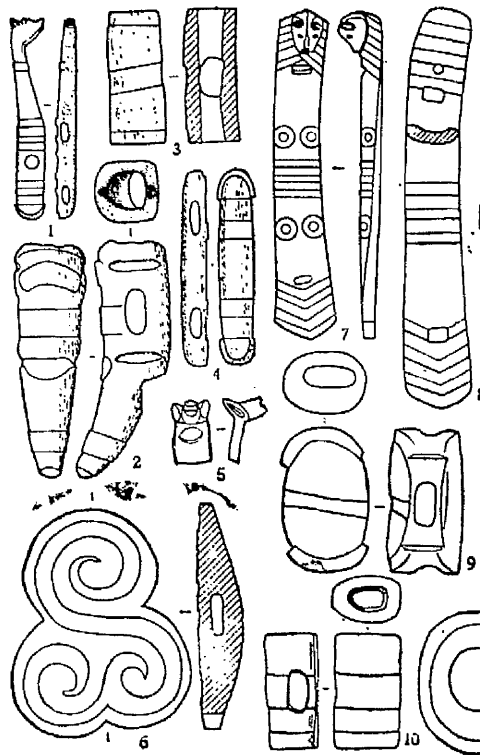
The curved intaglio lines on both this item and the other bone ornaments are indeed echoing the stylistic tradition of wood and bone carving encountered in southern Siberian sites of the Scythian period (Bash-Adar, Pazyryk and others).

²⁵ Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1995: 99

²⁶ Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1993; Liu and Xu 1988: 413-24.

The inventory from the 28 tombs at Yujiazhuang is comparable with Bronze Age sites within Gansu and Ningxia provinces, but just in terms of metal artefacts. In fact, bone craftsmanship can be compared only with Yanglang Mazhuang site. At Yujiazhuang in fact, the huge amount of bone articles represent the most extraordinary discovery. They include horse bits, belt buckles, jie yue, triangular objects, ornamental heads, rectangular narrow ornaments, wands, bow tips, hairpins, arrowheads and beads [Fig.16].

Fig. 16 Bone inventory at Yujiazhuang [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1995: p.99, pl 18].



The tri-lobed plaque and the horn shaped tapering artefacts are comparable to those found at Yanglang Mazhuang, thus connecting the two sites and further pointing to a link with Southern Siberia and the Scythians. Indeed the fish-shaped horn object from Yulongtai, the horn shaped wands from Maoqinggou and Taohongbala in the Ordos area could also be compared for their tapering shape to these found at Yujiazhuang. They may in fact belong to the same artistic tradition. Some of the long tubular objects exhibit two perforations and they may have been used as psalias in the horse accoutrement. Indeed bone strap-guides have also been identified, thus confirming that bone too (not only bronze or iron) was a medium used for horse decorations, certainly preferred by the people of Yujiazhuang. Apart from those objects clearly connected to horse gear decorations representing the majority of the bone articles uncovered, long wands with incised horizontal lines and zoomorphic heads (possibly lupine) in high relief represent the strangest artefacts of all. In all, the bone inventories yielded by burials at Yujiazhuang and Mazhuang are quite extraordinary and would suggest a confined phenomenon. Indeed the analysis on the physical data of the skulls found at the site of Yujiazhuang would reveal their belonging to the North Asiatic Mongolic type, similar to the movable herders of Mongolia and other northern regions and different from pre-existing East Asian Mongolic type, predominant in the region during the Neolithic period. As such, Yujiazhuang people would have actually migrated from the north, bringing with them the bone carving tradition.

Around the same time, in the mid 1st millennium BCE, in Xinjiang, articles mostly made of horn appear in the inventories at Hanqigou site in the Hami basin and at Subeixi in Shanshan county in Turfan basin. The majority of specimens have been carved out of deer antlers. Objects of bone from Hanqigou included just a tri-lobed tanged arrowhead and a single cheek piece with two perforations. Bone items from Subeixi were mainly small ornaments and tools, such as plaques, rings, a comb and an awl, reflecting the range of objects proposed by earlier sites in the same region, in limited quantities, with no great variations.

Textiles and leather

The weaving and tanning industries are very difficult to track in the archaeological record, given the intrinsically perishable class of materials utilised. Hence it is extremely rare to find leather and woollen articles dating back to the late 2nd and early 1st millennia BCE. Thanks to the particular climatic conditions characteristic of the desert areas of eastern Xinjiang and western Gansu, some unique fabrics and leather accessories have been preserved to the present, providing an invaluable hint on past economies and levels of craftsmanship achieved by these pastoral –semi-nomadic- people. Among the sites surveyed in this work, Hami Yanbulake is one of the earliest to contain woven fabrics. Bone utensils such as the spindle whorls and pins and leather punches discovered in the tombs were in fact employed in the production of clothes: desiccated corpses have been found wrapped with beautiful woollen textiles that, given the frequency of recovery of various types of weaving tools, must have been produced locally. Almost thirty fragments were unearthed, the colours ranging from red, yellow, green and brown, manufactured in plain weave (tabby), plain twill and knitting.²⁷ Distinctive is the composition of the fabric, which mainly consists of sheep and goat (mohair) wool without the inclusion of vegetal fibres such as cotton or hemp.²⁸ According to Barber, woolly sheep and the weaving technique must have been imported from a western source.²⁹ The identification of members of the Yanbulake culture as ‘proto-Europoid’ would suggest a morphological link with the earlier site situated on the lower reaches of the Kongque river, Gumugou. Indeed at both sites inventories comprised both wooden figurines and woollen fabrics. Han Kangxin further suggests that this morphological type would be close to other Bronze Age peoples further to the west and

²⁷ Tabby is the simplest form of weaving, where the thread of the weft is passed over and under each strand of the warp. Twill weave involves, ideally, running the weft over two and under two of the strands of the warp, but alternating the pattern each row so that it is offset one place, resulting in a diagonal rib or alignment of the weave. Twill is almost invariably associated with wool and never with linen or cotton.

²⁸ Good 1998:656-668

north, the Andronovo people from Southern Siberia and Kazakhstan.³⁰ Since Gumugou cemetery has been carbon-dated slightly earlier than Yanbulake (*circa* 19th century BCE), the migration trajectory must have pointed eastward from Kazakhstan through the Tianshan Mountains and then turning slightly north to reach the Yanbulake area.

During the 1st millennium BCE, in roughly the same area of eastern Xinjiang where Yanbulake culture thrived, the Chawuhu sites, at Hejing xian Chawuhu and Luntai xian Qunbake in Turfan basin provided other examples of weaving production and leather tanning. In cemetery IV at Chawuhu³¹ the excavators brought to light a large number of fragments of simple plain and twill woollen fabrics (43) together with six silken belts. The chromatic range is quite restricted, prevalently using natural white and brownish red. Some of the fragments woven in tabby feature a diagonal printed pattern in red and white [Fig.17]. Unfortunately, the description in the report is quite incomplete and it is difficult to analyse their craftsmanship.

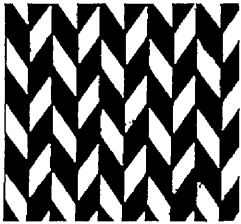


Fig. 17 Patterned tabby from Chawuhu IV [Wang Mingzhe 1999: fig 105.4, p. 152]

Again in Xinjiang, millet and barley spikes and plenty of woollen and hemp fragmented fabrics have been unearthed at Wupushuiku in the Hami oasis area, a site dated to the early 1st millennium BCE that reveals strong cultural links with the Yanbulake horizon.³² The human remains at the site left no doubt on the appearance of these people, as like other proto-Europoid corpses found in Xinjiang, the occupants of these tombs would show Proto-Europoid features and wear multicoloured woollen clothing. The material assemblages would reflect the importance of agriculture-based occupational activities, such as weaving and barley and millet cultivation. Furthermore, green bristle grass rests have been detected on top of the wooden covers: this type of grass is the tallest grass in pasturelands, hence confirming the existence of extended pastures in the area.

A sophisticated leather case with hanging strap and curvilinear designs was found at Wupushuiku [Fig.18]. The case resembles the shape of a curved horn. Both its shape and its refined surface ornamentation with swirling curves could recall southern Siberian examples, ultimately derived from the Andronovo tradition.

²⁹ Barber 1998: 647-655 and also Barber 1999.

³⁰ An Zhimin 1998.

³¹ Wang Mingzhe 1999: 151.

³² Barley (*Hordeum sp.*) is thought to come from the west, together with wool-bearing sheep, probably brought by those groups of proto-Europeans who settled down in the Hami basin (such as at Yanbulake) [Good 1998: 659].



Fig. 18 Leather case from Wupushuiku [Urumqi 1999: fig 276, p. 117]

A new AMS³³ date for these fragments (diagonal twills with plaid decoration for the majority)³⁴ has been recently suggested of about 770 BCE instead of 1200 BCE, postponing the official date for the Wupushuiku site. The wool seems to be from a hairy rather than a woolly fleece, most likely a very different breed from that encountered in the Qiemo Zahongluke fragments. All dyed threads are un-pigmented.



Fig. 19 Diagonal twills from Wupushuiku [Urumqi 1999: p.118 fig 280-1-2]

The use of normal diagonal twill weave seems to be strictly linked with wool, for its natural stretching resilience. The early use of colour too tends to be associated with wool, which comes natural in many different hues and is far easier to dye than linen and hemp. Examples from Wupushuiku [Fig.19] include a fragment natural milk chocolate brown with narrow stripes of pale blue and white, roughly carbon-dated to 770 BCE.³⁵ This fabric includes six different colours: a red-brown ground with narrow stripes of light and dark blue, red, white, and black. Plain-woven plaids constitute another example, with skinny red or brown and light or dark blue pinstripes at regular intervals, on a dominant

³³ Accelerator Mass Spectrometry date.

³⁴ At the same time period, the proto-Celts in central Europe were also making plaid woollen twills, see Halstatt and Hallein salt mines woollen fragments dateable to 1300-400 BCE [Barber 1998:650].

³⁵ Barber 1998.

white ground. According to Barber³⁶, all these weaving techniques may originally have come from around the Caucasus area and then spread east and west to reach China and central Europe. Thus implying that the people who inhabited this site might have come from those regions further west in the oasis settlements of the Bactrio-Margiana area and penetrated into the Tarim basin, through the Yili valley.³⁷

Furthermore in Wupushuiku a pair of leather boots with sewn-on beads has been excavated.³⁸ Such decorative custom on garments was apparently diffused in the Andronovo culture too, further connecting the two cultures. In addition to these artefacts, some of the corpses were found bearing blue swirling tattoos on their skin in a manner also encountered later on during the mid 1st millennium BCE at Pazyryk in southern Siberia and at Qiemo Zahongluke and at Shanshan Subeixi, again, in Xinjiang province.

Whilst the woollen textiles with light blue, red and deep black dyes found at Alagou I together with fragments of Chinese silk gauze embroidered with sinuous animal motifs inspired by Chu artistic vocabulary (further attesting the extent of trading between metropolitan China and Xinjiang) have not been thoroughly documented in the archaeological reports,³⁹ those unearthed at Subeixi have been instead analysed in details.

The Subeixi burial complex in Shanshan xian is situated at the easternmost corner of the Turfan basin, indeed not very far away from the sites cited above, although it is slightly later, dating to the mid-late 1st millennium BCE. The site is particularly interesting as the excavations of 1991-1992 yielded 23 desiccated corpses still wrapped in their original clothing. The burial assemblages were constituted by the large array of woollen and leather clothing accessories, including vests, boots, trousers, hats, gloves and head covers. One woman wore a large woollen skirt striped horizontally in shades of red, yellow and brown with a dark felt hat rising high above her to two conical peaks.⁴⁰ The pelt used to make her long coat had the fur turned inside for warmth and neat leather slippers protected her feet. A gigantic leather hand guard, a sort of protection worn by falconers, wrapped her left hand. The lady possessed two little pouches, one long and narrow and the other containing a small round comb. Two other women had their long tresses bound into black hairnets made in either needle technique or sprang.⁴¹ Yet other three women, possibly priestesses, were found wearing a high conical hat and a

³⁶ Barber 1999: 143-45.

³⁷ Barber 1999: 149-167.

³⁸ Mei and Shell 1998.

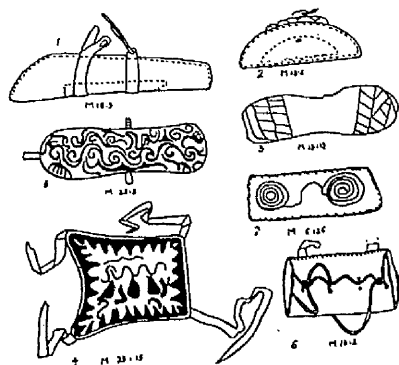
³⁹ These tombs revealed an anthropological group close to the Pamir-Ferghana type, hence connecting them with the Saka people of the Pamir.

⁴⁰ See Fig.22, Chapter 2.

⁴¹ Barber 1999: 200.

cosmetic pouch at their sides, similarly to southern Siberian cultures of the Scythian period. Yet conical hats such as these are hard to find within the southern Siberian context. On the other hand, the conical hat unearthed at Issyk in eastern Kazakhstan (6th-4th c. BCE) could provide a feasible link. Also in the case of Issyk, given the size of the clothing the wearer was probably a woman, rather than a 'golden man', and even more, she was probably a sort of warrior-priestess herself. According to Eliade, throughout Eurasia women's magical prestige was so widespread that even male diviners and shamans, called 'soft men', would wear women's clothing and practice women's customs to gain women's charisma and magical powers.⁴² Many diviners and seers, practising rituals involving shamanistic elements, were indeed employed by the Scythian chieftains for personal and public reasons.⁴³

Certain shamanistic practises that involved the use of hallucinogenic plants (ephedra and hemp) are known from evidence in Pazyryk Scythian kurgans. Ephedra has also been found in Subeixi, providing another possible connection to Shamanism and the Scythian world. In this respect, the 'witches' of Subeixi could have played a ritualistic role in Subeixi society by being magical diviners and soothsayers, following the Shamanistic tradition adopted and transmitted by Central Asian people during the Scythian period.⁴⁴



To the side of most of these female priestesses, richly decorated leather pouches and headrests or pillows with red and black swirls were found [Fig.20]. Swirls may have been inspired by Scythian artistic vocabulary as they appear quite frequently in southern Siberian funerary assemblages.

Fig.20 Leather knife-guard, pouches and pillows [Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1994: fig 20].

Together with these woollen accessories, also a quiver to contain the arrows (just like the *faretras* worn by Scythians portrayed by Greek artists) was found by the side of the male occupant of catacomb tomb M10 [Fig.21]. The case, a typical accessory of the Scythian warrior was made of sturdy leather around a thin wooden frame. In Siberia such items have not usually survived, However, the petroglyphs in the Altai mountains (early 1st millennium BCE) show that the case was large and it was hung from the waist on the

⁴² Eliade 1974: 168.
⁴³ Herodotus IV: 67.
⁴⁴ Mallory and Mair 2000: 196.

side so as not to impede the wearer's movements.⁴⁵ The hanging tapestry at Pazyryk provides another example where the knight wears a *gorytos* on the side.⁴⁶

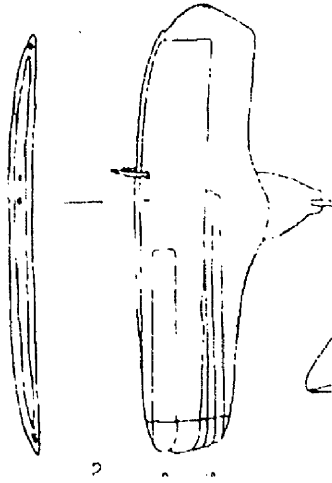


Fig. 21 Leather and wood quiver from Subeixi [Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1993: fig 7.2].

Shifting our focus into the regions further to the east, in Gansu province, at the beginning of the 1st millennium BCE, Hamadun cemetery in the Shajing cultural sphere represents the earliest site to have yielded various items made of leather, linen and wool. Leather was often worked in the shape of long belts to which bronze plaques

were applied. Alternatively, fragments of leather have been found forged in the shape of hand or knife guards. A pair of leather eye-covers represents a curious artefact, which must have been extremely useful when travelling through the sandy desert in daylight and stormy weather. In this case, they were found together with small bronze balls inside the eye sets and a turquoise stone in the mouth adorning the face of the male occupant of a rectangular vertical tomb furnished with *jiji* grass mats (M13).⁴⁷ The tomb was also furnished with some linen fabrics survived only in poor fragments, which nevertheless hint to a predilection for woven and leather artefacts. Leather items have been found at Hamadun only in four tombs (M5, M13, M15, M18), the majority belonging to the catacomb type, if one excludes M13. The level of craftsmanship varied but mostly included just hand guards, knife sheaths and belts made of horse, cow and sheep leather. Indeed linen and woollen textiles have been often recovered in Hamadun, wrapped around not only bronze decorative ornaments (small balls, plaques and knives), but also around the mortal vestiges of the occupant. The best preserved clothing fragments have been found in three catacomb tombs (M5, M19, M15), with colours ranging from plain blue to a combination of yellow, blue and black, woven in plain thick weave pattern on a relatively small loom.

The majority of the clothing fragments found so far in Xinjiang and Gansu reveal indeed the use of a small textile device, which would enable the weaver to manufacture cloth with a plain weave and a twined warp. It was probably the case of a simple horizontal

⁴⁵ Jacobson 1995:222-24.

⁴⁶ Rudenko 1970: pl.154.

⁴⁷ Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1990: 222, 228.

loom managed by a single weaver, like those still used by nomads in Central Asia.⁴⁸ The earliest looms in the Eurasian steppes go back to the Eneolithic period in the Yamnaya Pit-Grave Culture in the west and comprised a vertical or horizontal frame used to hold the warp threads stretched and rigid, and a rectangular placket used to separate the threads.⁴⁹ Other types of looms throughout the Eurasian steppes and through the centuries would employ either a vertical or a horizontal frame and a variety of types of thread separators, including reeds, planks and rings.

Given the archaeological evidence of ancient textiles along the northwestern border of China, it is quite clear that they played an important role in the ability to survive in these environments. Their importance is even evident in the careful attention to clothing details on the small wooden dolls from Yanbulake. It is possible that in each region, as in the rest of the Eurasian steppes, local productions made their own contribution to the development of diverse textile technologies and to a great extent this variation was determined by diverse environmental factors encouraging the propagation of certain types of plants and flocks of animals. The use of a simplified type of loom would be in accordance with the archaeological evidence from the western areas of the steppes and could have been inspired by a certain level of life mobility within these societies.

⁴⁸ Barber 1991.

⁴⁹ Shishlina et al 2000: 109-117.

Chapter 6

Cultural Transmission and Artistic Expression

The Steppes and the Central Plains

From the analysis of the various archaeological sites along the Chinese northwestern border during the early Bronze Age period, it is clear that local cultural phenomena emerged from a source quite distinct from that of the Central Plains. As we have seen, such cultural distinctiveness was indeed already defined during the Shang period. It is also evident that the archaeological sites surveyed in the course of this study did not all belong to a homogeneous culture, although they could probably be defining as 'sharing' a certain number of artistic affinities, especially in terms of bronze inventory. These groups must have led a semi-sedentary life with a mixed economy based on both simple agriculture and animal husbandry complemented by hunting and fishing. Depending on the nature of the relationship with state-societies such as the Shang, they seemed to develop a different type of social negotiation, sometimes involving belligerent campaigns, sometimes turning to peaceful trade.

The analytical criteria in this study have strongly depended on the assumption that along the Northern Zone, a sort of geo-cultural division constituted by the Taihang Mountains was already explicit by the Shang period and persisted throughout the Bronze Age. Differences in climate and terrain on either side of the mountains extending from northeast to southwest, following roughly the boundary between modern Shanxi and Hebei provinces encouraged the development of two different economic systems: agrarian in the east and a mixed farming-hunting-breeding economy in the west. Both systems greatly influenced the local artistic production; according to Lin Yun two different complexes of bronzes in the area north of the distribution of the Shang and Zhou bronzes could be discerned, namely a "north-western" complex and a "north-eastern" complex, roughly corresponding to the natural division of the Taihang Mountains.¹ The north-eastern complex associated with more stable agrarian societies emerged during the latter part of the Western Zhou period and appears to have been less prolific in bronze production than its northwestern counterpart. Indeed some of the non-Chinese finds in this sector would suggest the existence of temporary or seasonal migrations from the west.²

¹ Lin 1986: 242

² So & Bunker 1995: 38.

Andronovo and Karasuk contacts

On the western side of the Taihang Mountains, sites have yielded quite refined bronze specimens dating already to the Erligang-Yinxu phases of the Shang dynasty. Metal assemblages in northern burial contexts from Zhukaigou and Lijiaya areas well reflect the occupations of these northern groups engaged in hunting and herding activities, in competition for economic resources and characterised by the emergence of a military elite.

In this context, burial furnishings reflected the shift of loyalties according to the strength and wealth of each tribe, as in the case of the different *fang* belonging to the Lijiaya cultural horizon. These elements of social negotiation are evident in the bronze assemblages, as they almost invariably comprised weapons: battle-axes with tubular sockets (from Shang prototypes) and mirrors on one side, and knives, daggers with zoomorphic finials and “bow-shaped” objects on the other.

Daggers and knives from Zhukaigou, Lijiaya and Huoshaogou and Yanbulake are characterised for the most part by the integral casting of hilt and blade, by a narrow and straight hand-guard and by a handle with a ring-shaped finial. On the other hand within Zhukaigou and Lijiaya early types, dated from the 16th to the 11th c. BCE, quite a large number display a characteristic curved hilt crowned by an animal-shaped pommel,³ often inlaid with coloured stones, especially turquoise [Fig.1]. The ibex-pommelled dagger unearthed at Chaqimale in the Hami area is identical to those found in Lijiaya contexts.⁴ The dagger, together with another ring-headed small bronze knife, a leaf-shaped arrowhead and some whetstones was found 4 m. below the surface by farmers digging a storage cellar, who discarded all the ceramics that came with them.

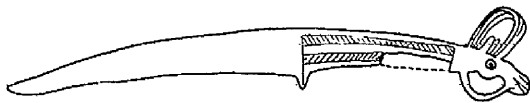


Fig. 1 Ibex-head pommelled knife from Lijiaya context [Lin 1986: fig. 51.7, p. 252]

The motifs on the dagger and knife pommels are usually drawn from the local fauna, consisting primarily of domestic animals such as horses, deer, goats, ibexes and eagles. All these animals are indeed part of the eco-system of the steppes and are not usually found in Chinese environments. Yet, northern bronze knives have been found repeatedly in the Yinxu excavations, both at Anyang and in other more peripheral zones such as Hebei,⁵ Inner Mongolia,⁶ Liaoning and Shanxi,⁷ but also Xinjiang, confirming on

³ Other daggers present perforated hilts, or straight hilts with grooves ending in a rattle, such as the one unearthed in Baode xian in northern Shanxi province [Wu Zhenlu 1972: p.4, fig 4].

⁴ Wang Binghua 1996: fig. 1.3, p. 74.

⁵ Hebei Bowuguan 1980: no.83, p.36.

one side the cultural contacts between China and the Northern Zone, and on the other, the extent of cultural diffusion within the Northern Zone.

Turquoise inlay

Distinctively characteristic of this type of weapon, often related to Karasuk examples in southern Siberia is the particular manner of shaping nostrils, eyes, and sometimes horn tips, as round cells for the setting of inlaid stones. Not only weapons were shaped in this manner, but also personal ornaments, like the golden earrings found in Mongolia, which exhibit a long u-shaped hook with a finial pendant in the shape of a ram whose eyes have been rendered with turquoise cloisonné.⁶ Turquoise in fact can be considered one of the most valued types of semi-precious stone throughout the Northern Zone. It was consistently employed for adornments throughout the 2nd and 1st millennia BCE in different archaeological contexts, from Hami Yanbulake to Siba Huoshaogou and even in Lijiaya. Almost always, turquoise was revered in the shape of beads and necklace accessories, or earring pendants. Sometimes it was also employed in the decoration of ceramic vessels, as in the case of the ceramic double-handled *dou*-cup found in Huoshaogou, now displayed in the Gansu Provincial Museum in Lanzhou, which exhibits a row of turquoise stones inlaid on the body. Antecedent Qijia beads could have inspired the choice for turquoise, but the taste for inlay must have been endogenous, as other ceramic containers with shell inlays have been found within the same archaeological context.

It is also worthy notice that the chromatic choice, beside the predilection for gold and silver that went well beyond a simple chromatic appreciation, of blue (turquoise), red (agate and carnelian) and white (glass or bone paste) for personal adornments encountered throughout Chinese north-western border strongly resembles the palette favoured by central Asian people, in both southern Siberia and Kazakhstan, possibly influenced by a common Andronovo cultural substratum and by a possible local availability of the raw stones. Although sources of turquoise are not discussed in ancient Chinese literature, turquoise deposits are present in Anhui and Hubei provinces, but they are also quite abundant in both Xinjiang and southern Siberia.⁹

The predilection for vibrant colours to some extent must have influenced the emergence of semi-precious stones inlays on pictorial bronzes of the late Spring and Autumn period in China. But not only that: in fact, when turning to early Western Zhou tombs in Shaanxi

⁶ At Tazigou, Lindong, Chifeng, southeastern Inner Mongolia [Wang Weixiang 1994: 31].

⁷ Lin 1986: 245-246

⁸ Novgorodova 1989: pl.9.

⁹ Thorp 1991: 29.

province, as part of the burial assemblage, complex necklaces have been found adorning the deceased. The ornaments comprised strings of beads in agate and turquoise combined with small flat decorated plaques of jade. Among the earliest examples of such strings are the beads found in tomb M13 at Baoji Zhuyuangou [Fig.2].¹⁰ Yet subsequent examples come also from the northeast in the area of influence of the state of Yan. Some time later, the taste for this kind of agate beads spread to the whole of the metropolitan Zhou area, especially after the ritual changes at the end of the middle Western Zhou period (c. 900 BCE). The quality of such later examples would point to an origin in western China, perhaps within Shaanxi, where the custom of

combining jades and beads was possibly first experimented and ultimately drawn from further to the west, judging by the occurrence of beads of faience and the striking similarities with the chromatic palette employed on Central Asia ornaments. Mineralogical research suggests that most jades from necklaces and ornaments dating to the Shang and the Western Zhou periods would have been extracted from Hetian in northwestern Xinjiang. Hence already by the Shang period a 'jade route' between Central Asian jade sources and metropolitan China could have been established, providing the channel for other western infiltrations.¹¹



Fig. 2 Necklace in 179 pieces of jade, agate and turquoise found at Liulihe, Fangshan xian, Beijing, inspired by similar specimens found in Shaanxi province [Rawson ed. 1996: pl.56, p. 120]

It is noteworthy to remember that turquoise insets are already encountered during the Erlitou and later Yinxu phases, when bronze frontlets, weapons and bone beakers were embellished with this precious stone, possibly inspired by a foreign formulation which provided the initial stimulus for a refined artistic elaboration.¹² A particular attention must be paid to the so-called horse frontlets inlaid in turquoise [Fig.3] from Yanshi Erlitou in Henan province.¹³ Such items were almost always found together with small bells in the same tombs. Yet, neither type of artefact has precedents in the immediate geographical context, whilst they would look more congenial in a northern environment. The co-occurrence of the two would sustain the original identification of the frontlet as a horse

¹⁰ Lu and Hu 1988: pl. 38.

¹¹ Yang 1996: 228.

¹² Turquoise, however, was never used in the preparation of ceremonial vessels, but only on ceremonial axes and daggers.

¹³ Yang Guozhong, 1984: 37, fig 2.

trapping, whilst the bell would have been used as the accoutrement of the animal. Yet, no remains of horses have come to light at any Erlitou site, although they are witnessed in roughly contemporary Qijia settlements¹⁴ and, curiously enough, at Siba-Huoshagou, where horses were ritually immolated in funerary contexts.¹⁵



Fig. 3 Turquoise frontlet from Yanshi Erlitou [Rawson ed. 1996: pl.36, p. 86]

Given the large number of turquoise items found within the Northern Zone and the relatively few pieces unearthed in Chinese contexts¹⁶, one can presume that those items found in Chinese territories must have ultimately been influenced by an alien taste coming from the neighbouring west.¹⁷

Inlay disappeared from Chinese bronze production during the western Zhou period, only to reappear in the early 6th century BCE with the first examples of vessels inlaid with turquoise at Xinzheng Lijialou and Xichuan Xiasi (Henan), within Jin's territorial domain.¹⁸ Here bronze vessels and mirrors displayed openwork interlace of serpents interspersed with turquoise inlaid eyes roundels.¹⁹ The fact that these first, renewed, experimentations with inlay in metropolitan China mostly included turquoise stones set in round sockets suggesting animal's eyes (snakes) would further hint to a western stylistic derivation.²⁰

A decorated central bar, straight and curved lateral sections terminating in animal-head or slit pommels with jingles usually form the curious bow-shaped objects found in Lijiaya contexts [Fig.4]. Their role within northern and Shang societies is still obscure, with scholars debating whether shamans, archers or charioteers might have employed them

¹⁴ Horse remains were found at Wuwei Huangniangniangtai in the Qijia sphere of cultural influence [Gansu sheng Bowuguan 1978:429].

¹⁵ Horse bones have been consistently recovered from burials at Huoshagou, together with the remains of cows, goats, dogs and pigs, reflecting an economic strategy strongly based on animal domestication.

¹⁶ Turquoise was indeed used to make pendants during the Neolithic period in China as it is found in the Hongshan culture sites in northeast China in the shape of little fish. Its most remote use for inlay could be traced back to the turquoise-inlaid bone items of the Dawenkou burials of the 3rd Millennium BCE. Yet all these examples can be considered quite rare, in comparison with the artefacts made of jade in the same archaeological context.

¹⁷ Fitzgerald-Huber [1995] put forward the hypothesis that the early emergence of northern traits in the metal inventory at Erlitou could be linked to the intermediary role of the Kexingzhuang II culture of Shaanxi province, connecting it to the Qijia culture of Gansu and Qinghai. This in turn exhibited Central Asian elements affined to the BMAC cultures in Iran and Turkmenistan, which could have been transmitted eastwards thanks to the migration of Andronovo people into north-west China.

¹⁸ So 1995: 30-46.

¹⁹ Chen Peifen 1997.3: 88-93, fig. 15 p. 92.

in some mysterious way. Whatever role the bow-shaped objects might have had, at present the archaeological evidence would point to an origin within the Northern Zone adjoining the Yinxu culture. As such, not only it could have provided the prototype for the bronze bow-shaped ornaments in Yinxu style discovered even in Fu Hao tomb at Xiaotun, but also it might have spread in its primitive shape to the Minusinsk Basin, where it has been found in graves of the later Karasuk and early Tagar cultures (dated from the 10th century BCE).



Fig. 4 Bow-shaped object [Lin 1986: fig. 56.3, p.265]

All these bronze implements show certain morphological and stylistic similarities: they generally possess rings or small buttons, designed to hang from or attach to a part of the clothing, indication of portable use; animals are depicted in the round in a distinct manner, with eyes often forming a protruding tube, in a decorative style strongly reminiscent of the Karasuk culture of South Siberia (11th-8th century BCE) and of the early nomadic cultures of Central Asia. Yet Chinese scholars agree in considering the Shaanxi-Shanxi area as the place of origin for the so-called animal-head daggers and knives.²¹ From there they apparently spread to Mongolia, Transbaikalia and the Minusinsk Basin, where similar specimens have been recovered of a later date. The same route must have taken the bow-shaped object.

A similar route must have taken the ceramic *li*-tripod with snake design and flower shaped border encountered for the first time in Zhukaigou (18th century BCE).²² Given the distribution of similar specimens throughout the Chinese Northern Zone during the 2nd millennium BCE, the typology and the specific decoration could have originated in the Ordos (Zhukaigou and Lijiaya) and then spread over a large area to the east (in lower Xiajiadian sites) and to the west (in Gansu Siba-Huoshagou cultural horizon) reaching the Transbaikalia region of Southern Siberia (Karasuk culture).²³ The pattern of distribution remarkably parallels that of the early bronze production, further suggesting a cultural horizon over a wider area than previously thought, one which is encompassing Mongolia, Northern China, Transbaikalia and southern Siberia, following Chernykh's proposition of a "Central Asian metallurgical province".²⁴ Snake-patterned tripods appear

²⁰ For instance, in the early nomadic burials at Chilikta in eastern Kazakhstan (7th-6th c. BCE), several golden plaques of deer and the famous fish wand features the use of turquoise inlay to highlight the eyes.

²¹ Wu En 1986.

²² See Figs.5-6, Chapter 3.

²³ Li Shuicheng 1992: 50-57.

²⁴ Chernykh 1992: 264-271.

to have lingered on into the 1st millennium BCE as other examples have been found prevalently within Maoqinggou area, with few rare encounters in Gansu Shajing and Xindian areas. Maoqinggou, being presumably the most important ceramic production centre within the Northern Zone during the 1st millennium BCE, could have provided the resonance box for a later revival of similar vessels in Ningxia and Gansu by the mid 1st millennium BCE.

The Shang connection

Some of the most important evidence of contact between the Shang and the northern cultures come from sites dated from the 14th century BCE onwards, when the Shang king relocated his capital to Anyang in northern Henan. It was in this period that the military activity of the Shang state increased dramatically, in order to tamper and incorporate alien aggressive peoples. A large number of northern bronzes have been unearthed from the royal tombs at Xiaotun, suggesting a possible intermingling of northern people with the Chinese. In particular, the tomb of the warrior-consort of king Wu Ding, Fu Hao, yielded several bronze items with a decisive nomadic flavour that certainly did not originated in the Shang tradition, such as the ibex-pommel knife and the hairpin with rattle. These finds prove that by the time of king Wu Ding, bronzes from the northern complex had reached the Central Plains and were popular enough to be buried with the royal deceased.²⁵ The most élatant evidence for Shang contacts with the northerners, however, comes from the peripheral domains of the Shang dynasty, in Shanxi and Shaanxi provinces, where the Lijjaya sites are situated.

The Shang not only borrowed a few complete objects, but also their decorative style: Shang artisans imitated the animal-headed knives of the Northern Zone, as it appears from some of the knives discovered in some of the graves at Yinxu. For example the knives with the head of horse, ox, and ram from grave M020 at Yinxu. These knives are identical to the Northern prototype, apart from the manner of representing the horns of the ox and ram similar to the rendering of the *taotie* horns on Anyang bronzes. Shang artisans employed their own traditional techniques and aesthetic concepts on bronzes from the Northern Zone.²⁶ Sometimes the Chinese artisan produced objects for 'non-

²⁵ It is interesting to mention that indeed during pre-Shang period, at Yanshi Erlitou some of the excavated metal objects possessed characteristics, such as the handle knife with perforated grip, which could be associated with the pastoral groups in the Northern Zone [Fitzgerald-Huber 1995: 17-67]. Yet in the case of Fu Hao it must be remembered that she could have been a princess from one of Shang's peripheral kingdoms (*fang*) given in marriage to the Shang king. Her several military campaigns to the northern and western regions would have also provided the occasion for the capture of exotic war booty. All these circumstances may have brought northern bronzes into the Chinese territory.

²⁶ Lin 1986: 254.

Chinese patrons, with certain exotic motifs, as in the case of the famous bronze basin from Lingshi Jingjie (Lijiaya sphere) with a mule depicted on the cavetto, which might have had a specific meaning for them [Fig.5].²⁷



Fig. 5 Bronze basin with a mule depicted in the cavetto [Shanxi kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1986: pl 8.2, p. 5]

Shang metallurgical tradition was well separated from that of the Northern Complex and the two have often been regarded as two independent systems. Yet some sort of interaction did occur during the last two centuries of the Shang dynasty, when the people inhabiting the Northern Zone acted as a filter as well as a link between China and Central and Northern

Asia. In the northern areas, certain bronze shapes and zoomorphic motifs were first originated and later transmitted elsewhere: bronzes of the Northern Zone initially crept into the area where the Yinxu culture was distributed, influencing -as seen in Fu Hao inventory- some bronzes of the Yinxu style; some others passed into the Minusinsk Basin and were adopted by the Karasuk culture during the Western Zhou period. Thus, even if some Yinxu bronzes share stylistic features with Karasuk material, the time elapsed between the two productions is considerably long. According to Chlenova, the greatest number of remains of the Karasuk culture dates from the 11th to the 8th century BC, though she insists on placing the upper limit of the culture to the 13th century. Thus, various bronzes from the Minusinsk Basin may be considered contemporary with the Chinese Yinxu phase. On the other hand Maksimenkov dates the upper limit to the 11th century BC, eliminating the possibility that bronzes of Yinxu and Karasuk cultures directly influenced each other.²⁸

²⁷ So and Bunker 1995: 37. The phenomenon of Chinese workmanship for non-Chinese patrons will be further exploited in the latter part of the 1st Millennium BC.

²⁸ Lin 1986: 268-269.

Southern Siberia and Northern China

The relationship between the Northern Zone and the bronze culture of South Siberia is still rather obscure. According to Chernykh, the Northern Zone, together with Mongolia, the Sayan-Altai region, Northwestern China (Xinjiang) and Transbaikalia, should be addressed to as the "Central Asian metallurgical province."²⁹ However, given the paucity of archaeological information from Mongolia and Xinjiang, the full extent of the relationship between these areas, and between these areas and China proper, remains vague. At present, it is only possible to recognise the Northern Zone as an independent metallurgical area, with "apparent" links not only with China, but also with the west, in particular with the Andronovo-Karasuk cultures. Lijiaya and Zhukaigou cultural complex must have played a key role not only in bridging the relationship between the Karasuk and Shang cultures, but also in creating and spreading new bronze forms and decorations throughout the eastern Eurasian steppe. It is interesting to notice that evidence of contact between Xinjiang and Karasuk are also available, suggesting another route of penetration from the Altai region, via the Tacheng region into the northern foothills of the Tianshan Mountains. Although constituted by sparse findings such as a knife with deer-head pommel from Hami identical to the one found in Lijiaya-related Chaodaogou site (Hebei), a knife with goat-head pommel from Yili and a knife with a camel-head pommel and two daggers from the Altai.³⁰

From the archaeological material recovered so far, it is getting clearer that the relationship among China and southern Siberia in the 2nd millennium BCE was not played out only on one front, but implied different channels of communication and points of contact. The major ones that are getting delineated by recent findings were possibly located in the Altai region and the Mongolian Ordos plateau. Such neuralgic points were indeed active already by the 2nd millennium BCE and went on playing their role throughout the 1st millennium BCE, providing the channels through which major cultural *stimuli* and artistic innovations were exchanged, at times reaching the core of Chinese culture.

At that time, the Ordos plateau, mostly Zhukaigou, acted as an innovative centre for bronze manufacture separated from the mainstream Chinese metal industry, often playing an intermediary role between China (Shang) and Southern Siberia groups (namely Andronovo and Karasuk people), but also expanding its cultural influence to the south and to the north. To this regard, Lijiaya group of sites would provide the best example of political negotiation, acting as a buffer area between Zhukaigou and

²⁹ Chernykh 1992: 264-271

metropolitan China. Its nature appears to be quite complex, exhibiting on one side architectural and ceramic elements close to the Yinxu culture, whilst on the other displaying various metal articles strongly reminiscent of Central Asian cultures, perhaps induced by its proximity to Zhukaigou.

The iron connection

Apparently it is from Sanmenxia (Henan) that the earliest evidence for cast iron in metropolitan China comes. A blade combined with a bronze hilt inlaid with jade and turquoise, dated around the 8th century BCE was indeed excavated in 1990 from a burial at Sanmenxia Shangcunling, in the ancient state of Guo, a region with extremely frequent contacts with the northern steppes.³¹



Fig. 6 Iron short sword from Shangcunling [Beijing 1992: pl.104]

With regard to the iron objects found in Henan province at Sanmenxia cemetery of the Guo state,³² whilst 3 iron blades of meteoritic iron inserted in bronze hilts were found in tomb 2009,³³ dated to roughly the same period (end of the Western Zhou period, 9th - 8th century BCE), both in tomb M 2009 and M 2001 one bronze knife with cast iron blade and a sword with bronze and jade hilt and yet again an iron blade were also discovered. It is interesting to note that both meteoritic and non-meteoritic iron were found in the same tomb (M 2009), used in apparently similar objects with similar purposes. Before then, iron presence in metropolitan China was confined to four bronze weapons inlaid with iron dated to the Shang and Western Zhou period, which were all made of meteoritic iron and therefore were not the result of iron metallurgy. However, although Chinese had not yet mastered or better, introduced, iron metallurgy in their vocabulary, the technique employed to produce such blades implied an advanced smithing method. This kind of skill suggests that they already had considerable understanding of the nature of iron. It was during the Eastern Zhou period (Spring and Autumn period, 722-481 BCE) that iron objects found their way into the Central Plains. Although archaeological evidence is yet scarce, many are the textual references to iron datable to this period. In the *Shanhajing*,

³⁰ Mei 2000: fig 3.1, p. 118.

³¹ Li Xueqin, 1985: 80-84

³² Sanmenxia shi wenwu gongzuodui 1992.

there are references to the location of various iron-mining centres, suggesting that the technique was indeed known. In the *Zuozhuan*, under the 29th year of the Duke Zhaogong:



In winter, Zhao Yang and Xun Yin of Jin led a force and walled Rubin, after they laid upon the [districts of the] state a contribution of one *gu* of iron, in order to cast penal tripods on which they inscribed the penal laws prepared by Fan Xuan Zi.³⁴

This sentence not only mentions iron in clear terms suggesting its definite introduction by 513 BCE, but it also underlines the complete absorption and mastering of such technique in order to cast an object of completely Chinese taste (a penal code tripod).

Fig. 7 Iron dagger from Gansu Lingtai xian Jingjiashuang [Li Xueqin 1985: pl 140].

According to Li Xueqin,³⁵ the earliest Eastern Zhou iron implement (before the discovery of the Sanmenxia pieces) was represented by the iron dagger with bronze handle from tomb M1 at Jingjiashuang in Lingtai xian, in Gansu province, datable to the early Spring and Autumn period (8th-7th century BCE).³⁶ The iron blade fragment is 9 cm long, and was welded onto the bronze hilt, which presents four vertical holes. According to Li, the sword, originally wrapped up in silk, was from the state of Qin.

Yet it is interesting to notice a bronze socketed celt with a single loop handle that was also discovered in tomb M2 at Jingjiashuang [Fig.8]. Whilst the double looped socketed celt has been found in Gansu in the context of the Qijia culture (around 2000 BCE), of which this burial complex seems to have cultural antecedents, the single loop feature is usually associated with Yili, Tacheng and Chawuhu, somehow suggesting an indirect relationship to the western regions and the Saka horizon [Fig.9].

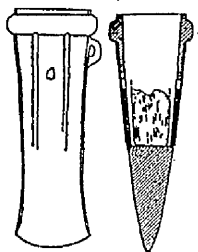


Fig. 8 Lingtai xian Jingjiashuang socketed celt from M2 [Liu and Zhu 1981: pl.3.5].

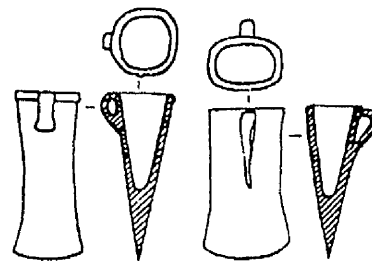


Fig. 9 Socketed celts from Saka related areas at Tekesi and Tacheng, Xinjiang [Mei 2000: fig.3.4, p.120].

³³ Yet another cast-iron object in metropolitan China comes from Shanxi Tianma Qucun site, dating back to a slightly later time, i.e. the 7th century BCE. [Han Rubin 1998].

³⁴ Li Xueqin 1985: 319.

³⁵ Li Xueqin 1985: 318.

³⁶ Liu and Zhu 1981: 298-301.

Guo state is also the place in metropolitan China where some of the earliest belt ornaments have been unearthed. In tomb 1715 at Shangcunling, serrated round and triangular belt ornaments dated to the 9th -8th century BCE in cast bronze were found surrounding the waist of the deceased in a manner very much resonant of steppe traditions.

In Xinjiang, various are the sites that yielded cast-iron samples. All these burial complexes can be ascribed to the early Iron Age period, that in Xinjiang seems to have commenced by 1000 BCE.³⁷ As we have already seen, 7 small fragments were found at the Yanbulake cemetery, of which only three can be ascribed to real objects (one knife, one spear head finial and a finger ring), plus part of the chain in a pair of pendant bronze earrings.³⁸ At Chawuhu, dated from the 11th to the 6th c. BCE, iron objects including knives, awls and rings, mostly from cemetery II (9th c. BCE),³⁹ are again small and few, reflecting the experimental phase of a new metallurgy, as in Yanbulake. The existence of iron in this region at a time, which precedes the appearance in the Central Plains, is confirmed by analogous findings at Qunbake, site within the Chawuhu cultural horizon, in the Pamir⁴⁰ and the area near Urumqi.⁴¹ Comparable iron and bronze knives found in the Chust culture in Ferghana and skeletal remains of Europoid stock point to a connection with the Pamir and the Ferghana regions.⁴² Once again, as for Yanbulake and Huoshaogou cultures, Ferghana and the BMAC complex seem to provide likely foci of cultural diffusion. Indeed the Chust culture may have played an important role in the beginning and early use of iron in southern Xinjiang. We must remember that this culture did provide the earliest evidence for iron-smithing in the Ferghana valley. However, at the same time other cultures in southern and central Asia (Afghanistan, Uzbekistan) were engaged in the development of similar technologies. This fact would suggest a western transmission of the iron technology from western Central Asia into Ferghana and then, through the Chust culture, into Xinjiang, eventually reaching Chawuhu.

Examples of possible non-meteoritic origin could be also considered those from the Yanbulake early period, dated to a much earlier time, hence providing the earliest evidence for iron metallurgy in China. Indeed, iron at an early date (late 2nd millennium BCE) has also been found along the Amur River, in the Maritime Territory of Russia, in Transbaikalia. The problem stands in the absence of a continuity of usage within Yanbulake, as later sites ascribed to the same cultural horizon did not yield any ferrous

³⁷ Chen Ge 1990: 366-374

³⁸ Chen Ge 1990.

³⁹ One knife was found in cemetery IV.

⁴⁰ At Xiangbaobao, Tashkurgan, where Europoids of the Indo-Afghan type were interred either in stone kurgans or cremated.

⁴¹ At Miqan Daccaotan [Zhang Yuzhong 1986].

objects. At present it would look like an extemporary endogenous phenomenon. On the other hand, the presence of iron knives, awls and rings at Chawuhu is well documented and seems to indicate a source further to the west.

Iron knives and spades were also recovered in Shajing contexts in southern Gansu. Should evidence for horse domestication be found in Shajing, iron metallurgy should be linked to the transmission of horseback riding. At any rates, the later Shajing-related site of Yushugou, besides yielding several iron articles, boosted several chariot accessories stylistically linked with southern Siberia and several accessories linked both to eastern Xinjiang and Ningxia, hence suggesting an trajectory from the north (Altai) through the Hexi corridor, down to Gansu and then further to the east, in Ningxia. The same route could have been used earlier for transmitting iron.

At the same time, analogies in bronze inventories would suggest a connection between eastern Xinjiang and Central China, in the state of Guo, where the earliest cast iron swords were in fact found. Iron swords, with tinned bronze handles, were also rather frequent in the inventories of the Yanglang cultural horizon, in Ningxia and Gansu dating partly to the 6th-4th c. BCE. Connections must have existed between the Yanglang group of sites, pre-dynastic Qin and Guo, for many are the stylistic and typological affinities shared. Although chronologically there is yet no evidence for an earlier example within Qin territory, the cultural connection between Qin and its neighbours to the northwest is rather élatant and may have proved instrumental in the transmission of ferrous metallurgy into Central China.

Horse riding

Socio-economic patterns throughout the North-western Zone appear rather homogeneous for the majority of the archaeological sites dated to the 2nd millennium BCE. Material evidence almost invariably indicated a semi-nomadic way of life, based on coexisting agricultural and pastoral production, complemented by hunting, fishing and trade. This economic model was indeed shared by many civilisations throughout the oases of Central Asia during the 3rd and 2nd millennia BCE. Such a fluid structure in turn encouraged short-distance (regional) demic contacts, permitting the transmission on the long distance (inter-regional) of several cultural influxes, among which possibly the practise of horse riding and its related artistic and metallurgical vocabulary. Indeed the widespread diffusion of a pastoral way of life throughout Eurasia (including north-west

⁴² Kuzmina 1998.

China) represented the ideal ground for the subsequent rapid adoption of nomadism over a large area.

The transmission of domesticated and trained horses in China can be documented no earlier than 1200 BCE,⁴³ although remains of *equus sp.* in Banpo (Shaanxi) apparently speak out of a remote ancestor within the wild horse population of the northwestern steppe area of China.⁴⁴ For this reason, most Chinese scholars believe that domestication of horses in China started around 2800 BCE. The earliest remains of horses associated with human habitation comes from Neolithic sites in the northwest, within Qijia cultural horizon (Gansu and Qinghai provinces) and in the east in Shandong province. However, the only and earliest evidence of ritual involving horses comes from Gansu, within Huoshaogou context (late 2nd millennium BCE). Furthermore, the transmission of the knowledge of metallurgy must have been determinant to the creation of harness for horse training.⁴⁵ At present the Huoshaogou-Shajing link is attested by affinities in the manufacture of penannular earrings, bronze plain mirrors,⁴⁶ ring-shaped knives and by similar catacomb-shaped burial structures. This group of evidence would suggest a strong bond between the two cultures and a possible eastward pattern of cultural transmission. Huoshaogou might have provided the means through which western metallurgical knowledge and horse-riding technique could have been transmitted further to the east, through the Hexi corridor into Gansu and metropolitan China.

Evidence of horse riding comes from an 8th century tomb at Arzhan (south Siberia, Tuva region)⁴⁷ and from a scene sculptured on a bronze fitting from Ningcheng xian Nanshan'gen (Inner Mongolia). It is interesting to notice that again in Ningcheng xian cheek-pieces and adornments with distinctive jingles (stylistically related to Lijiaya jingles) have been unearthed in tombs datable to the 10th –9th century BCE, suggesting a movement eastward of Lijiaya related groups.

The transition to full pastoral nomadism practised on horseback possibly occurred some time after, at the beginning of the 1st millennium BCE. Its emergence has been attributed to a number of motifs, among which, the progressive aridisation of part of the Central Asian steppes, which in turn compelled semi-sedentary cattle breeders to migrate eastwards in search of better pastures, thus becoming fully nomadic.⁴⁸ Such dramatic

⁴³ Evidence provided by the Anyang chariot findings.

⁴⁴ Xie Duanjiu 1985: 285; Wang Yuxin 1980: 99.

⁴⁵ Anthony 1995 and 1998.

⁴⁶ A plain bronze mirror with a small central back loop handle was found at Shajing eastern cemetery. Li Shuicheng 1994: pl.1.12.

⁴⁷ Griaznov 1984.

⁴⁸ Hiebert and Shishlina 1998: 222-237.

socio-economic change was further propelled by two innovations: horse riding with improved bits and bridles and mounted archery with the compound bow.⁴⁹

The material evidence for horseback riding is mainly based on small bone, bronze, and later iron, horse harness fittings, which are found scattered throughout the Eurasian steppe lands, in southern Siberia and north-western China during the first half of the 1st millennium BCE.

Metal horse fittings unearthed within the Upper Xiajiadian culture in north-east China, dated to the 8th-7th century BCE, are often considered one of the earliest evidence for the emergence of horse riding within the borders of China.⁵⁰ Yet the present study would seem to tell otherwise: the earliest evidence collected from the area west of the Taihang mountains would come either from Chawuhu and Qunbake in Xinjiang, where bronze simple two-holed rod-shaped horse bits were unearthed (datable to the 9th-8th c. BCE), or from Baifu Changping in Hebei where, should the dating of 10th c. BCE be confirmed, even earlier bronze horse bits were discovered. In addition to the snaffle bits and cheek pieces made of bronze, cheek pieces carved out of bone were detected, further attesting the practice of horse riding and animal husbandry in Chawuhu.⁵¹ Similar bone three-holed *psalias* have been found throughout the Scythian macro-cultural horizon, from Kazakhstan to Tuva and the Altai mountains, suggesting a western affiliation for the Chawuhu examples. The occurrence of joint bits and horse bridles, together with the evidence of funerary rituals involving the role of horses (sacrificial horse pits are a constant element throughout the development of Chawuhu culture) would confirm the economic predisposition towards nomadic pastoralism.⁵² It could also underline the insurgence of a cult directly related to the emergence of a social class of mounted warriors. Whilst during the first phase of development only harnesses were buried with the deceased, in the following periods, these paraphernalia were apparently replaced by the real sacrifice of horses. Naturally, the environmental factors must have also played an important role, as Chawuhu was surrounded by land suitable for grazing pasture. Such type of horse bits finds close counterparts further to the west, among the Saka-Scythian tribes in southern Siberia, Tuva, the lower Syr Darya and the Pamir mountains, again connecting these areas of China with the successors of the Andronovo macro-culture, the various nomadic people of the Scythian cultural horizon. In both cases (Chawuhu and Baifu) southern Siberian groups (Karasuk and Scythian horizon) would

⁴⁹ Barfield 1993.

⁵⁰ DI Cosmo 1998: 912.

⁵¹ See Fig. 11, Chapter 5.

⁵² In the northern part of the cemetery, most tombs have been accompanied by horse sacrificial pits, placed to the north-west of the stone enclosures, including heads, hooves or portions of the limbs symbolising the burial on the whole horse.

have played an important role in the transmission of such technology, either via the Altai mountain passes into Xinjiang, or through Inner Mongolia into Hebei and Shaanxi, eventually reaching southern Ningxia, at the Mazhuang cemetery, Yanglang, Guyuan xian. It is interesting to notice that at Mazhuang, as well as Yujiashuang, both sites in Ningxia dated to the mid-late 1st millennium BCE, tubular hanging ornaments, small bells and convex plaques of the same type of those found in earlier Shajing contexts have been detected.⁵³

Still to decipher is instead whether Shajing could represent an earlier instance of horse-riding culture within Gansu. The settlements nature (paralleling the Sintashta-Arkaim interactive model between nomads and settlers)⁵⁴ and the discovery of an alleged 'Amazon' still holding her horsewhip might instigate such view, given the fact that earliest horse harnesses made of bone and wood might have just not survived to prove their own existence. The Shajing sites analysed so far were all located close to or within river valleys. According to the data from historical geography, there was a large ancient lake covering both Minqin and Yongchang counties.⁵⁵ Both Lihudong and Sanjiaocheng were situated on the banks of a river, although placed on a high hill. The people of Shajing lived in an oasis, subsisted mainly on animal husbandry, supplemented with farming and hunting and engaged in the weaving industry. The ancient environmental conditions found at Shajing would suggest a parallel with the oasis dwellers of the BMAC. Similarly, the Shajing oasis dwellers might have come into contact with nomadic neighbours in the area and engaged in trading and cultural exchanges, just like the Andronovo did with the BMAC people earlier on during the 2nd millennium BCE. Shajing citadels could have provided a sort of trading post for mobile herders from the west who came into contact with the local settled agriculturalists, following the local environmental increase of aridity and steppe land (as it happened earlier in eastern Central Asia).

In the drier portions of the Eurasian steppes, herders of cattle and sheep were required to move frequently and across large horizontal distances between major river valleys in order to find sufficient pasture.⁵⁶ For such an enterprise, bulk transport was needed to help the herders to move their tents and supplies. In the absence of such bulk transport, provided by wheeled carts and horses, the early steppe herders could not move freely across the steppes, but were forced to remain tied to major river valleys, as it may have happened to the Shajing. A similar phenomenon occurred earlier on, around the Caspian area, with the Sredni Stog culture (4500-3500 BCE), where horseback riding was already

⁵³ Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1993: 36.

⁵⁴ Where BMAC and Andronovo material cultures seem to have partially merged [Hiebert and Shishlina 1998: 222-37].

⁵⁵ Li Shuicheng 1994.

practised. The evidence for horseback riding comes from the bit wear on the teeth of a 7-8 years old stallion at Dereivka on the Dnieper River in Ukraine, in the western margin of the Eurasian steppe.⁵⁷ Bit wear is the damage on the premolar teeth of a horse when the animal chews a bit. Although no actual horse bit has been unearthed from Dereivka cemetery, the damage encountered on the horse teeth would attest the use of such practice within this culture. It would be extremely interesting to analyse the teeth of the horses unearthed at Sanjiaocheng in search of similar bit damages, to infer a similar use of the animal. To some extent, even the strange whip excavated in M5 at Hamadun could point to horse riding.

With the advent of horseback riding, large-scale herding would have been greatly enhanced, with even larger flocks of sheep and herds of cattle.⁵⁸ The enlargement of economic sources should also be mirrored in the change of burial patterns within the group. In particular, a higher social stratification should be visible in burial contexts. The importance attached to animals is indeed evident in their funerary persistent role as sacrificial victims. At the same time, spatial distances would have been perceived as reduced, altering the social and geographical landscape of the steppe. Shajing could represent the initial stage of this socio-economic revolution, when horses started to be conceived as a useful means of bulk transportation and herding, although not yet fully exploited in their potential.⁵⁹ It was in fact only when wheeled vehicles were introduced, that the combination of vehicular bulk transport and horseback riding made such large-scale herd management possible, freeing the steppe herders from their logistical dependence on residential bases in the river valleys.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Anthony 1998.

⁵⁷ Anthony and Brown 1991.

⁵⁸ Khazanov 1994.

⁵⁹ Horses were not used for bulk transport during the early millennia of horse exploitation. It seems clear that horse harnesses were relatively inefficient prior to the invention of the rigid collar in the 10th century CE [Spruytte 1983].

⁶⁰ No evidence of wheeled transportation has been evinced from Shajing-related sites so far.

Steppe migrations

According to Kuzmina ethnic migrations in the steppe (during the 12th - 9th centuries BCE) were exerted from the west towards the east as a result of important ecological and historical changes in Asia in the late Bronze Age period.⁶¹ Apparently the climate in Southern Siberia suddenly grew cold and damp forcing Andronovo people to shift to nomadism.⁶² In turn this shift was conditioned by the emergence of riding and the growth of importance attached to horses. It is thus likely that during this time groups of pastoralists from Kirghizia advanced to Xinjiang where, around the borders of oases, there were lands suitable for cattle breeding. This advance could be reflected by the growing importance attached to the horse in Xinjiang archaeological cultures of the early first millennium BCE. The bones of horses have been found in many sites such as Wupushuiku and later on (maybe one or two centuries later) in Chawuhu culture. Finds of wooden cheek-pieces with two holes (the most elementary type) and other parts of harness fittings are also known, analogous to those of the late Andronovo culture.⁶³ Bronze horse bits found in Chawuhu and Qunbake feature stirrup-like ends. This particular type is also found in the archaic Scythian barrows of the northern Black Sea region, in the Aral Sea region, in the Tasmola Culture of central Kazakhstan, in the Gorno-Altai and the Minusinsk Basin, in Tuva and Mongolia.⁶⁴ Their wide and distinctive use within the Scythian culture would thus indicate some degree of interaction between Chawuhu and this steppe culture. Chlenova attempts to trace their origin to more archaic bits with inner ringlets in the "stirrups" typical of eastern steppe regions, such as the Aral Sea region, Kazakhstan, Siberia and Tuva. Hence many are the features suggesting a possible connection between Chawuhu and Scythian-related cultures of southern Siberia and Kazakhstan; in both contexts large cemeteries were found, with graves marked on the surface by pebble mounds and inventories consisting of small bronze knives, awls with animal finials, and horse bits attesting the adoption of horse riding.⁶⁵

The insurgence and establishment of groups of people from Central Asia within the borders of China, specifically Xinjiang and along the Hexi corridor in Gansu by the late 2nd millennium BCE - early 1st millennium BCE is thus suggested by the archaeological evidence. During this period, the frontier areas, from Inner Mongolia to western Xinjiang,

⁶¹ Kuzmina 1998: 63-93.

⁶² Hsu 1998: 683.

⁶³ Jettmar 1992: 142-3; Kuzmina 1992: 186-88 and 1996. Indeed, the archaeological evidence for horse riding could be attested by the presence of horse bits: if the horses had been exploited only for carrying weights, they would not need a bit or a horse-gear, as a halter would be enough [Bokonyi 1992: 17-30].

⁶⁴ Chlenova 1992: 502.

worked as a belt of cultural transmission between the bronze cultures of Central Asia and southern Siberia belonging to the Andronovo macro-culture on one side, and the Central Plains on the other. Cultural influences would have penetrated through different routes, possibly the same routes covered later on by the Saka-Scythians related groups during the mid-late 1st millennium BCE.

In this pre-historical scenario, North-Asian Mongoloid people from Siberia related to the Andronovo macro-culture must have played a role of vital importance. The Andronovo culture (1900-800 BCE), named after a burial complex excavated in the Minusinsk Basin of southern Siberia, can be better defined as a macro-culture exhibiting a number of regional variants and possibly incorporating genetically-different groups. Following Kuzmina's hypothesis, the Andronovo people during the 2nd millennium BCE were in contact with the oasis agriculturalists of the Oxus Civilisation and the BMAC, developing a strong symbiotic relationship with these sedentary people, as evidence suggests in Ferghana and Tianshan valleys.⁶⁶

In the period of its major expansion the Andronovo cultural horizon span over an extensive area from the Urals to the Yenisei and from the northern border of the forest-steppe south to the Pamirs of Tadjikistan, even reaching the Tianshan area of Xinjiang. Their arrival within the border areas of China was partially due to similarities in environmental conditions (prairies and desert oases) between Central Asia (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and southern Siberia) and northwestern China. In turn, these conditions facilitated the retention and transmission of traditional economic strategies, based on mixed farming-herding activities, in fact a model encountered in most sites dating back to this time, both in Xinjiang and Gansu. Their direct presence has been detected in some areas of Xinjiang (such as Gumugou, Agaersen, Weixiao and Sazi in northern and central Xinjiang),⁶⁷ whilst their indirect influence could be indicated by several elements encountered in other sites further to the east in Xinjiang, Gansu and Inner Mongolia.

Indirect evidence of Andronovo influence can in fact be found in Yanbulake burial and domestic architecture, in the use of mud-bricks, (connecting it further to BMAC complex), in the choice for grey and black coloured ceramics, decorated with net-patterned hanging triangles and pine-needles designs, but also in the manufacture of small wooden dolls placed in the burials, which in fact find almost identical counterparts at the earlier site of

⁶⁵ It was in the latter stage of the Karasuk culture (10th -8th c. BCE) that the first still primitive bridle with bone cheek-pieces for the bit appeared [Volkov and Ser-Odjav 1992: 459-60].

⁶⁶Kuzmina and Vinogradova 1996: 29-54.

Gumugou, a definite Andronovo-related burial site. In turn certain Yanbulake ceramic designs might have indirectly influenced the emergence of specific patterns on Chust ceramics of the early Iron Age period.⁶⁸ Again this phenomenon might have been possible through the intermediary role of pastoral herders related to the Andronovian sphere.

Then if one considered Wupushuiku as the lowest limit of the Yanbulake horizon (provided its dating to be right), still exhibiting hanging triangles on ceramics, the finding of a tripartite disk wheel made of Euphrate poplar would also find close affinities with earlier Andronovo wagon wheels found in Central Asia during the 2nd millennium BCE. In fact, the earliest wheeled vehicles in Eurasia were probably the heavy wagons encountered in the Yamnaya culture of the lower Dnieper, dated to 2900 BCE.⁶⁹ Only much later, in the late 3rd - early 2nd millennia BCE, wheeled vehicles appeared east of the Urals, in connection with the spread of the Andronovo people. The large disk wheels were possibly used for the first type of Andronovo wagon, whilst the spoke wheel –the one used later for war chariots in Shang China- must have for some time coexisted. Indeed the Andronovo people must have also been responsible for the transmission of chariots with spoke wheels (already found in the Sintashta-Petrovka site, as early as 2026 BCE)⁷⁰ into Shang China in the 13th c. BCE, appearing fully formed, un-preceded by any previous use of animal traction or wheeled vehicles, in Anyang, around the time of King Wuding,⁷¹ the husband of the famous Fu Hao (whose burial assemblage yielded a large array of articles with nomadic connotations).

Indirect Andronovo cultural influence can also be envisaged in the context of the Siba-Huoshagou sites in Gansu. The presence of gold penannular earrings, silver nose rings and arsenic bronze artefacts, together with the use of large fluvial pebbles burial tumuli and the evidence for wheat cultivation would indicate strong affinities with Andronovo variants from Central Asia, connecting it further to the BMAC and Oxus Civilisations. The intermediary link could be provided by Tianshanbeilu site with its syncretic Huoshagou-Yanbulake inventory further to the west in Xinjiang, through which indirect Andronovo influence could have been instilled.

⁶⁷ Mei 2000: 60. Sparse bronze objects of Andronovo type such as a spade, a flanged adze and a two-shaft-hole axes have also been found further to the east in Urumqi, Jimusa'er and Qitai regions, along the northern foothills of the Tianshan, indicating an eastward stretch of the Andronovo influence.

⁶⁸ Zadneprovkyi 1995: 15-18.

⁶⁹ Anthony 1998: 102-3.

⁷⁰ Anthony and Vinogradov 1995.

⁷¹ Shaughnessy 1988.

Iconographic transmission

Around 1050 BCE, the Zhou tribe from the lands west of the Taihang Mountains, took over the Shang, bringing with them a significant influx of northern influences. The new dynasty magnified the levels of exchange between the two cultural spheres, Chinese and non-Chinese, and imbued the artistic production of both with a new afflatus: Chinese ritual bronze vessels began to show northern features in shape and design whilst northern artefacts and personal ornaments increasingly appeared in Chinese contexts with Chinese workmanship and motifs. Through prolonged mingling with northern tribes, people in the Central Plains acquired a taste for the exotic, reflected in the choice of decorative details such as colourful inlaid stones,⁷² or other materials (gold and silver) used as signs of social status. Such trend of cross-cultural and artistic fertilisation became extremely intense during the 1st millennium BCE, culminating in the intrusion of elements of foreign –‘exotic’- iconography into the Chinese artistic repertoire during the Warring States and early Han periods.

The second half of the 1st millennium BCE was characterised by abrupt changes in the artistic repertoire of the northern people along the Chinese border. The iconographic change was partially caused by the displacement of certain tribal groups of Central Asia, named “early nomads,”⁷³ further east across the Eurasian continent to the northwest borders of China where they aggressively imposed their presence.⁷⁴ The earliest period in the history of the “early nomads” is generally called “Scytho-Saka” from the names of the two major tribes, the Scythians and the Sakas.⁷⁵ The written texts of ancient Greece, Assyria, Babylon and China constitute valuable sources of information about the culture of these ancient nomads. According to Herodotus, writing in the 5th century BCE, the Scythians inhabited the steppes north of the Black Sea between the Danube and the Don in a territory called Pontic Scythia. Extensive animal husbandry was their main occupation and determined their mobile way of life. Their society was ruled by an elite of mounted warriors, identified by Herodotus as the “royal Scythians”, who indirectly

⁷²Turquoise and malachite inlay on bronze was extremely popular in the latter part of the Spring and Autumn period, rather than during the Western Zhou dynasty.

⁷³ Prusek 1971: 96

⁷⁴ This situation may have been stimulated by the Achaemenid campaigns: according to Herodotus, Cyrus II, the Persian ruler, died in 530 BC fighting the Massagetae and later on, Darius I engaged in several campaigns against the Sakas [Basilov 1989: 22-24].

⁷⁵ Herodotus refers that the same tribes living in Eastern Europe and Western Asia were respectively called Scythians by the Greeks and Sakas by the Persians. [Rudenko 1959: 101]; the word “Saka” is in fact the Iranian form of the Greek “Scythian”, which entered Chinese sources as “Sairen”. Details are contained in the *Han Shu*, chapter 61, “Zhang Qian Li Guangli zhuan” and 96 “Xiyu zhuan” (HAN SHU.61: p 3897, 3884 and 96: p 3901).

controlled all the other groups inhabiting the steppes, such as the “agricultural”, “nomadic” and “free” Scythians.

During this time, approximately between the 7th and the 4th century BCE, different cultures developed in the Eurasian steppe lands resembling each other in the artistic production, religious beliefs, burial customs and social structure. Their affinities can be seen in the equestrian equipment, horse harnesses and in the peculiarities of their representational style, sometimes labelled “Scytho-Siberian animal style”. These populations surely belonged to different groups: Caucasoid lived in Eastern Europe, Turkestan (comprising Xinjiang) and South Siberia, while the Mongoloid type prevailed in Central Asia. In the northern area of the eastern steppes, including South Siberia, Altai Mountains, Mongolia and Transbaikalia, archaeological evidence suggests the existence of two different cultural complexes: to the east, in Transbaikalia and the southern Gobi region of Mongolia, lies a complex characterised by cist-stone tombs and a Northern Asiatic anthropological type, similar to the Xiongnu type at Noin Ula in Mongolia. In Western Mongolia, the Altai and Tuva regions, there are timber-chambered burials of Europoid anthropological type, similar to the Pazyryk kurgans. This cultural differentiation can also be traced along the Chinese borders. For example, Wusun and Saka tribes inhabiting Xinjiang province seem to have been of Europoid racial type, whilst burial sites in Ningxia witness an increment of north-Asian Mongoloid elements around the 6th century BCE, related to the nomadic presence in the region. Both cultural complexes shared similar features in the artistic production since the 8th century BCE, for specific early nomadic features such as animal decorated bronze accessories belonging to the same cultural sphere of south Siberian region, have been found in northern China. In turn South Siberian artistic production points to a Central Asian origin: its choice of iconographic motifs refers to a symbolic system strictly related to the Scytho-Saka representational art.

Thus one may say that while during the 8th and the 7th century BCE China started to look towards the north for a cultural stimulus, between the 7th and the 4th century BCE the contacts between the Central Plains and the far northwest were strengthened with Chinese artistic production deeply feeling that cultural influence. Contemporary bronze artefacts and motifs excavated in the Northern Zone include animal-shaped belt plaques, frequent representations of animal combats and coiled wolves.

Yet, there are many variations in the choice of iconographic themes amongst the northern people in the peripheral areas of China, for they exhibited strong regional characteristics even if permeated by a common cultural substratum. This differentiation is again explicit in the geographical fracture provided by the Taihang Mountains: one can

discern two main groups, one living west and the other east of this mountain range.⁷⁶ The tribes west of the Taihang Mountains were animal herders practising a limited amount of agriculture. Among them, those inhabiting the south-central regions of Inner Mongolia and Shaanxi-Shanxi area (Ordos desert), the grasslands of southern Ningxia and the Qingyang plateau of south-east Gansu had apparently a closer relationship with China, as witnessed in the reciprocal appropriation of artistic motifs and techniques.

The late first millennium BCE features the amalgamation of the intermediate area of semi-pastoral people gradually absorbed by the northern expansion of the states of Zhao, Yan and Qin. Even if contacts occurred long before, judging by the numerous archaeological evidence mentioned so far, clear evidence of the amalgamation can be dated only to the late 4th century BCE when military fortifications, trade and diplomatic exchanges were firmly established and, moreover, recorded by Chinese historiographers.⁷⁷

It seems clear that the artistic production of north-western China and the Ordos region of south-western Mongolia of the late 4th century BCE mostly reflected a symbolic system usually associated with Central Asian Scythian art. Apart from a pure discourse of iconographic appropriation, it is evident that many of the artefacts suddenly appeared in the north-west displayed metalwork techniques alien to the area in previous epochs, such as repoussé, granulation, strip-twisted wire, loop in loop chains and cloisonné which had been transmitted across the Eurasian steppes from metalworking centres farther in the west, and caused a major change on Chinese metallurgy.⁷⁸ Most of the artefacts in gold and silver from Aluchaideng and Xigoupan are engraved on the backs with Chinese characters stating the weight of the metal: a clear evidence for Chinese manufacture of goods for nomadic consumption.

By the 3rd century BCE, the disintegration of the motif documents the final loss of meaning of the entire symbolic system, reflecting the displacement of the earlier Scythian traditions in favour of new formulations, this time associated with a different ethnic group, the Xiongnu. New border markets rapidly became lively areas of mercantile exchange between nomadic and Chinese merchants. But nomadic goods, imagery, values and mythic structures penetrated into the Chinese sphere not only by trade but also through the avenues of tribute and diplomacy.⁷⁹ Indeed, throughout most of the Han period, Xiongnu presence along Chinese northern borders effectively preoccupied the dynastic administration. The early Han policy of appeasement was established by the

⁷⁶ So and Bunker 1995: 53-56

⁷⁷ Di Cosmo 2002.

⁷⁸ White and Bunker 1994: 31-54

⁷⁹ Yu Yingshi 1990: 118-125

Emperor Gaozu (206-195 BC) who negotiated the so-called *heqin* peace alliances with the Xiongnu *shanyu*. Altogether, between 198 BC and 135 BC, both parties agreed no fewer than ten *heqin* treaties, consisting of elaborate imperial regalia in order to keep the Xiongnu at bay. Within this setting, small objects even of precious material would have been exchanged. By virtue of its military power in the Han period, the Xiongnu confederacy was able to develop a political and economic role for the Han, which had great repercussions in the arts. The advent of a different ethnic confederation along Chinese northern borders is reflected by substantial changes both in metallurgy and subject matter, and by an increase of Chinese luxury goods in nomadic burials. After many centuries of cultural interplay, exotic motifs in the Chinese artistic repertoire had by now been completely sinicised. Nomadic art dated to this period is rather easy to discern: the adoption of mythical beliefs different from those of the pre-Xiongnu pastoral tribes associated with the Scythians is suggested by a new artistic vocabulary characterised by the interest in real animals and humans, shown in an abbreviated landscape setting with the gradual discharge of the old mythological raptor-headed creatures.

Beastly intrusions

Beaded necklaces accented by jade animal pendants in the shape of stags and crouching felines seen in profile have been found in a 9th century



BC grave at Rujiazhuang, Baoji municipality in Shaanxi province, where a Zhou nobleman and his consort were buried.⁸⁰ These pendants are related to similar ornaments in bronze and gold, status symbols of non-Chinese tribal chieftains along the northern frontier,⁸¹ such as the ones excavated in Gansu province from a late-Western Zhou burial at Ningxian Yucun [Fig.10], on the Qingyang plateau.⁸²

Fig. 10 Rubbings of tiger ornaments from Ningxian Yucun [Xu and Liu 1985: pl.3.4-6, p. 350]

The burial assemblages of the two sites present stylistic affinities, especially in bronze vessels typologies and in their surface decoration, suggesting a common cultural horizon. On the other hand, Yucun tiger plaques, miniature jars and spoons might belong to the northern repertoire.⁸³ Yucun in fact is conveniently situated on the Qingyang plateau, the same area where later on, during the second half of the 1st millennium BCE, the so-called Yanglang sites have been excavated. The archaeological evidence attests to the importance of such location, half way between the western regions (via the Hexi corridor) and the Central Plains. This area, in south-eastern Gansu was inside the early Qin sphere of activity and so it was south-western Shaanxi, including Baoji.⁸⁴ Hence it is not surprising to find by the 9th century BCE evidence of cultural contacts with the west: by that time Western Zhou, pre-dynastic Qin people were already present in Gansu and actively interacted with their neighbours, the so-called 'Xi Rong'. In this respect, the Qin culture might have actually stemmed out from a nomadic ancestor, possibly the same Xi Rong.⁸⁵ Indeed the area of south-eastern Gansu and western Shaanxi can be

⁸⁰ Baoji Rujiazhuang fajuedui 1976.

⁸¹ Among China's frontier finds, an ornamental jade head of a deer was also recovered from Lijiaya sphere of influence at Lingshi Jingjie in northern Shanxi [Shanxi Kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1986: 16].

⁸² Ningxian Yucun complex included the remains of stoves, house foundations and a cemetery, suggesting a rather established sedentary village [Xu and Liu 1985].

⁸³ It has been inferred that the presence of small pottery *guan*-jars in Baoji municipality sites such as Zhuyuangou and Rujiazhuang, would point to a link with eastern Gansu province, especially with the Siwa culture where similar pottery vessels were locally produced [Zhang Changshou 1980, Baojishi Bowuguan et al 1978].

⁸⁴ Although Baoji tombs at Rujiazhuang and Zhuyuangou seem to have belonged to nobles from the fiefdom of Yu, pre-dynastic Qin influence is quite strongly reflected in their artistic repertoire, also given the proximity with other burial complexes in the area belonging to Qin.

⁸⁵ The contentious historical issue in Chinese recent literature about the origin of Qin people, whether they originated from the East or the West, has been recently highlighted by Lothar von Falkenhausen, who suggested to 'leave the origins issue open', so far confined to the investigation of possible elements for ethnic affiliation, whilst proposing the use of other epistemological parameters, such as mortuary religious beliefs [2002].

considered the homeland of various other archaeological cultures active throughout the 1st millennium BCE such as Xindian, Kayue and Siwa, which would share a common nomadic (Qiang Xi Rong) background.⁸⁶ In particular, early Qin burials appear to share certain features with Xindian burials; primarily in their crouched burial posture, which stands out for its uniqueness within the Warring States panorama, whilst resembling Xindian examples. Then, a specific ceramic typology, the so called Xi Rong *li*-tripod (as it appears throughout the alleged Xi-Rong area), featuring a tall neck with two loop handles, has been encountered in various burial contexts of Shaanxi province (especially in Baoji), associated with the early pre-dynastic Qin. The same typology has been discovered at Zhangjiazui site, representing the 3rd phase of Xindian culture, further connecting the two cultural groups.

Bronze scabbards

Whether or not Qin people were ultimately descendants of the Xi Rong, they certainly had long intermingled with frontier tribes as witnessed by other findings throughout these regions. Other articles may in fact confirm the cultural exchange occurring within Qin domains in northwestern China during the first half of the 1st millennium BCE. For instance, at Lingtai xian Baocaopo in Gansu province,⁸⁷ again within the Qin sphere of influence, four bronze scabbards ornaments with interlacing ribbons topped by buffalo heads were recovered. The same custom of decorating dagger or knife sheaths must have been inspired by northern prototypes in leather and golden appliqué work. In Qin, a typical northern article, the ornamented sheath, was indeed decorated in Chinese style and used for a Chinese weapon, the tanged dagger. A similar phenomenon is also apparent, again within the Qin sphere of influence, at Baoji Zhuyuangou, two kilometres to the south of Rujiazhuang,⁸⁸ where another simpler version of bronze scabbard ornament was unearthed together with a tanged dagger [Fig.11].



Fig. 11 Baoji Zhuyuangou scabbard ornament [So 1995a: fig 2, p. 37]

From the archaeological evidence extrapolated so far from Qin-related sites in Gansu and Shaanxi provinces during the 10th- 8th c. BCE, the importance of Qin role in the transmission of northern artistic elements into metropolitan China is rather compelling.

⁸⁶ According to Yu Weichao [1986: 180-192], Qin was originally just one of the Xi Rong tribes inhabiting the Gansu steppes. On the other hand Han Wei has often disputed his formulation [1981: 1-8].

⁸⁷ Chariot finials at this site present a round shape also encountered in Ningxia sites (Guyuan xian), further connecting the two regions [Gansu sheng Bowuguan 1977: 115].

⁸⁸ Baojishi Bowuguan et al 1978.

Crouching felines



Possibly Qin functioned as an intermediary between cultures further to the west and the metropolitan Chinese. When looking at the small crouching felines found within Qin sphere of action, at Baoji Rujiazhuang [Fig.12], they featured a long hooked tail, their fore and hind haunches marked with large incised spirals and their ears heart-shaped.

Fig. 12 crouching feline plaques from Baoji Rujiazhuang (Shaanxi) [So and Bunker 1995: fig 12, p. 43]

All these stylistic features recall similar depictions on 7th and 6th century BCE Scythian ornaments such as on a gold plaque from Sakkyz village, Ziviye (Azerbaijan), or on a gold ornament from Kelermes in the northwestern Caucasian region. The only difference is in the position of the head, which is turned down in the case of the western and northern examples, whilst it is pointing forward in the Chinese one. Yet such examples are later in date and there are no antecedents in western Asia of that kind,⁸⁹ reaffirming the idea that this motif must have been originally elaborated in Central Asia and then spread westwards reaching the Pontic regions of the Black Sea by the 7th-6th c. BCE.⁹⁰

A pre-dynastic Qin elaboration of the motif could at this point be proposed; the original motif would have eventually been adopted by the northerners and transmitted further westwards by the Scythians. To stretch the matter harder, the motif could be considered a re-elaboration of a typical Chinese design, encountered in Shang and Western Zhou stylistic idioms.⁹¹ Late in the Shang period semi-naturalistic tigers were adopted into the hieratic ornaments of bronze vessels, eventually merging with the *gui* dragons to form fabulous creatures, retaining the naturalism in the treatment of the body, but also the stance and beaked head of the dragon.

⁸⁹ Rose Kerr 1977: 74-87.

⁹⁰ Jakov Sher 1992: 5-18.

⁹¹ Bunker 1983: 86 and Weber 1968: no. 2-3, pp 112-3, fig 16.

Interesting is to note how this iconographic motif spread into the bronze repertoire of metropolitan China. The felines cast on the foot of the bronze *fanghu* from Henan Xinzheng Lijialou [Fig.13], dated to the early 6th century BCE as well as the sculptural feline on the lid of the musical instrument from Sichuan, related to the Ba-Shu-Dian bronze cultural sphere, show certain stylistic affinities with the crouching felines further to the north. In fact, they display a similar treatment of the ears (heart-shaped), the curled tail, the comma-shaped claws and the head turned down. It is also noteworthy to remember that the same vase from Lijialou provides the earliest evidence for winged beasts in the Chinese repertoire, as it will be described later on in this chapter.⁹² From



Xinzheng Lijialou comes also an ornamental gold sheet with repoussé designs of interlaced serpentine pattern: the outline describes what could be identified as back-turned animal with a gaping mouth and an up-turned beaked tail. Such gold foil appliqué, presumably used to decorate other fittings or bronze surfaces recalls similar objects related to Scythian groups from the Altai region, like the wooden plaque-pendants from Tuekta, Pazyryk and Bashadar (5th-3rd c. BCE), where gold appliqué on wood or other materials was commonly used.⁹³

Fig. 13 Xinzheng Lijialou *hu* vase with tiger motifs [Li Min 2001: fig 1, p. 65]

Pre-dynastic Qin must have thus acted as a sort of transmitter between the northwestern people and metropolitan China. Such role could have been partly encouraged by links with the most notorious bronze foundry in North China, Houma Niucun in Shanxi province. Indeed there is increasing evidence that Jin workshops like those at the Houma foundries might have also supplied their western neighbours with some of their luxury goods. Qin tombs in Fengxiang county and Baoji municipality area in Shaanxi province have yielded a large number of cast gold and bronze fittings, ornamental hooks and dagger hilts with complex interlace work. Their level of craftsmanship is so outstanding that they could have been produced in Houma for Qin patrons.⁹⁴ Contacts between Qin and Jin were not always moderate and included quite a few belligerent confrontations. For instance duke Jing of Qin, whose tomb is situated at Yimen, Baoji

⁹² Wen Fong 1980: pl.67, p.128.

⁹³ Zurich 1994: fig 11.

⁹⁴ So 1995: 43.

municipality (Shaanxi), is mentioned several times in the *Shi Ji*, attacking the neighbouring state of Jin.⁹⁵

Another evidence of contacts between Qin and Jin can be signalled also by a certain commonality of stylistic elements between bronzes belonging to the Shaanxi-Qin area and those from Xinzheng Lijialou in central Henan, traditionally ascribed to Jin.⁹⁶ These stylistic affinities could be explained with the existence of bronze workshops dislocated within close range of each other, thus allowing decorative ideas and trends to travel easily among them. If this were the case, the contacts between Qin and Jin could have also stimulated the transmission of certain stylistic elements, such as the crouching tiger and the use of turquoise inlay from western China, through Qin into Jin and eventually to other metropolitan centres and vice versa.

Recumbent stags

The great number of horse fittings and ornaments found throughout the Northern Zone attests to the prominence of horses and chariots from the early first millennium BCE onwards.⁹⁷ In particular from the 8th century BCE, with the arrival of mounted tribes in the northwest and northeast, a new era of cultural interplay began. Besides the proliferation of horse and harness fittings in the 8th century BC, additional evidence of the advent of mounted tribes along Chinese northern border is provided by a carved bone plate depicting two horse drawn chariots, and a bronze buckle-like device showing two riders on horseback, unearthed from two tombs at Nashan'gen, Ningcheng Xian, Inner Mongolia, dated to the second phase of the Upper Xiajiadian culture (850-750 BC). It is the first stage in the process of gradual absorption of certain iconographic motifs drawn from the artistic repertoire of mounted nomadic tribes that will become more evident in the course of the 1st millennium BCE.

Particularly interesting are the sets of animals with hollow bodies found in the Ordos region of northwestern China and in southwestern Inner Mongolia (at Yulongtai, Taohongbala and other 6th-5th c. BCE sites) and in the Yanglang area of southwestern Ningxia and southeastern Gansu. Conceived as yoke ornaments of ceremonial chariots they reflected the rising importance of the horse and the horse chariot. This adoption must have been deeply influenced by contacts with the herders of the Eurasian steppes, where the custom of adorning funerary carts with animals was widely practised. Whilst yokes in the shape of crouching felines betray their Chinese (Qin) heritage in their pose and stylised bodies, the yokes featuring standing does, cast in two-piece moulds with

⁹⁵ Burton Watson 1993: 19-20.

⁹⁶ So 1995: 29.

prominent joint marks, well reflect the nomadic flavour. Similar ornaments were found in Jungar Qi, in western Inner Mongolia, at the site of Yulongtai, together with the remains of a wheeled vehicle.

Does and stags were even portrayed recumbent, both in sculptural yoke ornaments and small portable belt plaques. When talking about belt plaques, this posture was indeed quite diffused throughout Eurasia from the 7th to the 5th c. BCE.⁹⁸ During the Scythian period, images of bent-legged stags were common in the North Caucasus (Koban), the Black sea region (Kelermes), in Kurdistan (at Sakkyz) and Luristan, the south-Urals region, Pamir and eastern Kazakhstan (Chilikta), in the Tagar culture of the Minusinsk Basin in southern Siberia. Yet similar images on plaques have been seldom recovered from north-west China,⁹⁹ and only a few have been recently located in Chifeng province of Inner Mongolia and at Ganzibao, Huailai county, Hebei province, suggesting an association with the northeast.¹⁰⁰

However, by concentrating only on the unusual posture of the recumbent deer, a certain degree of continuity can be assessed throughout the Eurasian steppes, confirming the existence of a cultural tie between these regions. The non-Chinese origin of such yoke ornaments, their relatively early appearance in Qin territories, in a tomb at Bianjiazhuang, Long Xian, Shaanxi province (5th century BCE), and their surface treatment resembling wood-carvings from 6th century BCE nomadic burials at Bash-Adar in the Altai Mountains, reaffirm the important role of western and north-western China, and in particular of pre-dynastic Qin state, in the transmission of alien artistic iconography from Inner Asia.

The same recumbent deer motif would eventually appear on Chinese bronze inlaid vessels, portrayed in a curvilinear playful manner, alien to the nomadic prototype. On pictorial bronzes the Chinese artist departed drastically from the original nomadic meaning accorded to the animal and decided to subordinate the subject to a pure decorative scheme, de-contextualising the mythic animal from its ritual imagistic context.

Indeed when looking at the ceramic vase from the Western Han period in the collection of the Guimet Museum in Paris [Fig.14], the rows of standing deer with upright antlers applied in relief around the belly seem to tell a different story. They are strongly reminiscent of the Scythian images, which crept into the northwestern China during the 6th c. BCE, as much as they too seem extrapolated from their original context. Yet the

⁹⁷ Shaughnessy 1988: 189-237.

⁹⁸ Chlenova 1963 and 1992.

⁹⁹ The only such example would be the copulating deer found at Pengpu Yujiazhuang in Ningxia, whose features betray nevertheless a northeastern origin [Fig. 114, Chapter 4].

¹⁰⁰ He and Liu 1993: 23-40, 75.

concentration and repetitiveness of the deer motif suggest an augural meaning behind this animal. The popularity of this motif among metropolitan Chinese might have been partly encouraged by emerging daoist ideas in the 4th c. BCE. According to religious Daoism, the deer would possess certain magic powers, even attaining immortality, and were later believed to serve as the mount of immortals on their way to paradise, or even employed as a pun for wealth (*lu*).¹⁰¹



Fig. 14 Hu vase with applied deer motifs [Paris 2000: no 120, p.130]

Rabbits and hares

Hollowed out crouching rabbits were also found at Bianjiazhuang site in Qin territory [Fig.15].¹⁰² In these specimens the natural shape of the animals has been deformed to adjust to Chinese geometries.



Fig. 15 Long xian Bianjiazhuang yoke ornaments [Cooke et al 2000: pl. 82, p. 111]

Yet nomadic counterparts for such recumbent wild hares have been found in the Ordos region, at Lijiapan (5th c. BCE) and Aluchaideng (4th-3rd c. BCE). The animals in the round are here rendered in the most naturalistic manner, with their ears turned backwards and their four legs bent forward. Although a direct connection with the Ordos pieces is difficult to ascertain, the predilection for such prairie inhabitants would further suggest a foreign stimulus for the Qin examples, matured from the same cultural ground of the Ordos pieces. A few piece-mould cast plaques portraying two recumbent wild

¹⁰¹ Images of deer have been found within the remains of the ancient palace of Qin Shihuangdi and also appear as vehicles of immortals on lacquers belonged to the lady of Dai at Mawangdui (Hunan) dated to 168 BCE and bronze tubular poles inlaid by mercury amalgam found at Sanpanshan tomb of the king of Zhongshan, datable to the same time.

¹⁰² Again yoke ornaments [Shaanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo 1988: pl. 3.5].

hares one on top of the other occur only in private collections,¹⁰³ whilst none have come from officially excavated sites. Yet their arrangement would suggest a place of origin to the east of the Taihang Mountains, where other animals were often portrayed in such manner. The rabbit is not very commonly represented in Chinese art before its adoption as one of the zodiac animals during the Han period. Even the small jade carvings of rabbits found together other ones portraying antlered deer in Fu Hao's tomb at Xiaotun could have been influenced by a northern prototype, as portraits of small rabbits also appeared in the Lijiaya sphere of influence, at Jingjie Lingshi.¹⁰⁴ Equally influenced might have been the Eastern Zhou bronze vessels in the form of hares found at the Jin cemetery of Tianma-Qucun in Shanxi province, again close to Qin sphere of influence.¹⁰⁵

Bovine masks

Another point of connection with Qin would come from the harness ornament in bronze, dated to the 6th century BCE probably from northwestern China in the Therese and Erwin Harris Collection [Fig.16].¹⁰⁶



Fig. 16 Bovine mask [So and Bunker 1995: pl. 33, p. 118]

Cast in the shape of a bovine mask with large almond-shaped eyes, tiny heart-shaped ears and a broad curled up snout, this imposing object may have adorned the forehead of an elaborately caparisoned horse in the Central Asian tradition. Such custom is well illustrated by the horses buried in the 4th century BCE *kurgans* at Pazyryk in the Altai Mountains.¹⁰⁷ By contrast, the tiny heart-shaped ears are typically Chinese and occur on many Western and Eastern Zhou artefacts such as the bronze and jade tigers from Baoji in Shaanxi province datable to the 9th-8th c. BCE.



Fig. 17 Bovine mask on a bronze harness ornament [Cooke et al, 2000: pl 18, p. 81]

The connection with Shaanxi is further signalled by the discovery of a bovine image at Zhuyuangou [Fig.17].¹⁰⁸ In fact, Baoji Zhuyuangou site yielded a bronze horse harness ornament bearing a relief image of a horned mask resembling a bovine with two long, slightly curved, horns, which could be dated to the late

¹⁰³ Salmony 1933 pl.XVI and Bunker 1997 pls. 75-76.

¹⁰⁴ Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo 1986: fig.41.2-3-5.

¹⁰⁵ Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo 1994: pl.27.

¹⁰⁶ So and Bunker [1995: pl.33, p.118] would otherwise indicate a southern Siberian derivation for such an artefact.

¹⁰⁷ John Haskins [Haskins 1968: 92-95] suggested that certain horse chest frontlets with *taotie* designs of the late Zhou period would in fact provide a prototype for the masked plaques seen at Pazyryk, instead of being themselves derived from Central Asia.

¹⁰⁸ Again in Baoji municipality, close to Rujiazhuang [Baojishi bowuguan et al 1978: pl. 4.3].

Western Zhou period (8th c. BCE).¹⁰⁹ From the same archaeological context come some decorative patterns including deformed *taotie* masks. The latter are indeed following previous artistic criteria and well fit into the line of development of *taotie* masks. The contemporaneous presence at the site of both images would indicate that the bovine mask motive is not derivative of the *taotie*, and by being so different from previous bovine depictions of the Shang and early Western Zhou period in metropolitan China, it may have represented a distinctive element of the symbolic repertoire linked to the Xi Rong and consequently to Qin. Indeed, bovine heads with upright horns featured on Western Zhou bronze vessels throughout metropolitan China, embellishing the handles and the body of the recipients. In particular the interest for realistic rendition of zoomorphic images, especially bovine heads, during the Western Zhou period seems to be linked with north-western and western China, namely Shaanxi, Henan and Sichuan provinces.¹¹⁰ The presence of similar motives in the Zhuyuangou bronze inventory further substantiates the relevance of such images within northwestern China during the western Zhou period, perhaps under the cultural influence of pre-dynastic Qin. On the other hand, it is interesting to notice the parallel western development of bovine heads within Dian culture in Yunnan province during the late Warring States period.¹¹¹ Judging by the occurrence of bull's portraits on cowry shell containers, the cult of this animal must have played an important role in Dian society, perhaps echoing earlier ritual practices from the west. Even more curious is the stylistic analogy between Dian image of a bull's head and the Harappan bull image, both featuring a heart-shaped motif on the front.

In terms of surface rendering, the piece illustrated here finds a tantalizing comparison in the similarly grooved fluting on a *hu*-vase related stylistically to vessels cast at Houma, in Shanxi province.¹¹² Indeed this metallurgical centre once again proved to be strongly connected with Qin, as evidence of common stylistic elements would suggest. Hence, it could also be the case that Qin was the first to introduce the motif of the bovine mask into metropolitan China, through the connection with Houma foundry in Shanxi province. The bull motif may have ultimately derived from a Near Eastern prototype. The bull's cult started in the Paleolithic hunting societies in the Anatolian peninsula, where it was later adopted by early agriculturalists and eventually found its way into Sumerian and later Iranian mythologies. The Iranian tradition must have been the source of inspiration for the groups of cattle breeders inhabiting the Eurasian steppes, who often believed in the

¹⁰⁹ The cemetery indeed belonged to the fiefdom of Yu, a small state strongly influenced by pre-dynastic Qin culture.

¹¹⁰ Rawson 1990: vol. IIA, 35-46.

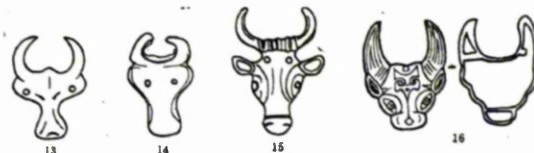
¹¹¹ Rawson 1983: no.211, p. 178.

¹¹² Wilson 1992: 227, fig. 7.

association between the moon god and the image of the bull.¹¹³ The motif was channelled and stylistically processed into the Andronovo and later Scythian repertoires, carried throughout Eurasia until it reached the northwestern border of China and Qin.

Qin connection with nomadic groups in the western regions would be further indicated by the occurrence of small portable bronze plaques in the shape of bovine heads found in surface collection in the Ordos region [Fig.18].¹¹⁴

Fig. 18 Small bovine head plaque from the Ordos [Tian and Guo 1986: pl. 89, p. 123



Indeed none so far has been produced

from official sites, but the taste for small sculptural zoomorphic portraits can be considered in line with the nomadic Scythian-related tradition of the mid 1st millennium BCE in the Ordos, as small heads of tigers, wolves and especially birds have been copiously found in Taohongbala, Maoqinggou and Aluchaideng, following a trend also encountered in Kazakhstan and southern Siberia. At Aluchaideng, as well as at another related site in Shaanxi province, Shenmu xian Nalin'gaotu, a number of artefacts displayed the same distinctive surface treatment of grooved bands, suggesting a link of manufacture.

Another alternative provenance would point to South Asia, especially India, where the buffalo with upright curved horns has been revered from times unmemorable. Bactrio-Margiana bronze production too could provide the intermediary phase, given the wide range of bull depictions in their art production. Indeed similar, almost identical plaques have been usually associated with random findings in Tibet. Tibetans tokchas in the shape of an elongated ox head have been consistently collected by the Tibetan people and used as amulets throughout the centuries. Their frequent occurrence in Tibet, even though no date or provenance can be ascertained, nevertheless would signal their passage through those regions (as we will see later when discussing the specific motif of the 'monkey on a horse', Tibet and Qinghai seem to have played an important role in the transmission of iconographic motifs from the southwest).



Fig. 19 Gold earring from Jiaohe Gouxi [Shanghai 1998: pl 111]

Although datable to a later date, roughly to the 3rd -2nd c. BCE, the burial site of Jiaohe Gouxi in eastern Xinjiang (Turfan basin) yielded several examples of bovine representations, including a

¹¹³ Gryaznov 1972, Porada 196.

¹¹⁴ Tian and Guo 1986: 121-2.

golden plate ornament shaped like an ox head and a beautiful gold earring in the form of an elongated bovine head inlaid with turquoise and white stones [Fig.19].¹¹⁵ Other artefacts brought to light from the Gouxu cemetery of Jiaohe city, such as the beautiful repoussé double gold torque, would point to a close relationship with Scythian groups further to the west, especially with Kazakhstan. Yet, the Scythian connection was probably established at an earlier date, during the mid-first millennium BCE, as the findings from Alagou sites again in Turfan basin would seem to tell. The Chinese historical documents recorded Jiaohe city as the capital of the Chushi (or Jushi) people during the Western Han period. The identity of these people is to date still disputed, but the findings would point to a strong affinity with western Saka culture. Apart from the issue of ethnic affiliation, the presence of a symbolism using the image of a bull or a cow was evidently exploited in eastern Xinjiang during the latter half of the 1st millennium BCE and could have been linked to the Scythian influence. Indeed the examples provided by sites further to the east in Shaanxi province can be dated much earlier than the Jiaohe specimens. Nevertheless, they too could have belonged to the same deeply rooted tradition going back to the 2nd millennium BCE in Central Asia, carried on by Andronovo people. The iconography might have in turn been absorbed by the nomadic groups of the Scythian horizon during the 1st millennium BCE and transmitted eastwards by few subsequent migratory waves, in different periods.

Human representation

Allegedly dated to the late Western Zhou period, are also two small carvings of clamshell, possibly tips of hairpins, portraying two humans heads [Fig.20] whose features have led scholars to retain them of Europoid facial type. Remains of a bone tip were found inside one of the heads, inducing archaeologists to assume their use as hairpins. Furthermore, their flattened backs was probably intended to enable the pins to lie comfortably on the wearer's hair, although their shape could have been strongly dependent on the material's own limitations.¹¹⁶

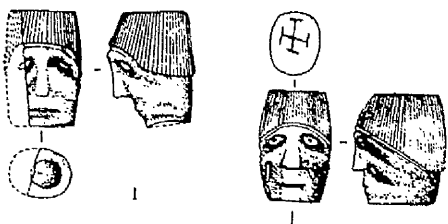


Fig. 20 'Europoid' head, shell carving [Shui Tao 1998: pl.1.2, p. 375]

¹¹⁵ Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1998.

¹¹⁶ Mair 1990.

The two small shell carvings were excavated from a late Western Zhou palatial site at Zhouyuan in Fufeng county, Shaanxi province dated to the 8th century BCE.¹¹⁷ They display large and deep-set eyes slanting downwards, wide closed rectilinear mouths with thin lips, large noses and narrow faces (rather trapezoidal in shape), all physiognomic elements which would support a Europoid affiliation. Furthermore, they display truncated conical headgears affined to those worn by some groups of the Eurasian steppes. They show quite a naturalistic rendering, a feature alien to metropolitan Chinese figurative tradition.¹¹⁸ Indeed human faces are seldom represented in Chinese Bronze Age art and if found, they are stylistically consistent with schematised images of animals on ritual bronzes.¹¹⁹ In this case, instead, the various physiognomies appear to characterise specific ethnic strains. The same can be said for the unique dagger found at Changping Baifu, which exhibits a pommel with the full-face image of a Caucasian man whose Europoid features are highlighted by bushy eyebrows and a handlebar moustache.¹²⁰ All these portraits can be indeed analysed in comparison with similar renderings found in the western regions, including Xinjiang and parts of Central Asia. In particular, similar trapezoidal faces have been carved on rocks on the south-western slopes of the Tianshan mountains,¹²¹ but they can also find parallels in the way nomadic warriors were portrayed with wide noses and rectilinear mouths on the stone statues found throughout the southern Altai region,¹²² echoing the southern Siberian and Mongolian counterparts. These depictions would seem to follow the migratory waves of Andronovo-Karasuk and Scythian-related people from Southern Siberia into the Altai region of northern Xinjiang and in Mongolia during the 2nd and 1st millennia BCE. The discovery of similar human depictions on shell in Shaanxi province as well as on a dagger from Baifu could hint at some kind of indirect cultural connection, supported by means of trading contacts rather than by demic migrations¹²³. It is also interesting to notice that most of the western Zhou artefacts in the funerary assemblages from Baifu appeared extremely close in shapes and decorations to those unearthed in late western Zhou sites within the Qin area of cultural influence in Shaanxi and Shanxi provinces further to the west. Was there a connection between pre-dynastic Qin and Baifu then? Further investigation is needed to

¹¹⁷ Yin Shengping 1986: 46-9 and Mair 1990:27-47.

¹¹⁸ Mair provides the only exception [1990: fig 3]. It consists of a bone carving of a human head unearthed at Anyang, which would portray a foreign Europoid resident in Shang China, strikingly similar to those depicted in the Western Zhou hairpins.

¹¹⁹ Chai Xiaoming 1992: 1111-21.

¹²⁰ The dagger was originally thought to have a mushroom-like pommel, like others found at the site, but upon recognizing the face, it became clear that the pitted surface of the pommel was indeed the artistic rendering of the Caucasian tightly curled hair [Csorba 1996: 564-87 and Beijingshi wenwu guanlichu 1976.

¹²¹ Wang Binghua 1988.

¹²² Urumqi 1999: 344-5.

¹²³ Indeed, the shape of these Western Zhou heads seems to follow the style of contemporary Chinese hairpins, although the subject matter did not.

unravel the network of contacts and relationships between northern and western China during the 1st millennium BCE, yet the blurred picture emerging would seem to highlight the role of pre-dynastic Qin.

Another interesting element in the two small shell carvings from Zhouyuan is the cross incision on top of one of the two figures. The sign has been identified by Mair as the ancient Chinese character for *m^hag (“mage”)-i.e. *wu-*, identical to the Teutonic Cross sign used first by Templars and later western magicians from the medieval period until today.¹²⁴ The ancient character, believed to derive from an earlier old Persian word of the same meaning (*maguš*), would have denoted powerful individuals at the Chinese courts who primarily engaged in divinations, astrology, prayers and healing with medicines. The linguistic evidence would suggest that priests of Iranian cultural background had entered China during the Shang and the subsequent Zhou dynasties, possibly carrying with them a cultural vocabulary alien to the metropolitan Chinese. The similarities between the allegedly Central Asian Scythian portraits and the small carved heads could even imply that the Scythians and these religious figures, *maguš*, had been somewhat connected. In this respect it is interesting to observe the definition of the word *maga*, ‘magian’ in Sanskrit. It defined ‘a priest of the sun’, also called Śākadvipin, i.e. from Śākadvipa, ‘the land of the Saka.’¹²⁵ The Sanskrit indication of a Saka-Scythian origin for these religious figures would thus corroborate the material evidence exposed above.

Raptor heads and beaks

The constant repetition of conventionalised raptor-heads and carnivore designs on belt plaques excavated at Liangcheng Maoqinggou, Inner Mongolia and throughout the Ordos region could have derived from both Chinese and Siberian sources. In this site objects undoubtedly produced in China were also recovered, such as the typical Eastern Zhou garment hook, and the knife-shaped coin, an indication of the existence of some trade with the Central Plains. Continued relations between China and Inner Mongolia are witnessed by the presence of some Chinese seals and faience beads found in graves dated to the late Warring States period.

Images of heads of predatory birds are in fact spread across the Scythian horizon, in many different variants. Apart from the Ordos and Mongolia, they have been located in the North Black Sea region, the Caucasus, the Aral Sea region (Ujgarak), the Pamir, in the Tasmola complex of Kazakhstan, in the Altai (Maiemir) and Minusinsk (Tagar) areas

¹²⁴ Mair 1990: 27-47.

¹²⁵ Mair 1990: 46-7.

of southern Siberia.¹²⁶ Its profusion reflect its popularity among the Scythians, who rendered it in various materials, employing different techniques: in bone and bronze they would have served as decorative motifs on knives, mirrors and sword guards, or alternatively, they would function as plates, pommels, scabbard tips or bow heads. Plaques and harness rivets designed as a comma with neither eyes nor beak halves may represent a very schematic variant of the bird's head, which was diffused only in the eastern part of the Eurasian steppes from the Aral Sea to the Ordos desert. Indeed the same motif may have stemmed out from this part of the Scythian horizon, possibly the Aral Sea region (particularly the Ujgarak burial complex), where the greatest number of findings has been located. Pictures of heads of predatory birds in the Middle East are known through Hittite and Kerkuk seals.¹²⁷ These pictures must have ultimately influenced the appearance of such bird-heads within the Scythian artistic vocabulary.

A further development of such stylistic disposition towards bird imagery can be encountered in the three-dimensional raptor-heads pole finials unearthed in the Yanglang zone of Gansu and Ningxia provinces dated to the mid to late 1st millennium BCE.¹²⁸ These small finials are cast in the shape of a stylised raptor head with a round neck that turns into a tubular socket of square section.¹²⁹ The bird has round eyes, indicated by indented marks, and a small hooked beak. Those from Yongdeng Yushugou were found in a set of 4, suggesting their possible ornamental use as chariot fittings. But the motif seems to have evolved further when looking at the long beaked bird finials from the Ordos region, excavated from both Xigoupan and Sujigou.¹³⁰ They feature a long pole shaped like a beaked bird. The eyes are rendered as simplified roundels, whilst the beak has grown enormously long, if compared with the Yujiashuang finial. These examples are indeed closer in shape to analogous pole caps made prevalently in bone unearthed throughout southern Siberia and Kazakhstan during the Scythian period.

Possibly related to the same iconography, are some other decorative plaques found in the Ordos area and precisely at the site of Aluchaideng (4th-3rd c. BCE), which present a quatri-lobed shape with four stylised birds' heads.¹³¹ This theme, as the previous ones, can be compared to an analogous plaque found in Kazakhstan, and precisely at Chilikta, where the heads of the animals have been rendered much clearer. In the Aluchaideng

¹²⁶ Chlenova 1992: 515.

¹²⁷ Chlenova 1967: pl.30, 22,23

¹²⁸ Pole finials in the shape of a beaked raptor head have been found at Pengpu Yujiashuang, Zhongwei Langwozikeng and Touyingxiang Pingle in Guyuan xian, in Ningxia province as well as at Yongdeng Yushugou in Gansu province, a site from some aspects (mostly ceramics) close to the earlier Shajing cultural horizon [Zhong and Han 1983: fig 3.5-7].

¹²⁹ See Fig.121, Chapter 4.

¹³⁰ See Fig. 84, Chapter 4 [Gai Shanlin 1965 and Tian and Guo 1986:351-65].

¹³¹ See Figs. 102-103, Chapter 4.

example though, the heads have been distorted and the original motif is hard to detect, but the beak curved, the ear elongated and the eye bulged can still be distinguished.

From the same areas of the Ordos and Yanglang, also come the highly stylised bird and tiger S-shaped designs dated to the 6th-5th century BCE, which could be compared to the zoomorphic patterns found in jades from the Guo cemetery at Shangcunling in Henan dated to the late Western Zhou period, whilst the standing carnivores resemble images from southern Siberia, at Pazyryk.¹³² It is noteworthy to remember that Guo-state burials at Sanmenxia Shangcunling also yielded what is considered to be the earliest evidence for cast-iron sword in metropolitan China and few are the metallurgical features of its bronze assemblage, including round-knobbed mirrors, which would point to an indirect link with the Chawuhu culture in Xinjiang, and possibly to a remote connection with the west.¹³³

Coiled felines

It is at this regard very interesting to notice the round mirror with back loop handle and animal patterns found at Chawuhu,¹³⁴ which seems to find a counterpart in the Guo state as well [Fig.21].¹³⁵ The mirror discovered in 1956 in M1612 at Shangcunling, dated to the 9th-7th century BCE, presents a back decorated in bass-relief with the contours of two tigers, a bird and a deer in radial disposition.¹³⁶



Fig. 21 Round mirror with zoomorphic designs in bass-relief [Song Xihu 1997: 152, fig 3, left]

Both the choice of animals, the arrangement of the figures and their contours find counterparts in the mirror typology from the Sayan-Altai region (Maiemir phase), also dated 8th-7th century BCE.¹³⁷ Guo state is also the place in metropolitan China where some of the earliest belt ornaments have been unearthed. In tomb 1715 at

¹³² Various examples of stylised S-shaped animal plaques, even depicting two horses were found along the northwestern regions, especially in the Ordos area (including the sites of Maoqinggou, Taohongbala and Gongsuhao, Yulongtai), in Ningxia at Yanglang Mazhuang [Tian and Guo 1986: fig 40, 41, 81,82, 113].

¹³³ At Chawuhu and Qunbake small iron and bronze knives could be compared to those found in the Chust culture in Ferghana; even Chawuhu skeletal remains of Europoid stock would point to a connection with the Pamir and Ferghana regions [Kuzmina 1998].

¹³⁴ See Fig.44, Chapter 4.

¹³⁵ An Zhimin 1998.

¹³⁶ Song Xihu 1997: 152, fig 3, left.

¹³⁷ Farkas et al 2000.

Shangcunling, serrated round and triangular belt ornaments dated to the 9th -8th century BCE in cast bronze were found surrounding the waist of the deceased¹³⁸.

The image portrayed on the Chawuhu mirror gives scope to another disputed question concerning the origin of the coiled feline. In fact, the animal arranged around the central knob could be interpreted as that of a feline predator with a curled tail and a gaping mouth trying to snap its own tail. Indeed later versions found in north-east China, dated to the 6th-5th c. BCE would belong to the widespread wave of the Scythian influx, as similar ornamental plaques have been identified throughout Central Asia, from the North Black Sea region, to the North Caucasus, the Aral Sea, the Tasmola complex in eastern Kazakhstan, western and southern Siberia, to Mongolia. Yet the earlier occurrence of a coiled feline at Chawuhu (roughly 11th-6th c. BCE), with its alleged cultural connections with both the east (Guo) and the west (Chust culture) could suggest an alien derivation beyond that of the Scythian horizon.

Animal combat

The appearance of a crude animal combat scene where a crouching feline is finishing off the remains of a small herbivore, on belt plaques dated to the 6th-5th century BCE in the northwestern zone appears contemporary to the emergence of the same motif on bronze vessels of the late Spring and Autumn period from the Liyu foundry. The narrow dividing bands on some of the Liyu vessels display rather harmless reclining animals interspersed with ferocious ones -felines- which clamp other animals as well as human in their jaws. This kind of hostility between beast and beast is alien to the Chinese tradition; rather, it belongs to the Near East symbolic system from the 3rd millennium BCE onwards.¹³⁹ Such motif is ultimately considered an Assyrian invention transferred into Achaemenid and Scythian artistic repertoires, which subsequently moved eastwards through Inner Asia as an important element of the Scythian complex.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, the pure animal combat motif -that is, animals actually locked in physical attack- occurs in the art of southern Siberia by the 5th-4th c. BCE,¹⁴¹ but the attack of man by beast is yet unknown in the steppe repertoire. It may have occurred in China as the ultimate evolution of the famous Shang motif of the "man at the gaping mouth of a beast", though

¹³⁸ Triangular bronze plaques have been also unearthed at Nalin'gaotu in Shenmu xian, Shaanxi province, a site generally associated to the Ordos cultural sphere and indirectly connected to the Scythian influx (5th - 4th c. BCE). However, these findings would reflect the proximity to metropolitan centres and the extent of cultural interaction with the Chinese, rather than with the Scythians [Dai and Sun 1983: 25].

¹³⁹ The Near eastern origin of the "animal style" is rejected by many modern scholars, but Western Asian motifs, in particular from Assyrian and Achaemenid art are assumed to have played a role in the transmission of this theme to Chinese Northern Zone.

¹⁴⁰ Watson 1971: 112

¹⁴¹ For example the scenes of predation marked in felt on shabracks from Pazyryk [Rudenko 1970: 268-269].

clear evidence of this transmigration has yet to come.¹⁴² Another interesting source of inspiration for the representation of men as preys may in fact have come from archaeological cultures on the northern border of the Shang state. When looking back into the late 2nd millennium BCE material from Lijiaya cultural sphere, a three-dimensional depiction of a tiger about to assault a kneeling man is found on a ritual wand from Yanchuan Yongdoucun.¹⁴³ However, it is yet difficult to assess whether this representation could be considered endogenous to Lijiaya or inspired by contemporary Shang depictions, or even by western prototypes, especially in the light of similar scenes found in Luristan art.

Easier to ascertain is the possible western stimulus behind the subject matter of the animal attack sculpture unearthed from tomb no. 1 at Lingshou, Pingshan Xian, Hebei, capital of the Zhongshan state, and dated 309-308 BCE. Here a three-dimensional tiger is realistically depicted crunching a cervid in its jaws: the Chinese artists have transformed a typical steppe motif into a realistic three-dimensional depiction. This tendency was already partially evident in the Liyu production, suggesting that the Zhongshan animal combat was a motif only indirectly borrowed from the steppes. The Zhongshan state, originally called Xianyu, was established by a northern ethnic group known as Bai Di, (the White Di), whose customs seem to have been sinicised quite soon, thanks to the occupation of Wei (406-377 BCE). During the Warring States period this small kingdom suffered the influences of the neighbouring states of Yan, Qi and Zhao, considered important centres of the transmission of iconographic motifs from the northwest.¹⁴⁴ Thus its location could have easily resulted in contacts with the mounted, semi-nomadic tribes of Mongolia and southern Siberia, where animal combat was traditionally employed.¹⁴⁵

But the animal combat scene reached Chinese territories further south: two centuries after it had been introduced in north-western China, it penetrated into the Ba-Shu-Dian cultural sphere of Sichuan and Yunnan provinces. Bronze plaques in high relief, interpreted with a sympathetic eye and unsurpassed realism, have been found mainly at

¹⁴² Chang 1983: 56-80

¹⁴³ See Fig.18, Chapter 4. A remote connection with Luristan could be hypothesised, as a strikingly similar bronze wand, described in the caption as a back scraper, bearing on top an aggressive tiger devouring a small prey has been found in Azerbaijan, dating to the early 1st millennium BCE [Mahboubian, 1997: pl.262].

¹⁴⁴ Li 1985:93-107.

¹⁴⁵ The Di seem to have played a complex role amongst Chinese states: they established marriage ties with the Chinese and they observed the Chinese custom of exchanging royal kin members as virtual hostages. In particular the state of Jin seems to have had the most dramatic involvement with these ethnic groups, through military campaigns and marriage exchanges. Their frequent contacts may have resulted in a reciprocal cultural influence and may have been one of the reasons for the appearance of certain iconographic motifs into Liyu bronze artistic repertoire.

Shizhai Shan, in Yunnan.¹⁴⁶ The presence of the snake may be attributed to a local tradition, but on the whole, Dian animal symplegma represents the latest and farthest extension of this Scythian *leitmotiv*, which some scholars believed it could have been introduced through the middle role of the state of Chu.¹⁴⁷ Other evidence of the Scythian influx comes from the weapons sheaths made in gold repoussé and the bronze swords bearing incised decorations of felines and other animals¹⁴⁸. Their fur treatment is curiously reminiscent of the Bashadar flame-like effect.

Qin state and the West

From the textual references encountered in the *Shiji* and other Chinese chronicles and the archaeological evidence available at present, it is clear that Qin rulers, even though their ethnic origin remains debatable, greatly intermingled with frontier people to the northwest. The earliest example would come from Gansu, precisely Lingtai xian Baicaopo, a Western Zhou site (10th c. BCE), where four scabbard ornaments with interlacing tendrils and buffalo figures were excavated together with typically Chinese 'tanged' daggers (*ge* dagger-axes).¹⁴⁹ The scabbard appliqué ornament, a typology belonging to a non-Chinese repertoire, was widespread among the nomadic peoples of the steppe lands, and their recovery in Qin homeland, with a typical Chinese motif (the tendrils) would signal an early process of cultural syncretism. Other less ornate examples were recovered in Shaanxi province in a later (9th c. BCE) Western Zhou site in Baoji xian.¹⁵⁰ Eventually related scabbards but made in carved bone and ivory reached central China from the 7th to the 6th centuries BCE, as they have been found in Henan Luoyang Jincun.¹⁵¹

Also the bronze-hilt short sword cast in one piece was transmitted from the north to Gansu around the beginning of the 1st millennium BCE. In fact, an example recovered from Yucun, in Ning xian, Gansu (9th century BCE), still in Qin homeland, displays all the features of a northern short sword,¹⁵² such as the reinforcing mid rib on the blade, whilst the dragon-head design of the hilt is typically Chinese. Stylistically related short swords have been recovered throughout Qin territory, in Gansu Lingtai xian, and in southwestern Shaanxi, in Long xian and Fengxiang xian. Short swords with similar dragon-head hilt design kept on being produced in Qin, and developed into cast gold hilt and iron blades,

¹⁴⁶ Rawson 1983.

¹⁴⁷ Bunker 1983: 91

¹⁴⁸ For an example see pl 145 in Rawson 1983.

¹⁴⁹ Gansu sheng Bowuguan 1977: pl.14.3, p.115.

¹⁵⁰ Zhang Changshou 1980: 526.

¹⁵¹ Beijing 1959b: 97-98

¹⁵² See Fig.7 of this chapter [Xu and Liu 1985: 350].

lavishly inlaid with turquoise, as the one found in 6th c. BCE tomb at Yimencun, Baoji xian, Shaanxi.¹⁵³

On the same line, is also the iron blade-tinned bronze hilt short sword found in Gansu at Lingtai xian Jingjiazhuang,¹⁵⁴ one of the earliest forged decarburised steel (cast) iron artefacts found in metropolitan China, which comes from a Qin tomb in their homeland. The excavators dated it to the early 8th century BCE. As suspected, several examples of bronze hilt short swords with the same type of forged iron blade (a total of 9 specimens) have been also identified in Gansu and Ningxia (i.e. in Yanglang area),¹⁵⁵ datable between the 8th and the 5th century BCE, that is during the Spring and Autumn period. Among the typologies the most frequently found is either a typical northern short sword with animal design like those found at Taohongbala (antenna type) or a short sword with again animal patterns on the hilt, yet imbued with Chinese stylistic connotations, which would prove again the extent of Qin influence on Yanglang tribes. It is interesting to notice that in most of the Ningxia sites where these swords have been unearthed, typical Qin three-holed *ge*-dagger axes and sometimes *mao* spear heads were also found, further attesting the close ties between the two entities.

The majority of the early iron artefacts (especially weapons) are very low in carbon content. Such peculiarity would render the iron good for smithing (forge welding, quench hardening, tempering, cold hammering), and more resistant, but almost impossible to cast, given an impracticable high melting point (wrought iron or steel). This process would not be possible to mass-produce evidently. However, another way which would have been instead easy to produce in large scale would have been that of casting high-carbon (around 4% of C) iron, brittle in nature, which would melt at a lower accessible temperature, and then decarburised to a low carbon content, in order to render it 'malleable cast iron'.¹⁵⁶

Several iron agricultural implements (spades and sickles for digging the soil) have been also found in the tomb of Duke Jing of Qin, who died in 537 BCE in Fengxiang. The 13 mausolea of the early dukes of Qin were discovered in 1977, each of them including two or more very large ramp vertical tombs and several sacrificial pits containing horses and chariots, the whole surrounded by one or more moats. In tomb M1 apart from 182 human

¹⁵³ Baojishi kaogu gongzuodui 1993: 24-26. Cruder versions yet, still inlaid with turquoise are found in other western and northern sites [Zhao Congcang 1991: 9].

¹⁵⁴ Liu and Zhu 1981.

¹⁵⁵ This type of short sword has been found in Ningxia at Pengyang xian and Guyuan xian [Luo Feng: 1993a and 1993b], at Xiji xian [Luo and Han 1990], Zhongwei xian [Zhou Xinghua 1989] and Gansu Yanglang xian [Liu and Xu 1988].

¹⁵⁶ Han Rubin 1998: 92.

sacrifices, including high rank persons and slaves, 10 digging implements (including a spade) made of iron were found in the tamped-earth fill of the tomb.¹⁵⁷

Belt hooks could also have been transmitted (or at least the idea of fastening the belt) from the northern area to metropolitan China, through the intermediary role of Qin. The belt plaque and buckle must have been regarded as a high symbol of status in the steppe areas, given the large occurrence in burial contexts of the Yanglang zone. This fact and the close economic ties between the steppe people and Qin must have induced the ornamented belt to travel into China, emerging first as one cold expect in the Qin domain during the 7th-6th century BCE. The so-called 'Chinese' belt hook, differently from the 'nomadic' buckle that uses a loop and tongue fastening system, employs a hook and a button system. As it can be seen from various portraits throughout China, it was worn with the knob inserted into a hole in one end of the belt and the head hooked into one of several slits in the other end¹⁵⁸. The commonest materials were bronze and iron, apart from some examples made of gold, jade and silver. Rapidly, the belt hook became prized and remained basically the only ornament on a Chinese belt throughout the first millennium BCE. The earliest examples come from the Qin tombs at Fengxiang,¹⁵⁹ datable to the late Spring and Autumn period (6th century BCE). Fengxiang was a very important site, as it has been identified as the location of the city of Yong, the capital of Qin from 677 BCE to 424 BCE. Consequently, the site yielded the greatest variety of belt hooks, including the common belt hook in bronze and small gold hooks with a hooked end, but the projection encased in a hollow cavity on the underside.¹⁶⁰

Together with these bronze examples, iron belt hooks were also found, displaying the same range of typologies seen in the bronze specimens. From the simultaneous discovery of two hooks, one made of gold inlaid iron and the other of plain iron, attached the former to the master, the latter to his slave, one would suspect a symbolic connotation, implying status and wealth in the use of gold rather than iron.¹⁶¹ What is clear is that iron belt hooks were also worn by slaves and probably this fact would signify a less valuable nature of iron, certainly if compared with gold. Yet the co-presence of iron and bronze belt hooks in Qin tombs in Fengxiang dated to the early Warring States period would seemingly indicate an equal value for the two media from that stage

¹⁵⁷ Wagner 1993: 92.

¹⁵⁸ Wang Rengxiang 1985: 267-312.

¹⁵⁹ Zhao Congcang: pl 5.2. Yongcheng kaogudui 1981.

¹⁶⁰ Yongcheng kaogudui 1981.

¹⁶¹ Found at the Jin-related site Houma Qiaocun in Shanxi province, in M2; these tombs have been associated with settlers from Qin in the territory of the state of Wei. They are dated to the 4th century BCE and yielded several human sacrifices, probably slaves, who were also collared with an iron ringlet. Similar iron collars have been found in dynastic Qin [Yongcheng Kaogudui 1981] and Yan (Xiadu site) sites [Hebei sheng wenwu guanlichu 1975].

onwards (although bronze hooks outnumber iron ones). Before then, no iron belt hooks have been counted among the inventory of the early tombs at Fengxiang dated to the late Spring and Autumn period. If, from one hand, fewer iron hooks in tombs could signal the emergence of this medium in China, on the other hand, however, the lesser number of iron belt hooks in comparison with the bronze ones, would point to a higher symbolic value of the latter, and to a more utilitarian value for the former.

Interestingly, similar fastening devices have been recovered both from Pengyang xian and Yanglang Mazhuang in Ningxia, where so-called *pipa*-shaped belt hooks have been identified.¹⁶² However, these sites have been dated later than the Fengxiang one, and the decorative patterns on the hooks are visibly Chinese in style, suggesting a Chinese priority of invention.

Yet, bronze objects with a strong hook at one end and a hole at the other for attaching a strap, were also used by the nomadic people in Mongolia and southern Siberia,¹⁶³ although their exact function is unclear, for they could have been used for fastening belts as well as for hanging objects (weapons most likely) from the belt. The evidence come from several 'deer stones' steles (*olennye kamni*) scattered over a vast territory stretching from the Amur River in eastern Siberia to the Elbe River in the west and generally associated with Scythian-related nomadic cultures. These commemorative stone steles found close to burial complexes in most cases depict either zoomorphic or abstract-anthropomorphic forms in Scytho-Saka-Siberian animal style. In the latter ones, the only realistic elements are the incised necklaces, the beads and the fighting and festive belts with suspended weapons. The type of weapon depicted are illustrated with particular details: dagger's pommels are annulated, mushroom-shaped or animal shaped, *gorytos* and short swords, battle axes, knives and whetstones are also portrayed. These particular depictions are used to date the deer stones. If so, those steles with weapons hanging from the belt encountered in Mongolia, Tuva, eastern Kazakhstan and the Altai region could be dated to the 9th-8th century BCE, long time before the emergence of any type of belt hook or buckle in north-west China. However, these steles would correspond to an indirect form of evidence, since only rarely from the depictions one can actually detect the presence of hooks for suspension. Curiously enough, it was also in Qin that the earliest known hooked device for suspending bells was found: in Baoji xian, at Taigongmiao in the tomb of Duke Wu of Qin, dated to the

¹⁶² For example at Zhangjiecun [Yang and Qi 1999: pl.1.2, p. 29], but also at Maoqinggou, in western Inner Mongolia [Tian and Guo 1986: 227-31].

¹⁶³ Kimball et al 1995: 326-8.

early 7th century BCE.¹⁶⁴ However, it is still not clear if there is a connection between the suspension and the belt hooks.

At the same time, coiled birds S-shaped tinned bronze plaques found in great number in the Qingyang plateau of southern Gansu and in Ningxia most of the times feature a decorative style more Chinese than northerner [Fig.22].



Fig. 22 Ligou, Qingyang, tinned bronze plaque [Liu and Xu 1988: 420, pl.17.3].

These belt ornaments were probably made by Qin artisans during the late 5th-4th century BCE to appeal to northern taste. A similar intention must have been behind the production of another type of belt buckle frequently encountered in 5th century BCE tombs in Gansu and in Ningxia.¹⁶⁵ Tinned bronze plaques in the shape of a tiger with her cub and a small snake [Fig.23].¹⁶⁶ This type of plaques display a typical northern motif, distributed all over the Yanglang area but its surface decoration with pseudo-granulation and surface curls recalls artefacts found in Shanxi, Hunyuan xian, Liyu, an area controlled by another semi-barbarian state, which was also engaged in trading exchange with frontier people, the Zhao. The dragons, granulated texturing, raised commas and interlace on the Qin hilts and gold articles found at Fengxiang, on the other hand, also resemble the same motifs on clay moulds of harness fittings from Houma or related workshops, such as Hunyuan, in Shanxi, providing the connection, between Shanxi, Shaanxi and Gansu.



Fig. 23 Qingyang plaque depicting a tiger, her cub and a small snake [Liu and Xu 1988: p.421, pl.18.5].

Further evidence of Qin manufacture can be offered by yet another belt plaque unearthed in Qingyang at Yuanjiacun [Fig.24],¹⁶⁷ which presents a clearly defined Chinese decorative style in the interlacing dragons deliberately selected for exotic appeal. Chinese style seems to have slowly crept into the nomadic stylistic repertoire, as

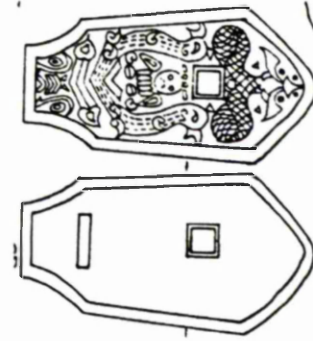
¹⁶⁴ Lu and Yang 1978: pl 1-2.

¹⁶⁵ In Xiji xian Chenyuanchuan site [Yan Shizhong 1992: 574, pl.1.10].

¹⁶⁶ Liu and Xu 1988: 421, pl 18.5.

other examples of syncretic style are known throughout the Yanglang area, both in Gansu and Ningxia, during the mid Warring States period.

Fig. 24 Qingyang Yuanjiacun tinned bronze plaque [Liu and Xu 1988: p. 414, pl. 2.11].



As proved above, the early emergence in the Qin domain of belt hooks during the 7th-6th century BCE can be partially ascribed to the relationship between this state and the northwestern tribes, notably those inhabiting the so-called Yanglang archaeological area (the Qingyang plateau in Gansu and the Guyuan county of Ningxia). With it certain selected iconography was possibly transmitted: it seems likely that the same figure of the camel might have been introduced into China, through Qin, during the 4th century BCE.¹⁶⁸ To this regard, the same site in the Ningxia part of the Yanglang zone where

pipa-shaped Qin style belt hooks have been excavated, Zhangjiecun in Pengyang xian, has also yielded a belt plaque depicting a camel with his rider [Fig.25].



Fig. 25 Plaque representing a kneeling camel and his rider found at Zhangjiecun, Pengyang xian, Ningxia [Yang and Qi 1999: p. 29, pl.1.1].

Furthermore, belt ornaments similar to those unearthed in the Guo state, but made of jade, have also been recovered from the same looted tomb of Duke Jing of Qin (577-537 BCE) opened outside Fengxiang. This stylistic relation might be due to the history of the land in southwestern Shaanxi. The lords of Guo, who in 771 BCE retreated east with the Zhou court, first dominated this area. Then Qin took over, inheriting Guo culturally mixed subjects along the territory. This would explain the presence, indirect, of Guo stylistic patterns in Qin. Then by looking retrospectively, Guo stylistic connections with the steppes at the beginning of the 1st millennium BCE could have first been possible by close contacts in Shaanxi province.

¹⁶⁷ Liu and Xu 1988: 414, pl. 2.11.

¹⁶⁸ So 1995: 36-43.

From the discovery of belt hooks, it is evident that tinning was also largely employed and that the belt hook was gaining importance as a status symbol in proper China as well. Qin appear to have also adopted the northern practice of tinning leaded-tin bronze plaques, probably from foreigners from Guyuan in Ningxia that came to serve at the Qin court. This idea is supported by the similarity between some S-shaped distinctive bracelets [Fig.26] found in Ningxia (dated to the 6th-5th centuries BCE) and counterparts found in Qin burials of the 5th-4th century BCE.¹⁶⁹



Fig. 26 Fragment of a tinned bracelet with horizontal band pattern found in Ningxia [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1995]

Tinning was a technique widely employed in Gansu, Ningxia, western Inner Mongolia and Ordos regions to embellish lead-tin bronze ornaments by making them shine with a silvery surface.¹⁷⁰ Dipping or wiping a bronze object in molten tin without the aid of mercury accomplished this effect. Apart from centres in the northwest of China, tinning was also practised in southern China in Sichuan, where a different tinning technique employing mercury amalgam was used for patching bronze blades of the Ba-Shu culture, during the Warring States period.¹⁷¹ In metropolitan China, however, the tinning technique employed by Qin artisans seems to follow the northern method. Qin metalworkers had a vast supply of tin, as it appears from the employment of tin in various archaeological contexts and the richness in tin ores in Shaanxi province.¹⁷² This availability must have stimulated the adoption and development of such decorative technique. Tinned bronze belt hooks have been excavated at Huangjiagou, near Xianyang in Shaanxi province,¹⁷³ and a lead-tin alloy surface enrichment has also been identified on several mid Warring States period vessels at Huaiyin in Jiangsu province, witnessing the diffusion of the tinning method.¹⁷⁴

Yoke ornaments as well, have been found in pre-dynastic Qin tombs, with an iconographical choice close to that found in northwestern Mongolia and the Ordos region in general, and in Gansu and Ningxia area (although the animal examples from the latter usually present an open muzzle), during the early Warring States period. A common preference for yoke ornaments links Qin with Gansu nomadic production. The

¹⁶⁹ Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1995.

¹⁷⁰ Han and Bunker 1993.

¹⁷¹ In this process, the amalgam was applied to the blade, and then subjected to firing, which caused the mercury to evaporate, leaving a pattern on the blade to be polished.

¹⁷² So 1995: 36-43

¹⁷³ Xianyang Kaogudui 1982: 11, fig.7.5.

¹⁷⁴ He Tangkun 1993: 465-8.

iconographic choice seems often Chinese rather than nomadic, as in the case of the four rabbit-shaped yoke ornaments found in a Qin tomb at Longxian Bianjiazhuang (Shaanxi).¹⁷⁵ Although Jenny So would find counterparts in the bronze hare-shaped vessels of the Houma foundry in Jin state,¹⁷⁶ one has to remember that rabbits were also quite favoured among the nomads, as the four crouched rabbits found at Lijiapan, north of the Great Wall and close to Nalin'gaotu (Shaanxi), demonstrate.¹⁷⁷ During the 4th century BCE, Qin appears to have produced yoke ornaments for frontier customers until horse riding superseded the horse-drawn vehicle.

The reason for a strong cultural relationship between the northern Yanglang nomadic groups and Qin may be implicit in their ethnic affiliation. Following Yu Weichao's hypothesis based on the interpretation of the *Shi Ji*, the ancestors of the state of Qin might have been originally a tribe that lived among the Xi Rong groups, in modern Gansu and Shaanxi province.¹⁷⁸ In the Qin Records section of Sima Qian's *Shi Ji* it is in fact said that the founding ancestor of the Qin clan, Zhong Jue, was living among the Xi Rong at the border of Bao Xi, the easternmost part of Gansu province, in Li xian, the ancient Xi Quan Qiu of the Qin clan mentioned in the *Shi Ji*.

During the Western Zhou period the Qin came to close contact with the Zhou court and achieved equal status with the other metropolitan states, when Emperor Xiao of Western Zhou (890-878 BCE) decided to make Feizi imperial vassal (under the name of Qin Ying), as a gift for being an excellent horse breeder. Subsequently after the fall of Zhou, in the Spring and Autumn period, Qin became rapidly powerful and hegemonic in the western part of China among the Rong and the Di, retaining a distinctive northern flavour and developing a culture of its own. But its nomadic roots and cultural affiliation with the tribes still in Gansu must have encouraged the exchange trade between them. To this regard, golden plaques [Fig.27] have recently come to the market, probably belonging to a western Zhou Qin tomb in Lixian, Gansu province.¹⁷⁹ Such golden rectangular plaques present rivets for hanging and an embossing pattern of typically Qin origin. Han Wei assumed them to have been used as coffin decorative appliqués, following a metropolitan fashion encountered in Zhou. However, gold has never been found before in Western Zhou period Qin tombs, and it has thus been inferred that it could have been traded from the 'western corridor' or from the Altai Mountain area, that is Xinjiang, as early as the 9th and 8th century BCE. This would further prove the extent of trading between Qin and the western regions, already by the end of the western Zhou period.

¹⁷⁵ Shaanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo 1988: 17.

¹⁷⁶ So, 1995: 36-43.

¹⁷⁷ Dai and Sun 1983: 26, fig 5.

¹⁷⁸ Yu Weichao 1986: 180-192.

Fig. 27 Golden plaques possibly from Lixian [Deydier 1994: pl. 2]

The pre-dynastic Qin territory in Shaanxi province indeed yielded a vast array of items that could hint to western connections. Apart from the tantalizing evidence provided by affinities in bronze inventories, sporadic unusual findings could also indicate the extent of interaction between Qin and the western regions. Again in Shaanxi province, the two shell hairpins in the shape of human heads found at the ruins of a late Western Zhou palace in Fufeng county could speak of a long-distance trade with Central Asia, but also of a long-lasting cultural exchange emerged during the



Shang period and carried on until the end of the Western Zhou period at least. The Europoid features of the portraits could also shed some light on the ethnic provenance of some of the people interacting with Qin during the Western Zhou period. Indeed the identification of the cross symbol on their heads, as a proto-Elamite glyph describing powerful diviners, would seem to indicate a demo-cultural influx. Similar signs incised on pottery spindle-whorls found at the administrative building at the Anau-depe site in Turkmenistan could tell something more about their meaning.¹⁸⁰ Yet the interesting note in this finding is represented by the contemporary discovery of a Chinese seal made of jet, which would confirm an indirect connection between this area and Central China. Indeed, a similar seal, although made of bronze, was collected on the surface at Maoqinggou site in Inner Mongolia.¹⁸¹ It may have been a case of indirect connection through trade; the important aspect is that, no matter how, a remote thread linked Inner Mongolia and the BMAC complexes further to the west, possibly through the aid of groups of nomadic herders who interacted actively with sedentary oases settlers of the Eurasian steppes, as first did the Andronovo and, later on, the nomads of the Scythian period.

The camel

The early emergence of belt hooks in the Qin domain during the 7th-6th century BCE can be partly ascribed to the relationship between this state and the northwestern tribes,

¹⁷⁹ Deydier 1994: pl.2.

¹⁸⁰ Hiebert 2002. Ceramic spindle whorls may in fact have been imbued with a votive-magical connotation as in the case of the examples unearthed from early Sarmatian female burials in Pokrovka, dated from the 4th c. to the 2nd c. BCE [Davis Kimball 1997-8].

¹⁸¹ Tian and Guo 1986.

specifically those inhabiting the Yanglang archaeological area (the Qingyang plateau in Gansu province and the Guyuan district of Ningxia province). Through the same channel provided by the distinctive connection between the Qin and the northwestern tribes a discreet number of iconographic elements (some of which will be analysed in the following pages) seem to have been transmitted. Among these, possibly the image of the camel, which might have been introduced into China via Qin, through the watercourses supplied by the Han and Wei rivers during the 4th century BCE.¹⁸² Small buckles showing a rider on a two-humped Bactrian camel in kneeling position have been recovered from 4th century BCE contexts in southern Ningxia [Fig.24].¹⁸³ The camel, often playing a vital role in the economy of oasis-dwellers, was one of the earliest animals to be portrayed, first on ceramics then on bronzes, in sites in the westernmost part of the Northern Zone. Bactrian camels depictions are featured on a unique ceramic spouted jar from Chawuhu cemetery I.¹⁸⁴ Here the animals have been portrayed kneeling down with folded legs, antedating the posture employed on bronze plaques of the mid to late first millennium BCE. Although images like this one are indeed rare to find in the archaeological context of north-western China before the mid-1st millennium BCE, the socio-economic relevance of the camel has long been attested by the presence of pits containing the bones of sacrificed camels. The presence of the camel is already attested in Gumugou in Xinjiang and in northern Kazakhstan during the 18th c. BCE.¹⁸⁵ By the early 1st millennium BCE camels' pits were accompanying the dead in Luntai Qunbake (Chawuhu cultural sphere of influence); datable to the mid 1st millennium BCE are instead the pits found close to Qunbake, in the Turfan basin at Alagou I. Dated to the end of the 1st millennium are other sacrificial pits containing the remains of camels, unearthed in Jiaohe (Gouxi and Goubei cemeteries), again in Turfan basin. Small golden plaques made in repoussé depicting two humped camels were also retrieved from these sites.¹⁸⁶

Whilst the phenomenon of interring camels (in parts or whole) seems to be restricted to Xinjiang only, the related iconography quickly travelled eastwards, through the means of small portable objects, i.e. bronze and golden belt plaques and garment appliqués. Indeed the transmission of zoomorphic iconography such as this one could have also been encouraged via textiles patterns. In fact a fragment of a tapestry kept at the Xinjiang Institute of Archaeology in Urumqi presents a row of Bactrian camels and trees.

¹⁸² So 1995: 36-43.

¹⁸³ Yang and Qi 1999: 29.

¹⁸⁴ See fig.18, Ch. 3.

¹⁸⁵ The presence of camel dung within the settlements suggests the domesticity of the animal. Based on such assumption, the earliest evidence for camel domestication would come from a settlement in central Iran dated to the 3rd millennium BCE [Mallory and Mair 2000: 139].

¹⁸⁶ Xinjiang wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1998: 201.

The fragment was recovered from the site of Shanpula in southern Xinjiang, dated to the late Western Han period (1st c. BCE).¹⁸⁷

Images of Bactrian camels with their legs folded beneath with the bottom of the hind hoof lying atop that of the front hoof (a posture reminiscent of contemporary and even earlier plaques with deer images) started to appear along the north-western fringes of China by the mid first millennium BCE, not only in Gansu, Ningxia but also in the Ordos area, at Xigoupan and Aluchaideng at roughly the same time.¹⁸⁸ This iconographic motif is possibly of Central Asian derivation: pectorals for horses in the shape of two fighting camels have been unearthed together with various bronze plaques portraying a single standing camel, in western Kazakhstan and dated to the 6th-4th c. BCE.¹⁸⁹ The motif of the two fighting camels is also encountered in burials in the southern Urals region dated

to the 6th c. BCE¹⁹⁰ and in the Filippovka complex in Russia dated to the 4th c. BCE, but ultimately seems to have derived from an ancient 2nd millennium BCE prototype excavated within the BMAC.¹⁹¹ Indeed archaeological evidence from the Namazga civilisation (3rd millennium BCE) suggests that the camel was by then already domesticated to drive carts. The earliest artistic representation comes in the shape a small steatite seal or amulet depicting a two-humped Bactrian camel with his head turned slightly backwards, which was excavated from Tokolok-21, near Merv in Turkmenistan, dated to the early 2nd millennium BCE.¹⁹²



Fig. 28 Wangshan Jiangling camel lamp [Li 1986: Pl. 137]

Hence, alien to the Chinese tradition, the camel captured the imagination of the Chinese and was adopted in different contexts: the first evidence in metropolitan China comes from the camel and rider motif on a bronze lamp excavated from the late 4th century BCE Chu tomb no.2 at Wangshan, Jiangling Xian in Hubei [Fig. 28].¹⁹³ The animal was later incorporated as an exotic creature in *xiangrui* landscapes found on *yunqi* chariot poles

¹⁸⁷ Wang Bo and Xiao Xiaoyong 2001: 47-78.

¹⁸⁸ Datable to the 4th c. BCE. In particular the two golden rectangular plaques from Aluchaideng, made in repoussé, exhibit the scene of a Bactrian camel attacked by two raptors, possibly griffins [Tian and Guo 1986 and Paris 2000: fig 114.].

¹⁸⁹ Baipakov et al 1998: plates 189-194.

¹⁹⁰ Davis Kimball et al 1995: fig 26, p. 114.

¹⁹¹ Farkas et al 2000: 188.

¹⁹² Kohl 1981 and Knauer 1998.

¹⁹³ Li Xueqin 1986: pl. 137.

and bronze censers *boshanlu*, of the late Warring States period and early Western Han period.¹⁹⁴

The monkey rider

Another curious artefact rarely found in excavated sites but mainly collected on the surface in the Ordos area (Inner Mongolia) is the small pendant figurine of a monkey riding a horse [Fig.29].¹⁹⁵ The fact that most of these figurines came from surface collections has always made difficult assessing their provenance and date. Yet the two examples coming from officially excavated sites in Ningxia would seem to point at a



Warring States date. Indeed a similar pendant was also found in southern Siberia, in the Minusinsk Basin, belonging to a Tagar cultural context (7th-1st c. BCE), corroborating this chronological frame.¹⁹⁶

Fig. 29 Monkey on a horse figurine from Ningxia [Wang Xun 1998: fig 1.4]

All these small statuettes present a central hole for suspension, suggesting their use hanging from the chest as a sort of amulet. In this respect it is interesting to notice the specimen formerly in the collection of C.T.Loo and now in the Sackler collection in Washington DC,¹⁹⁷ apart from the alleged dating to the Ming dynasty on the basis of its zinc alloy composition,¹⁹⁸ the piece is morphologically identical to those discovered in Inner Mongolia. Furthermore, it presents the rebus *Mashang fenghou* ("may you immediately be lifted to the rank of marquis"), which expresses the hope for a prompt promotion. Apparently these amulets were popular among Chinese officials and high status persons and the presence of a Chinese *rebus* would further indicate specific scope within China rather than southern Siberia.¹⁹⁹ On the other hand, the unique iconography of a monkey riding a horse seems to connect to an older mythological repertoire stemmed out from lands to the south-west, where the monkey has always been revered from times unmemorable as a protective creature.²⁰⁰ A similar iconography is encountered within the Tibetan repertoire of *tokchas*. *Tokchas* are small bronze objects that have been found on the ground [Fig.30]. They may or may not originally have been intended as amulets as some are merely unadorned buttons.

¹⁹⁴ Tubular poles inlaid in gold and silver depicting fantastic landscape scenes were apparently meant to decorate the ritual chariots (*yunqi* chariots) used for riding and exorcising the evil spirits during the Western Han period [Munakata 1991]; see for instance the tube from the Zhongshan king tomb at Sanpanshan (Hebei) [Wu Hung 1994].

¹⁹⁵ Tian and Guo 1986: 134-5. Only two sites in Ningxia have yielded this type of figurines: Xizhi Yuqiaocun [Li et al 1993] and Guyuan Xijiao Guozhuangcun [Luo and Han 1990: pl.13.1, p. 414].

¹⁹⁶ Tian and Guo 1986: pl. 99, p.135 and Salmony 1933.

¹⁹⁷ Bunker 1997: no. 277, p. 298.

¹⁹⁸ Brass (Copper and zinc alloy) was apparently used only from the Tang dynasty onwards [Zhou Xinghua and Fan Xiangxi 1994: 16-21].

¹⁹⁹ Bartholomew 1988.

²⁰⁰ Especially in connection with the horse [Wang 1997: 431-4].

Yet, once Tibetan peasants and herders found them on the ground, they would have been carried, treasured and endowed with magical or protective qualities. Indeed it is commonly believed that *tokchas* fell from the sky, hence their Tibetan name referring to thunderbolts. The fact that those *tokchas* featuring an obscure iconography not specifically related to Buddhism are believed to have fallen from the sky at some



mysterious point in time underlies the problem in assessing their date and provenance. No archaeological context is so far provided for this kind of metal production and stylistic association is usually employed to provide a feasible date.

Fig. 30 Pendant tokchas of a monkey on a horse [Anninos 2000: fig 48]

Indeed an almost identical match to the Ningxia plaques comes from a private collection,²⁰¹ providing an undisputed evidence for cultural connection between Tibet-Qinghai and Gansu-Ningxia regions.

Among the *tokchas*, few are also displaying a horse-and-rider motif. They were mostly found in the north-eastern corner of the Tibetan plateau, close to Qinghai. According to some authors, this particular motif should be roughly dated to the 10th century CE.²⁰² However, the proximity of most findings to Qinghai and, indirectly, to northwestern China (through Gansu), and their uncertainty in terms of dating could leave space for a different view, implying an earlier date for the lot and an association with the examples from China.

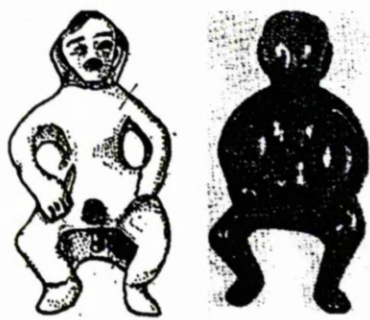
Another motif found in *tokchas* from western Tibet is that of a crouching monkey eating a fruit, with no horse company.²⁰³ The specific position of the animal, which seems to match the equestrian monkeys from Ningxia and Southern Siberia, may have derived from Near Eastern prototypes, as similar depictions are found in Crete, Mesopotamia, Egypt, in Elam, in Bactria and even in the Harappan civilisation of the Indus Valley, where monkeys thrive. Indeed the animal itself can hardly be considered indigenous to southern Siberia; however, crouched monkeys on horses have never been found in an Indic context. Hence, only indirectly the motif of a monkey crouched on top of a horse could have been inspired by south-western depictions of crouched monkeys.

²⁰¹ Personal communication with Anna Maria Rossi [illustrated in T. Anninos 2000: fig 48].

²⁰² And particularly to a small Buddhist kingdom encompassing the horse-rearing grasslands around Qinghai Lake and the hilly areas further east, called Tsongka, which assumed importance as a supplier of cinnabar, musk, furs and horses to China, competing with the XiXia and the Liao, during the Song dynasty [Anninos 1998].

²⁰³ Bussagli 1949.

Another figurine found in Tibet, in Northwest China (Ordos) and in the Minusinsk Basin of southern Siberia is that of the standing naked ithyphallic man with slightly bent legs, possibly a symbol of fecundity [Fig.31]. The co-occurrence of this motif would further signal a connection between the three regions, perhaps even suggest a possible semantic link between the motifs -the horse, the crouched monkey on horse and the naked man with bent legs-. Hence the motif of a crouched monkey riding a horse and its



relative symbolism could have travelled north from India through Tibet, eventually reaching both southern Siberia to the west and northwestern China, Ningxia and Inner Mongolia, during the Warring States period. Somehow during the journey towards China the motif might have lost part of its original meaning and acquired new ones, yet retaining its apothropaic value.

Fig. 31 Naked man figurines from the Ordos and Tibet [left Tian and Guo 1986: pl.98.7, right Bussagli 1949: pl. 5]

Curiously enough, another motif found on few Chinese garment hooks from the late Warring States and Western Han periods may be indirectly linked to the depiction aforementioned. A horse in profile with a frontal naked rider is quite an unusual depiction published recently by the Ariadne Galleries in New York [Fig.32].²⁰⁴ Although the motif in itself is not very common, the type of tiny belt hook would nevertheless suggest a northwestern source, specifically south-western Inner Mongolia, i.e. Ordos.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, the incised cowry shell collar and incised swirls on the horse body are



stylistically close to the Houma foundry bronzes in northern Shanxi, hence providing a link with north-western China.

Fig. 32 Naked horse rider, Northern China [Pang 1998: pl 165]

Fantastic raptor-headed creatures

The appearance of a specific symbolism employing raptor-headed fantastic animals as the main *leitmotiv*, on the north-western part of Chinese northern zone has been often

²⁰⁴ Pang 1998: pl 165.

²⁰⁵ Li Yiyou 1963: 53, no 78-79.

made to coincide by archaeologists with the activity of Alexander the Great in Asia (died in 327 BCE) and the adoption of mounted warfare by the state of Zhao from tribes called Lin Hu or Hu in the ancient Chinese records. These names seem to indicate an “anthropological type” rather than a specific group, probably of Indo-European derivation in some cases associated to a sub-tribe of the Yuezhi (Indo-European speaking tribe related to the Scythians in south-eastern Europe and to the Saka of Central Asia).²⁰⁶

These fantastic animals with raptor-headed appendages first occurred on tinned and plain bronze plaques of the type previously described from the Qingyang and Guyuan regions. A multiplicity of heads is an archaic way of suggesting omnipotence, a symbolism strictly related to nomadic tribes with an Indo-European heritage.²⁰⁷ Small eagle heads as an ornamental motif marking the shape of the shoulders and the haunches were often used on the northern shores of the Black Sea on the figures of deer and other animals.²⁰⁸ The earliest known example occurs on a gold plaque from a Saka burial at Chiliktin in Kazakhstan, whilst the latest known example is a 1st century CE gold buckle from Zaporozhie in the Dniepr River basin in Russia which is made up of mirror-image plaques adorned with carnivores with eared raptor-headed manes and tails.

In the Black Sea regions, the Scythians first represented a mythic ungulate in the 5th century BCE as a cervid with antler tines transformed into raptor heads. By the beginning of the 4th century BCE, the raptor heads acquired ears and almond-shaped eyes, like griffins, due to the increasing Greek involvement in the manufacture of Scythian art in the Pontic regions. At the end of the 4th century BCE this fantastic animal was replaced by other images carrying the same meaning in a different form.

By this time, the mythological ungulate tattooed on the man buried in Pazyryk kurgan no.2 in the Altai Mountains, displays a rapacious beak similar to its antler tines. This additional iconographic feature is also present on the mythological ungulates adorning 4th and 3rd century bronze artefacts from northwestern China such as the gold headdress finial excavated at Nalin’gaotu, Shenmu Xian, Shaanxi province, close to the Ordos desert.²⁰⁹ This image, standing on a raised mound, features a prominent beak and horns with raptor-headed antler tines. Other versions of the same creature are represented on gold repoussé plaques found at Xigoupan in Jungar Qi and Aluchaideng in Hangjin Qi,

²⁰⁶ Some scholars in China today maintain on epigraphic grounds, that the character usually read as *Yue* is instead a variant of the character *Rou* and therefore the correct reading should be Rouzhi rather than Yuezhi.

²⁰⁷ Jacobson 1984: 113-129

²⁰⁸ The same motif was widespread in south Siberia where it may have inspired the stylised ornamental motif comprising a circlet between two triangles: perhaps a stylised representation of the ear, beak and eye of the original eagle [Rudenko 1959: 101-122].

²⁰⁹ See Fig.92, Chapter 4.

Inner Mongolia, and dated to the 3rd century BCE. Plaques from Xigoupan,²¹⁰ for example, show close affinities in the rendition of the beaked ungulate both with Pazyryk in south Siberia and with Saka sites such as Issyk in Kazakhstan.²¹¹ The fact that raptor-headed appendages occur earlier in Gansu and Ningxia regions than they do in the Ordos suggests that the route taken by this symbolic system and by the mounted tribes carrying it went through the Gansu corridor and then north along the Huang He to the Ordos area.

The wolf

As can be seen from the wolf depicted on the gold plaque from Aluchaideng, also carnivores, not only herbivores, could be provided with similar fantastic attributes: whilst in the Pontic regions the lion acquired these attributes, in southern Siberia and Chinese northern zone the local predators, the tiger and the wolf, were chosen. Wolves may have played an important role within Aluchaideng society, given the frequency of encounters in its assemblage. They appear crouching on the golden torque and headdress calotte, as three-dimensional heads possibly used as pendants or buttons, and as fierce predators attacking an elongated cow in a mirror-image double plaque.

Wolves were ascribed with supernatural powers and often depicted by the people of the Eurasian steppes. Of course, representations varied according to the geographical location, from the northern shores of the Black Sea, the southern Urals, Western Siberia to the Altai, but one can see that there existed certain common features shared by all of them: the enormous head with bare fangs and twisted upper lip,²¹² the dislocated hind part of the body with a stripe along the spinal column and the soft paws. Sometimes wings were attached to the back of the animal and a turned-up snout with a small raptor head often placed on its tip. Mythological representations of the wolf would often include a mane composed by small eagle's heads around the neck, as in the case of the Aluchaideng plaque.²¹³



Fig. 33 Wolf devouring a small ungulate [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1993: 7]

Other various mirror-image belt plaques depicting a standing wolf attacking a small prey (usually a small ungulate), whose hindquarters have been twisted 180°, with crest and tail provided with raptor-heads have been detected throughout the Yanglang zone of

²¹⁰ Tian & Guo 1986: 356, fig 4.1-4 and 357, fig 5.2,5

²¹¹ Bunker 1992b: 107.

²¹² Such as the one featured on some horse trappings from Kurgan 4 at Pazyryk.

²¹³ See Fig. 99, Chapter 4.

northwestern China, in Gansu and Ningxia [Fig.33].²¹⁴ In the majority of cases, the treatment of the surface with small raised curls and pseudo-granulation texture would betray a Qin manufacture, ultimately based on Jin Houma-Liyu style, once again attesting to the cultural and economic connection established between the western nomadic groups and the Qin state. Such connection might have been essential for the transmission of the wolf motif further to Jin (Houma) and the rest of metropolitan China during the latter part of the 1st millennium BCE. Given the archaeological evidence from Ningxia and the Ordos, it may seem plausible that the motif of the winged wolf, a creature most popular in the Altai, could have been introduced through Gansu and Ningxia to the Ordos region and then into China, where it might have ultimately served as the prototype for the sinewy Han dragon.²¹⁵

The goat-man



Another motif, which might have reached China through the same route used by raptor-headed appendages and by all those patterns associated with Scythian symbolic repertoire, is the curious image of the so-called goat-man.

Fig. 34 Zither tuning key [So and Bunker 1995: no.71, p.149].

In fact, strangely enough, a zither-tuning key in cast bronze inlaid with gold portraying this mythic creature has been unearthed in China. This recumbent human-head goat figure from the Iranian mythology may have been inspired by similar motifs on foreign objects in perishable materials (such as textiles) which reached China with migrating tribes or trading merchants from Central Asia.²¹⁶ The goat man was also an important image in Luristan art, as similar artefacts have been usually found in Iranian sites dating to the 8th-7th centuries BCE.²¹⁷

Although the piece here illustrated [Fig.34] belongs to a private collection, a similar bronze tuning key with a seated goat was unearthed from Changzhi Fenshuiling, Shanxi province and dated to the 5th c. BCE,²¹⁸ suggesting a northern location in the Yellow

²¹⁴ Indeed some confusion has been made to a number of similar tiger scenes, as the difference between the two animals is sometimes minimal [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1993: 7 and Yang Shizhong 1992: 574].

²¹⁵ Yet it seems that the Chinese dragon may have originated from a later, Xiongnu, prototype, rather than from a Scythian-related motif [Rudenko 1959: 121].

²¹⁶ The goat-man image goes back to the 4th millennium BCE in Western Asia, developed further into Luristan art (11th-9th c. BCE), transmitted to Achaemenid Persia (6th-4th c. BCE) with apotropaic qualities and in ancient Mesopotamian art where similar horned helmets were portrayed [So and Bunker 1995: 149].

²¹⁷ Mahboubian 1997: no. 249, p. 207.

²¹⁸ So 2000.

River basin for the human-goat key, rather than along the southern Yangzi valley areas influenced by Chu culture. Unfortunately the instruments employing this type of tuning key, the so-called *qin*, mostly disintegrated through the centuries and the few surviving examples all come from southern sites, notably in the tomb of Zeng Hou Yi (Hubei) and in Mawangdui M3 (Hunan) dating between the former to the 5th and the latter to the 2nd century BCE.²¹⁹

Yet, the archaeological evidence from Fengshuiling, together with the ten-stringed *qin* zither's distinctly foreign characteristics –its shape, the recurring appearance of northern motifs on the tuning keys featuring animals drawn from the steppes (bears, wolves and goats, in combats and composite creatures such as the goat-man) and the same peg tuning system similar to that used in string instruments from Western Asia- suggests that this instrument and its accessories were ultimately drawn from Central Asia, through the intermediation of the nomadic groups of northwestern China. Remains of a plucked string instrument were recovered in the kurgans complex at Pazyryk in southern Siberia (4th c. BCE), providing the evidence for the use of such musical instrument among the herders of the Siberian steppes. A further link could be provided by the string instrument unearthed in 1996 at Zahongluke cemetery in southern Xinjiang (roughly datable 8th-2nd c. BCE) in a multiple tomb (M14) where 19 bodies were buried supine with flexed limbs.

Fig. 35 Wooden plucked string instrument from Zahongluke M4 [Urumqi 1999: p.47, no.77]

This sort of 'vertical harp' [Fig.35], a cross between a harp and a violin, 86 cm long was found lying between a child and a middle-aged woman wearing a dark brown cap. According to Mair, two other string instruments, perhaps the earliest extant and best preserved harps in the world, one smaller, the size of a violin - about 60 cm long- and one larger, of the size of a viola -about 1 m long-, were brought back to Urumqi from the same cemetery in 1996.²²⁰ All these specimens appear to feature technical and morphological analogies with the harp from Pazyryk.²²¹ The Zahongluke site yielded various desiccated human corpses exhibiting proto-Europoid features, sometimes bearing beautiful swirling motifs tattooed on their skin, a practice also encountered at Pazyryk. Zahongluke proto-Europoid affiliation, and its affinities with Pazyryk would point to Central Asian origins. Hence the archaeological evidence could suggest an eastern route for the zither, its tuning keys and their motif of the goat-man via



²¹⁹ This finding represents the earliest of this kind in metropolitan China [Beijing 1989: pl.48.p.167, fig 78].

²²⁰ CIAA unpublished correspondence material.

²²¹ Urumqi 1999: 41, pl.53.

southern Xinjiang, into North-western China and then into the southern regions under Chu cultural sphere of influence.

Returning to the goat-man zither-tuning key, its connection with the western world might be further signalled by two silver belt plaques dated to the 5th century BCE unearthed from kurgan no.3 at the Issyk cemetery II, near Almaty in Kazakhstan [Fig.36]. The Issyk site already proved to be an important centre for the transmission of iconographic patterns from Achaemenid Persia to the Eurasian steppe-lands, and then further east to Xinjiang, where Saka burials, like Alagou, suggest a strong link with Central Asian Scythians.



Fig. 36 Human-feline griffin from Issyk [Baipakov et al 1998: p.197, no. 363]

Each plaque depicts two composite creatures placed up side down, featuring a human face with a big nose, moustaches and a long beard, surmounted by what looks like a helmet with diverging horns, and the body of an animal, possibly a feline judging by its soft round paws. The bearded creatures are also provided with wings, an attribute further inspired by Achaemenid art.

These examples appear to diverge from the standard depiction of a composite humanised goat, by exhibiting instead a feline body. Some of the goat-man images from Luristan indeed show a very elongated body, which could pass for that of a feline. Yet another parallel could exist between the Issyk plaques and the human headed leonine

stag-demon depicted on the felt hanging from Pazyryk, Kurgan 5, in the Altai, datable to the 4th-3rd c. BCE [Fig.37].²²² The source of inspiration for this portrait may have equally been from a common Western Asian mythological tradition, possibly inspired by the Assyrian male sphinx or the Achaemenid composite monster defeated by the king depicted at Persepolis.



Fig. 37 fragment of a tapestry with the antlered feline demon with human face from Pazyryk 5 [Farkas et al 2001: pl.42, p. 80]

The extraordinary winged goat with antlers depicted on a fragment of tapestry from Shanpula site in southern Xinjiang (3rd-2nd c. BCE) could provide another missing link in the transmission of the goat-man motif from ancient West Asia to China.²²³

²²² Farkas et al 2000: pl.42, p. 80.

²²³ Li Xiaobing 1995: 84, pl.142.



Fig. 38 Fragment of a tapestry from the Abegg-Stiftung collection [Keller and Shorta 2000: cat. no.5, p.20].

The Shanpula fragment is similar in composition to another fragment, this time in the Abegg-Stiftung collection [Fig.38].²²⁴ What is interesting in this latter example is the humanised face of the horned goat, once again proposing the anthropomorphism of the mythic animal occurred on the zither-tuning key from northwestern China.

The occurrence of the goat-man and its feline variations in southern Xinjiang, inspired by a possible Achaemenid source (which at the same time might have also reached southern Siberia), when combined with the archaeological evidence for the earliest string instruments in the same zone, would seem to corroborate the hypothesis of a southern route for its transmission to China.

Winged creatures

Generally speaking, the motif of winged animals (lion-, wolf- and eagle- griffins) was ultimately derived from Near Eastern prototypes. In Mesopotamia by the 3rd millennium BCE the motif was elaborated within the early Iranian tradition at Ur, from where it began to spread in all directions, reaching Europe, Central and Eastern Asia and even India. The motif is indeed found throughout Europe and Eurasia, being one of the most widespread artistic motifs ever, assuming different forms in different regions, but mostly the body of lions or tigers. From the Pontic regions griffins were later transmitted to the steppes where Scythian-related tribes in both southern Siberia and Kazakhstan re-elaborated the image by preferring winged lions and wolves, as the decorations on the tattooed man from Pazyryk, the wood-carved horse trappings from Tuekta and the three-dimensional lions on bronze censers from Issyk well demonstrate.²²⁵ Winged lions are encountered on golden plaques and bronze censers from Alagou II in Xinjiang around 4th

²²⁴ Keller and Shorta 2000: 20, cat. no.5.

²²⁵ It is also interesting to notice that Herodotus, when talking about the geographic distribution of the various Scythian tribes throughout Central Asia mentions that the legendary Arimaspi, "the gold-watching griffins", inhabited the Upper Irtish and the Altai. Whatever the name meant, it is logical to think that these areas were particularly related to the idea of the griffin.

century BCE, directly connected to the Semireč'e production of eastern Kazakhstan.²²⁶ The same iconography found its way to Inner Mongolia and the Ordos region, perhaps through northern Siberia and Mongolia.

Wings and antlers attributes associated with the shamanistic world of the nomadic tribes were eventually transmitted from Central Asia to China where they entered the bronze artistic repertoire of Xinzheng in Henan province during the Spring and Autumn period.²²⁷ In fact the earliest evidence for winged animals comes from the four sculptural horned creatures on a *fanghu* vase from Xinzheng Lijialou cemetery (6th c. BCE).²²⁸ It is interesting to notice that, although winged animals have not yet appeared from excavated sites within pre-dynastic Qin territory, other bronzes decorative elements, comprising the aesthetic preference for vivid turquoise inlays and lively zoomorphic decorative schemes seem to have been shared in Shaanxi and in Xinzheng in central Henan. This connection could hint to the existence of workshops operating within close range of each other, so to permit decorative ideas and trends to travel easily among them.²²⁹

The decorative style employed at Xinzheng persisted in the Central Plains throughout the early Warring States period. It was then under Chu cultural influence that this bronze tradition reached the apex, with the beautiful sculptural birds with antler tines unearthed from the tomb of Zeng Hou Yi at Leigudun, Suizhou, Hubei (6th-5th c. BCE). Though the southern tradition of carved wood did play an important role in the choice of three-dimensional rendition,²³⁰ one might infer that the subject matter could in fact have been ultimately derived from the north, through the states of Qin, Jin and Zhongshan.²³¹ The latter was instrumental in the transmission of several iconographic themes from the steppe world. Particularly interesting are the sculptural objects inlaid in gold and silver which betray the non-Chinese heritage of the Zhongshan kings: the base for a square table with four birds intertwined with four fantastic horned dragons with winged body is emblematic. These animals, a dominating presence at Zhongshan, represent also a minor theme on Houma bronzes from the state of Jin. Foundries at Houma may have supplied the northern nomads with some of their luxury items, in turn adopting their iconographic repertoire. But the role played by Jin in this transmission should be further

²²⁶ Here the portrayed creature has also been identified as a Tianshan snow leopard [Davis-Kimball 1998: 8].

²²⁷ Bagley 1996: 84-5

²²⁸ See Fig. 13 in this chapter.

²²⁹ For a list of motives and the hypothesis of intermediary metallurgical centres at close range distance see So 1995: 29.

²³⁰ Mackenzie 1991: 107-157

²³¹ Houma in Shanxi [Bagley 1996]; Jin influxes on Chu artistic production may be also inferred from certain iconographic details employed on Chu lacquered tomb guardians -*zhenmushou*- which appear to have been drawn from the bronze artistic repertoire at Houma foundry in Shanxi province [compare Li Xueqin 1985: fig 13, with the famous *zhenmushou* from Henan, Xinyang Changtaiguan].

investigated in order to assess the extent of the interplay between Jin, the northern cultures and Chu.

The bear

The bear represents another motif drawn from the steppe artistic repertoire and fully absorbed into Chinese art in the course of the Han dynasty.²³² Bears inhabited the forest of northern China and became an extremely popular motif from the late Warring States period onwards. In particular crouching bears are almost ubiquitous in early Western Han burial contexts, as the small bear-shaped circular fittings witness.²³³ This motif may have crept into metropolitan China due to the intermediary role played by the artistic repertoire of the semi-barbaric state of Zhongshan.²³⁴ Indeed a three-dimensional standing bear has been recently unearthed from one of the earliest Qin cemetery in Lixian (Gansu), dating to the Spring and Autumn period, thus antedating the appearance of this particular motif within metropolitan China.²³⁵ As a matter of fact, the small bear, lively portrayed behind a kneeled man crowning the wheeled cosmetic box [Fig.39] property of the female occupant of the tomb M1, could suggest an alternative route of transmission into Central China through Qin, rather than through Zhongshan.

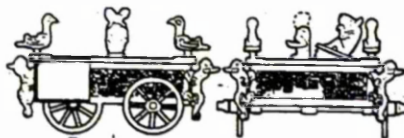


Fig. 39 Drawing of the bronze cosmetic box from 98LDM1 at Lixian Yuandingshan [Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2002: fig 23, p.19]

At the same time, curiously enough, a bronze pole top in the shape of a trident was also unearthed from the same tomb [Fig.40].²³⁶ It is its shape that would seemingly suggest a connection with the Zhongshan state, where similar trident-shaped standards have been discovered in M6, Pingshan xian, Hebei, dated to the 4th c. BCE. Previous scholarship frequently related these pole tops to central Asian steppe origins and nomadic traditions, although Bunker objected to their size and weight as unsuitable to be carried around in a nomadic context.²³⁷



Fig. 40 Shan-shaped bronze pole-top or standard [Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2002: fig 26, p. 21]

²³² Although small carved marble figurines of squatted bears are known to be dated to the Shang period, the lively rendition of bears from the Warring States period seem to reflect more a naturalistic approach usually inspired by steppe art motives.

²³³ Like the circular fittings unearthed from the tomb of prince Liusheng at Mancheng, Hebei province [Beijing 1980: 205, fig 138.16] and those found from the burial complex of the king of Nanyue, Guangdong province.

²³⁴ So 1995: 60-67

²³⁵ Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2002: fig 18, p.16.

²³⁶ Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2002: fig 26, p. 21.

²³⁷ Wen Fong 1980: 319 and Bunker 1983b: 73.

Indeed central Asian standards, diffused throughout the Eurasian steppes would almost invariably take the form of zoomorphic finials such as standing sheep, goats, birds and griffins and would never feature such stylised trident-like appearance. In this respect, the early Qin bronze standard found at Lixian would provide the only antecedent to the Zhongshan pole tops. Apparently smaller versions of the Ping xian tridents have also been recovered from the Guo state burials at Sanmenxia Shangcunling dated to the late Western Zhou period.²³⁸ Indeed the same Guo state would show influences coming from the west, as the round knobbed mirror, the presence of iron artefacts of non-meteoritic nature and the presence of belt ornaments would seem to point out. In the eastern Eurasian Steppe lands, bronze pole tops have been associated with the Arzhan complex in the Tuva region and the Tagar culture of the Minusinsk Basin both in southern Siberia, apart from the findings of the Ordos region, at Taohongbala, Xigoupan and Yulongtai, amongst the others. Other impressive examples have been found in the Pontic region of the Black Sea (Koban culture).²³⁹ The closest counterpart to the Lixian standard could be found among the famous bronze axe-heads found in Luristan, dated to the 2nd millennium BCE, although they invariably exhibit four points rather than three.²⁴⁰

The material from burials of semi-nomadic affiliation in north-western China would suggest that the rare appearances of bronze standards in metropolitan China would ultimately derive from a nomadic prototype. The earliest occurrence within pre-dynastic Qin, ultimately related to the nomadic Xi Rong groups, could in fact suggest an active role of the Xi Rong in this iconographic transmission.

Cauldrons

Another object further attesting the importance of pre-dynastic Qin in the East-West transmission of artistic elements is the *fu*-cauldron found in the 1995 excavation, again at Lixian, in Gansu province, in a pre-dynastic Qin tomb [Fig.41].²⁴¹



Fig. 41 *Fu* cauldron possibly from Lixian [So and Bunker 1995: no.22, p.108]

This cooking vessel consists of a deep U-shaped bowl sitting on a low trumpet-shaped pedestal and two inverted U-shaped handles

²³⁸ Wen Fong 1980: 319.

²³⁹ Artamonov 1969: 58-61.

²⁴⁰ Mahboubian 1997: pl. 194, 196, p. 178-9.

²⁴¹ Li Xueqin 1998.

made to look like twisted rope, decorated with a typical western Zhou frieze. A moulded twisted rope band divides the decoration on the bowl into two sections: a narrower section at the top filled with repeated large, hooked S-shaped motives, and a wider section below filled with two rows of large scale like motives. In its shape it certainly resembles very closely the sort of bronze cauldrons usually associated with the Saka-Scythian artistic repertoire and the Xiongnu at a later date.²⁴² Yet similar containers with simple handles have been unearthed not only at Lixian in Gansu province but also throughout pre-dynastic Qin territory, from Baoji to Fengxiang, all in Shaanxi province, in the Ordos area and in Hebei province.²⁴³ The vessel from Lixian has been dated roughly to the late Western Zhou period, early Spring and Autumn period (8th c. BCE), in accordance with the majority of the other findings in the area and possibly being one of the earliest in the group. In this respect, by ranking among the earliest examples of its kind in western China, it could as well represent the likely prototype for the cauldron used amongst the nomadic groups in north and northwestern China. Its discovery in Lixian, within Qin domain, would also suggest some sort of connection with the Xi Rong people, with whom the Qin greatly intermingled, possibly sharing a common cultural background. The use of decorative patterns inspired to the main Western Zhou repertoire would reflect the influence of metropolitan culture on Qin, whilst the shape and the modality of use would have been dictated by Xi Rong cultural analogies.²⁴⁴

By extending it to the larger picture of central Asian discoveries of this kind, the cauldrons of Gansu and Shaanxi province come to also represent the earliest stage in the stylistic development of such typology. From Gansu, they progressed into Central Asia, transmitted either via Xinjiang²⁴⁵ or from Shaanxi via Mongolia,²⁴⁶ into Siberia,²⁴⁷ Kazakhstan and central Russia.²⁴⁸ This type of cauldron was primarily utilitarian, with the cone-shaped base often pierced in three places to allow air to ignite the fire, whilst letting the fumes out.

²⁴² Bronze cauldrons findings seem to cluster into six compact geographical areas: the Danube-Don region of Eastern Europe, the Volga-Ob region of Russia, the Upper Yenisei region of southern Siberia and the Tianshan region in Xinjiang, the Lake Baikal-Orhon region of Irkutsk, Transbaikalia and Mongolia and the Huanghe-Liaohe region of Gansu, Inner Mongolia, Shaanxi and Hebei [Erdy 1992: 379-438].

²⁴³ For a list of examples excavated throughout northern China see Wang Changqi 1991 and Liu Li 1987.

²⁴⁴ Traces of burning on the lower belly of several cauldrons would suggest their use for cooking in ritual and/or mundane occasions.

²⁴⁵ Simple cauldrons have been unearthed in the Hami Balikun area, although dates are still disputed [Zhang Yuzhong 2002].

²⁴⁶ In northwestern Mongolia at the Ulangom cemetery a simple U-shaped cauldron with simple round handles was found [Erdy 1992: table 3.6, p. 425].

²⁴⁷ One ancient cauldron of the same kind was discovered in the lake Baikal region dated to the 7th-6th c. BCE and various others in the Minusinsk Basin, Tuva region and the Yenisei Valley within Tagar cultural contexts [Erdy 1992: 396].

²⁴⁸ Few simple cauldrons dated to the 6th-3rd c. BCE are shown in Baipakov et al 1998: pl. 358, p. 194 and pl. 198, p. 153.

The Xiongnu later adopted cauldrons although their most favoured type would feature handles surmounted by mushroom-shaped projections.²⁴⁹ This was indeed the type carried into central Russia and Ukraine that eventually reached Eastern Europe (Hungary and Romania) between the 2nd and the 4th centuries CE. Its transport suggests that cauldrons ultimately developed into ritual vessels, bearing decorative patterns whose meanings are now difficult to grasp.

In the course of the early transmission during the first half of the 1st millennium BCE, the role of the Xi Rong as intermediaries cannot be overlooked. Their connection with other pastoral groups further to the west, enhanced by possible analogies in economic strategies, social structures and environmental conditions must have encouraged the flow of cultural ideas and objects from Shaanxi and Gansu provinces through Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia into Central Asia, providing a channel of cultural transmission that was open in both directions. When comparing a map of the Eurasian Steppes with the map of the recovered cauldrons it comes clear that especially when dealing with the Asiatic areas findings are almost invariably located either at the borderline of the steppe zone and the forested mountain areas, or in the latter, further suggesting an economic homogeneity amongst the different groups. Curiously enough then, over 90% of the cauldrons were found near water, i.e. springs, lakes, rivers and marshes. This constant feature would further suggest their widespread cooking function for ritual or/and utilitarian purposes.²⁵⁰

Twisted hindquarters

Possibly related to the penetration of Scythian cultural influences through the northern zone are many of the small creatures with their hindquarters twisted at 180°, depicted on golden roundels, buttons, belt hooks and later incorporated into pictorial compositions during the early Western Han period. One such example is provided by the animated depictions of animals (lions, tigers, horses) immortalised in the middle coffin made of lacquer in Mawangdui tomb, dated to the 2nd century BCE. Not only the posture, but also the way in which the subjects have been represented may have been drawn from a northwestern prototype, for similar depictions have been unearthed at Alagou II site in Xinjiang province.

²⁴⁹ Traditionally mushroom-shaped projections have been associated with the Xianbei, however recent studies have sustained that the Xianbei ultimately borrowed this feature from their predecessors, the Xiongnu [Erdy 1995].

²⁵⁰ Erdy 1992: 381.

Fig. 42 Golden repoussé plaque depicting a winged lion with its hindquarters twisted at 180° [Mei 2000: pl.2.45]



The golden feline ornaments from Alagou, made from hammering a piece of flat golden foil on a wooden mould [Fig.42], are datable to the 4th century BCE and may represent one of the last influxes from the Scytho-Siberian cultural world.²⁵¹

The stylistic analogies between Alagou II and Saka-Scythian sites further to the west are attested by a number of sites scattered

throughout Kazakhstan. Small golden repoussé plaques and harness buttons similar to those found in Alagou have been unearthed from Tasmola and the Semireč'e complexes (Issyk and Prochorovka kurgans), dated between the 6th and the 4th century BCE,²⁵² suggesting a strong connection between the two areas, Kazakhstan and Xinjiang and an eastward migration of the motif. Analogous treatment was given to a number of beaked ungulates tattooed on the deceased man from kurgan 2 at Pazyryk, in southern Siberia, datable to the 4th century BCE. Scythian repertoire often features ungulates (goats, horses and deer mostly) in this awkward position, whilst predators (lions, tigers and wolves) are seldom portrayed in such a discomposure. Hence the posture could have signalled the capitulation of the prey by its predator. As such, the winged lion found at Alagou, differently from its counterpart on the tattooed man from Pazyryk, by showing such discomposure would seem to capitulate or at least to have fallen. The only explanation that comes to mind would be that of a connection with a yet-obscurer episode within the Scythian mythological tradition.



Fig. 43 Golden repoussé plaque with a twisted horse [Tian and Guo 1986: 357, pl.5.4].

Another example of 'animal-twisting' comes from the Ordos area, at Xigoupan (4th c. BCE) [Fig.43].²⁵³ Here, together with the most famous plaques of beaked ungulates with curled antler tines, comes a group of small square plaques, intended to ornament belts and scabbards, portraying a horse with its hindquarters twisted at 180°. Similar depictions of horses have been found on scabbard golden ornaments of the Semireč'e complex of eastern Kazakhstan, dated to the 5th c. BCE, suggesting continuity in style with the Saka tribes further to the west. Furthermore,

²⁵¹ Yang Boda 1987: no.14.

²⁵² Baipakov et al 1998.

²⁵³ Tian and Guo 1986: 357, pl.5.4.

a long rectangular golden ornament made in repoussé, found at the site,²⁵⁴ seems to provide yet another link with the Scythian tradition. The peculiarity of the ornament, apart from its use as an iron sword ornamental sheath intone with the Scythian tradition, stands in its depiction of a row of crouched beaked ungulates, possibly horses, among spiky leaves. Indeed these spiky leaves may have symbolised an idealised tree of life, a common motif of Scythian cosmogony. This idea would be further attested by the presence of semi-transformed horses, believed by Scythians to be the guardians of the sacred tree. As such not only the ornament would provide a clear evidence of the strong cultural connection existed between Xigoupan and the west, i.e. the Saka-Scythians, but it would also point at Xigoupan as a closer point of contact between central China and the Scythian world.

Gold and silver: a Central Asian aesthetic

Precious metals, prevalently gold and silver, had been seldom valued in the Central Plains for their connotation of social prestige, for often they were employed as a complementary medium to bronze, jade, wood or lacquer. Instead these lustrous metals have been extensively found among the groups inhabiting the frontier areas, conceived almost exclusively for personal ornamentation, often as status markers but not gender-specific (as women and men both wore them). Theoretically speaking, personal adornment can be conceived as a means of displaying personal status within a specific social framework, hence as symbol of social aggrandisement. Here it follows that the nature of 'jewellery' (i.e. precious –valuable- objects used for personal ornamentation) reflects in some measures the structure and activities of a given society, also in the archaeological past.²⁵⁵

Once again the earliest evidence for the ornamental use of gold and silver would come from the western border. Gold and silver earrings (and nose rings) with turquoise or agate pendants have been found in Yanbulake site in eastern Xinjiang and, possibly a little later, in Siba-Huoshagou group of sites, suggesting a western source for such personal ornaments.

In Huoshagou and Yanbulake different metals were probably used as social markers depending upon the status of the deceased, since small accessories made of gold, copper, bronze (and seldom silver) have been assembled differently in burials.

²⁵⁴ See Fig. 85, Chapter 4.

²⁵⁵ Clark 1986: 6-7. There is however an epistemological problem: if the relations of social power were 'naturalised' and not idealised in the burial context one could assume a straightforward correspondence between personal ornamentation and social status of the deceased. Unfortunately, ideologies are difficult to define within an archaeological context, leaving these assumptions unconfirmed. In other words, it is not

Especially earrings and few examples of nose rings discovered in these two cultural areas seem to have had some yet-unexplained symbolic meaning. Earrings made of bronze and gold have been discovered throughout the North-western Zone and they have been considered by most archaeologists as diagnostic artefacts of the steppe people of Central Asia. Yet the manufacturing technique seems to be rather geo-specific in nature, as it varies from place to place, ranging from heat-forging, cold hammering to casting. Heat forging is a technique traditionally ascribed to Central Asian and Southern Siberian cultures, whilst casting would have been drawn from China. The majority of pieces discovered so far are in fact forged rather than cast. This technical preference could have been due to environmental and economic contingencies, since hammering represents a more direct and quicker method of metalworking than casting, which instead involves a more complex process of creation. However, at Huoshaogou gold and silver artefacts are both cast, forged and filaments are twisted, probably betraying an Andronovo influence²⁵⁶ or an indirect BMAC source, where the technique of strip twisting had long been known. BMAC affinities are also exhibited in the Lijiaya bronze and gold inventory at a slightly later date. Apart from specific animal patterns on bronze and golden earrings used as social markers in burial contexts, golden filaments were also retrieved that, once analysed, could prove the existence of strip twisting *in loco*. Yet it is difficult to trace a possible route of transmission, as such technique is usually believed to have emerged in South Asia during the 3rd millennium BCE. Its presence in BMAC sites would provide an intermediary step. It would also be tempting to trace its migration path through Tibet into Qinghai and then eastwards to Shaanxi, following the extent of diffusion of another Lijiaya specific bronze object, the Yulin type of tubular axe, which extended westwards into Qinghai. Indeed Tibet (and Qinghai) must have been pivotal in the exchange of several ideas between China and South Asia throughout the Bronze Age period, as pre-Buddhist *tokchas* seem to indicate. At present, the paucity of information on the Tibetan side still prevents further assessments.

Other examples of penannular earrings made of golden wire come from Shajing sites, once again hinting at a connection with the earlier Siba-Huoshaogou cultural horizon. On the other hand Chawuhu and Qunbake examples of leaf-shaped earrings would point to the nomadic steppe cultures of the Scythian horizon, migrating into Xinjiang from Southern Siberia and Kazakhstan. As this type of gold inventory was in fact confined to a single tomb at Chawuhu, it may have represented a vanguard for subsequent waves of Scythian-related groups, which must have travelled further deep into the Turfan area, as

said that the most richly adorned body would belong to the highest, most authoritative member in the social hierarchy of a given society.

²⁵⁶ Han Rubin 1993.

material evidence at Alagou seems to attest, bringing with them their metallurgical knowledge and their symbolic repertoire.

During the second half of the 1st millennium BCE, stylistic and technical affinities with the nomadic people of Kazakhstan and southern Siberia increased tremendously, reflecting the extent of cultural interchange and demic contacts between the steppes and northwestern China. It is during this period that loop-in-loop chains of Saka derivation appeared in the inventory at Alagou II. Similar chains (and with it an entirely new socio-economic²⁵⁷ and ritual baggage) eventually reached Inner Mongolia at Aluchaideng in second half of the 1st millennium BCE. Local sites in the Ordos, dated to the period prior to Aluchaideng, Shihuigou, Xigoupan and Nalin'gaotu, such as Taohongbala, Gongsuhao and Sujigou in fact did not display any direct signs of Scythian influence, whilst exhibiting close ties with the Maoqingou cultural sphere.

Indirect western influence was indeed present thanks to the long-established network of short-distance trading activities, which encouraged the transmission of certain economic strategies, mostly related to the sphere of horse exploitation (either chariot or horseback riding) on a large scale throughout the Northern Zone.

The dragon

The only mythological beast favoured by the Xiongnu was a reptilian creature with a sinuous body, long tail, lupine head and four prominent clawed feet which may have inspired the dragon that first appeared in the artistic vocabulary of the Western Han (206 BCE- 8 CE).

A dragon coiled around two tortoises [Fig.44] appears on a bronze plaque, dated to the 2nd century BCE, of a type often found both in Chinese and Xiongnu burials.²⁵⁸



Fig. 44 Dragon plaque from a Xiongnu burial at Daodunzi, Tongxin xian, Ningxia [Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al 1988: 344-5, fig.9.1-13]

²⁵⁷ Often exhibiting signs of equal status among sexes, if not a preferential ritual connotation for women, as evinced among the warrior-priestesses of the Saka-Scythians in Central Asia [Davis-Kimball 1997-8].

²⁵⁸ A pair of belt plaques with identical design was recovered from the tomb of the King of Nan Yue, in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, dated to the 2nd century BCE [colour plate 19.1 in Beijing 1991].

A twisted rope border serves as a rectangular frame for the scene depicting a large dragon twisted around two tortoises.²⁵⁹ The combination of dragon and tortoise is also found on the interior of a bronze basin from the Zhongshan royal tomb at Pingshan xian (Hebei) suggesting that the motif might have been adopted from the artistic repertoire of the Bai Di, the founders of the Zhongshan state already in the 4th century BCE.²⁶⁰ This theme was widespread during the Western Han period, when it was adopted as the mythological symbol of the north cardinal direction (also called “the black warrior”). The dragon here illustrated has assumed a Sinicised form similar to the *bi xie*, a Western Han zoomorphic image with winged feline body and limbs. This mythical animal in turn descended from earlier northern wolf representations with comma-shaped ears and all four legs depicted, already seen in the Altai mountains of south Siberian at Pazyryk and Bash-Adar, related to the previous symbolic system of raptor-headed animals and usually found on artefacts from the northwestern areas (Yanglang and Ordos zones mainly) dated to the 4th-3rd century BCE. Nevertheless the *bi xie* of the Western Han period is totally Chinese in design and manufacture.

Another dragon with large lupine-head, spiral horns, almond-shaped eyes and the comma-shaped ears resembling Scytho-Siberian formulations of the wolf, is sculpturally portrayed on a lute-shaped belt-hook dated to the late 3rd century BCE [Fig.45].



Fig. 45 Lupine gilded belt hook [So and Bunker 19995: pl.15, p. 71]

On the opposite end of the belt-hook, a beaked creature (probably an owl) stands holding in its claws the twisted hindquarters of two does in a typical northern posture. The owl reminds of raptor-head ornaments of the Scythian period and appears also as an ornate spout on a silver wine cup from the royal tombs at Jincun, Luoyang, Henan province, dating back to the late Eastern Zhou period. Similar zoomorphic configurations are found on elaborate belt-hooks from the same site, suggesting a connection between

²⁵⁹The rectangular format with twisted rope effect is indeed more commonly found within the Xiongnu period than in the earlier Scythian period. The only exceptions are provided by the Xigoupan and Aluchaideng plaques in the Ordos and by a single example from Ningxia [Zhong and Han 1983: fig 4.11]. Whilst the twisted rope effect seems to belong to the nomadic tradition, the confinement of the design into a geometric rectangular contour would seem to find its source in the Chinese tradition. Indeed the first examples of such plaques would be encountered in areas under the strong influence of Qin, such as Ningxia southern regions, where this plaque was actually found.

²⁶⁰ So 1995: fig 66.2. On the other hand, such theme might have originated in China and later on transformed to appeal the steppe taste, since the only examples of this subject matter, associated with the steppes, come from sites, like Daodunzi in Ningxia, where Chinese influence was certainly felt.

nomadic centres and the ruling houses of the late Eastern Zhou period, but also with the southern cultural sphere of Chu, for similar raptor heads-shaped cup handles have been unearthed from Baoshan, Jingmen xian, Hubei province, roughly dated to the same period.²⁶¹ Thus this beaked creature seems to belong to the Scythian symbolic repertoire, rather than to the Xiongnu imagistic world, but was definitely absorbed and Sinicised in the late Warring States period and the first part of the Han dynasty.

***Xiangrui* landscapes**

Winged lions, as well as bears, birds, and other fantastic creatures derived from the nomadic pantheon crept into the early Han mountainous landscape settings, as symbols of *xiangrui* -auspicious zoomorphic phenomena, considered good omens and signal of the approval of Heaven. Exotic animals were apparently brought from time to time to the court of the emperor Han Wudi (147- 87 BCE). These events were considered extraordinary and augural at the same time.²⁶² From these recorded facts, it may have come the idea of enhancing the mystic power of the sacred mountainous landscapes of shamanist origin with exotic animals.²⁶³ Chariot pole ornaments best exemplify the type of *xiangrui* landscape favoured during the Western Han period.²⁶⁴

Bears, deer, leaping tigers, camels, wild boars, and perched birds establish the wilderness of the craggy landscape setting. This complex of images indicates the continuity of an imagistic reference from Issyk (Kazakhstan) through Alagou (Xinjiang) into the first *xiangrui* landscape representation in China. The scene is also the first pictorial representation of landscape as landform in Chinese art. Until then, the natural realm had been explicitly conveyed on Zhou pictorial bronze vessels by rows of stylised trees and implicitly indicated by zoomorphic images and simple ground lines.²⁶⁵ Landscape by implication was then the primary way of signifying natural terrain whereby the images served as signs of the antithesis between natural and urban contexts.

²⁶¹ So and Bunker 1995: 151-2.

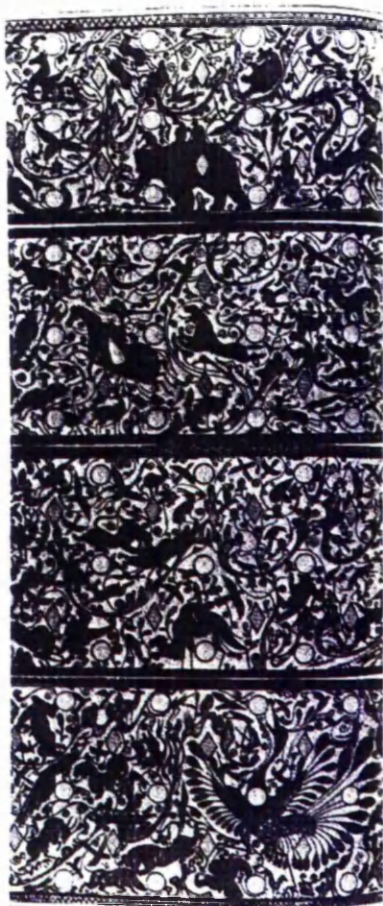
²⁶² Wu Hung 1994: 39-46.

²⁶³ Munakata 1991: 18-19.

²⁶⁴ This pole, together with the other three examples only extant in the world [see Munakata 1991 for a detailed account of the other three poles] would have been used as decoration in the exorcist chariot (*yunqi che*).

²⁶⁵ Weber 1968.

On the Sanpanshan pole [Fig.46], the winged horse, visible to the left in the uppermost register, may carry a reference to the nomadic motif of winged-ness, whilst the markings on the sides of many of the animals portrayed seem related to the marking of muscles on



Scytho-Siberian zoomorphic images. Finally the use of inlaid stones recalls nomadic rather than Zhou traditions of inlay.²⁶⁶ Ann Roes suggested that the nomadic tradition of marking animal musculature, seen in Pazyryk, would derive from inlay techniques, which in turn depended upon patterns of stylisation in stone sculpture. Occasional markings used to emphasise the haunches of an animal or imitating its fur, hair or spots on late Zhou pictorial vessels relate back to nomadic traditions with many examples both in south Siberia and Inner Mongolia (i.e. the Xigoupan plaques).²⁶⁷ However, the surrounding context, if not the treatment of the combat itself, hardly conjures up the idea of the dangerous realm of the mountain wilderness associated with the shaman's journey to the other world. The concept has been gradually Sinicised and softened up to appeal Western Han aesthetics, in contrast to the sober intensity of the nomadic versions.

Fig. 46 Sanpanshan bronze tube [Munakata 1991: fig 9, p. 22]

The same pictorial scene almost contemporaneously travelled westwards: in Kazakhstan a diadem [Fig.47] made up by a continuous golden openwork band featuring the same landscape motif, has been unearthed in the Kargaly valley in the Semireč'e complex, from the tomb of a Wusun princess (2nd c. BCE-1st c. CE).²⁶⁸



Fig. 47 Kargaly diadem [Baipakov et al 1998: pl 466, p. 225]

²⁶⁶ Indeed the reference is also provided by the contemporary Kargaly diadem. For further references see Jacobson 1985: 141-2.

²⁶⁷ Roes 1952: 17-30.

²⁶⁸ Baipakov et al 1998: pls. 446-8, p.225.

Flying dragons, deer, boars and feathery immortals on the back of winged lions or unicorns are walking against an openwork background of stylised rocks and trees interspersed with turquoise, malachite and carnelian inclusions. Unicorns, in Chinese *si*, are mentioned in the chapter of the southern mountains of the *Shanhaijing*. According to the text, unicorns and rhinoceros used to inhabit an area identified with modern Lingling in southern Hunan, in the Chu area of influence. Hence the motif could have been drawn from the southern state rather than from a northern source. Mountainous landscape was often depicted using the *yunqi* motif, i.e. cloud-shaped swirls interspersed with birds' heads and beaks (a clear reminder of Scythian raptor heads). Such motif is also evident in Mawangdui lacquer coffin decoration, as well as in almost all the tubular poles with *xiangrui* landscapes.²⁶⁹ The treatment of the background and the immortals of the type usually associated with Taoist landscape representations would seem to indicate a Chinese source for such a diadem. What is particularly interesting about the whole scene is the contrast between the lively scene of walking creatures below and the absolutely static depictions of winged horses on pedestals above. Such depictions seem closer in style to the Achaemenid portraits and quite unusual for the Chinese. The winged horse seems here perceived as some sort of symbolic presence, either related to Central Asian mythology, or perhaps related to the legend of the flying horses from Ferghana highly coveted by the Chinese emperors. In both cases, the animal is set amidst a landscape clearly suggesting the sacred intermediary realm between heaven and the human world, conceived originally by Shamanism and later included in the Taoist belief of the sacred mountain of the immortals. Perhaps within this conception, the flying horse could have played an important and unique role.

Kargali has been associated by the excavators with the Wusun confederation, one of the most powerful in Central Asia during the 1st century BCE and the first centuries CE.²⁷⁰ The territory controlled by the Wusun included the Semireč'e, part of Ferghana and northern Xinjiang. Their presence in Ferghana would possibly explain the presence of flying horses in the diadem. Their history was characterised by a strong conflicting relationship with both the Xiongnu and the Han government. Their presence in Central Asia and their close contacts with the Chinese would have made them the ideal transmitters of Sinicised iconographic elements into the west.

²⁶⁹ Munakata 1991: 18.

²⁷⁰ Baipakov et al 1998: 57.

Conclusions

When approaching the archaeological context of north-western China in prehistory, conclusive remarks are difficult to make. New sites and material evidence continue to emerge everyday from these remote areas of China, substantially altering and updating the present archaeological framework by adding new findings, while suggesting new approaches. In such a 'temporary' context, my research stands as one of the possible perspectives, a small contribution to shed light on this yet-obscure proto-historical scenario.

By partitioning the study into two main classes of available material culture – permanent fixtures (burial structures) and movable artefacts (burial assemblages)-, my observations have greatly depended on the information provided by the Chinese archaeological reports published during the last fifty years. Thus my perspective has somewhat been 'channelled' by the epistemological restraints posed by these literary sources. Archaeological evidence seems to be confined largely to burial contexts, thus limiting the scope of the whole investigation. However, by collecting as many data as possible from the reports, other pieces of information have been extrapolated, shedding some light on the life of these ancient people and contributing to delineate their ethnic affiliation.

It is generally assumed that certain typological and stylistic aspects of material culture undoubtedly contribute to the formulation of ethnicity. Yet ethnicity *per se* expresses a very ephemeral concept, whose parameters are difficult to define and have to be negotiated and contextualised on multiple analytical levels. Ethnicity is a multidimensional cultural entity, varying in expression according to various social, historical and economic factors. This polyvalent nature needs to be thoroughly contextualised in order to be understood. But often in the case of the archaeological material from north-western China 'parameters' such as burial structure, pottery and bronze typologies have been acknowledged by the archaeologists as passive and silent witnesses, whilst physical anthropological data informing on sex, age and health have been seldom acquired in situ, neglecting their significance in highlighting social constructs related to gender and age. In many cases, my search for specific parameters for ethnic affiliation - such as gender or age concern - has been hampered by the poor attention devoted by the excavators to these questions. Such a lacunose pool of data has more than once raised questions on ethnicity without finding answers.

Ecological and cultural correspondence in north-western China

Many queries that emerged along the way were related to important issues, such as the correspondence between ecological contingencies and cultural traits in north-western Chinese societies, where horse riding made a major impact and permeated not only the economic life but also the artistic production.

North-western China is characterised by continental semi-arid grassland interspersed between mountains and deserts. This environmental setting is analogous to that found in the western Eurasian steppe-land. But this assonance goes well beyond ecological conditions: affined Bronze Age herding cultures have indeed been identified across the Eurasian steppe. Whilst in the past these cultures were collectively labelled under a few macro-cultures (such as Yamnaya, Katakomba, Srubnaya and Andronovo) and treated as monolithic blocks of ethnically homogeneous nomadic groups migrating across large distances, solely on account of similarities in ceramic and funerary typologies, the emphasis can now be shifted from a global to local adaptive model of pastoral and agricultural interaction.¹ Already by the 3rd millennium BCE mobile herders in the Western Eurasian steppes and pastoral herders in the oases of Central Asia adapted locally within small regional systems. They developed adaptive strategies linked to different environmental conditions (either grassland or desert) and modified their herding strategies (and consequently their economic preferences) according to their access to surrounding pastures. During the early 2nd millennium new expansionistic cultures on the steppes and the desert oases appeared, reflecting simultaneous changes throughout Eurasia. These later developed mobile economies incorporating many features of the sedentary world (i.e. wheat cultivation and metal production), in a complex mixed economy that grew influential in relationship to their neighbours. A similar pattern of economic and social development, culminating with the full exploitation of horse riding and the adoption on a large scale of pastoral nomadic strategies is now traceable in north-western China during the Bronze Age and early Iron Age. Similarly to their neighbours further west, semi-sedentary stock herders of north-western China migrated eastwards in search of new pastures, possibly due to the progressive desertification of their home land.

These migrations are corroborated by the metal evidence linked to the Andronovo macro-culture,² as well as by physical anthropological data from Xinjiang.³ Recently,

¹ Shishlina and Hiebert 1998.

² Mei 2000.

³ Han Kangxin 1998. Contrarily, Russian scholars seem to depend heavily on physical anthropological studies up to this day, strongly paralleling physical features with ethno-cultural traits [Chikisheva 2000].

confidence in physical anthropological data has been questioned in its ability to detect ethnic groups, given the huge variability encountered in physiognomic traits and the lack of real knowledge about the modalities of heredity of macroscopical characters (skeletal and dental). Indeed the study of mitochondrial DNA polymorphism is to be considered more appropriate, when attempting to detect possible demic migrations. However, DNA analyses on the skeletal remains have been carried out only partially in Xinjiang, whilst in Gansu are yet to be planned.⁴

Besides the scarcity of molecular biology studies, the problem in the investigation of north-western China archaeological economies lies in the substantial lack of paleo-botanic and paleo-zoological data that could provide clues on human diet and herding stock preferences, notwithstanding the absence of quantification in most excavation reports. This penury is partially due to the scarcity of excavated residential settlements that would provide direct evidence of discarded animal bones,⁵ thus avoiding inferences deriving from ritually sacrificed animals in burials. Furthermore, no taxonomic difference between goat and sheep is rendered explicit in the burial excavation reports, and clues on the zoological type can only be extrapolated from the analysis of naturally preserved textiles, which had been 'presumably' produced in loco. Yet even the study of textile fragments (goat and sheep wool, hemp, linen and cotton) recently purported by some American scholars is still in its infancy among archaeologists in China, who surely could greatly contribute to this study, given their direct access to the material.⁶

Settlements: evidence for craft specialisation

The issue of craft specialisation represents yet another relevant question when looking at parameters for ethnic affiliation. Labour division and craft specialisation are both vital in the discussion on gender, and most of the times they are detectable through the analysis of settlement formation.

In terms of residential evidence and settlement patterning the material available in north-western China is, to say the least, sporadic. Settlements evidence is sometimes found related to the late 2nd - early 1st millennia BCE residential compounds related to Siba-Huoshagou, Yanbulake, Xindian and Shajing cultural horizons. Siba people appeared to dwell in small citadels with defensive walls raised from the alluvial plain beneath, clearly separated from the cemetery and laid out

⁴ For a detailed explanation of how mitochondrial DNA is extrapolated see Francaletti 1998.

⁵ Davis and Kramer 2001:116-137.

⁶ Barber 1995, 1998, 1999, Good 1998 and Bunker 2001.

according to a certain way.⁷ Such a structure is in tune with the Longshanoid expansion of central China,⁸ but detailed information on settlement patterns, which would also shed some light on Siba-Huoshagou economy, is yet to be published.

Economic inclinations can generally be suggested by the analysis of local paleo-ecological conditions and paleo-zoological evidence encountered in burials and discard areas, agricultural microlithics and paleo- botanic evidence. In fact, when looking at these foci of evidence Huoshagou, Donghuishan and Ganguya show significant differences in terms of territory exploitation.⁹ Huoshagou is located in an arid spot where water supply is relatively deficient and their major source of subsistence would have come from animal herding, as partially reflected by the amount of animal sacrifices in the tombs (sheep, oxen, horses, dogs and pigs) and the presence of microlithics tools which would further suggest a rural society with a mixed economy of agriculture and animal husbandry. On the other end, both Donghuishan and Ganguya are located at the foot of the Qilian Mountains, above an alluvial plain rich of water sources. These ecological conditions encouraged a more settled agricultural society, based on wheat cultivation (carbonised wheat was discovered at Donghuishan) rather than animal herding. Fewer remains of sacrificed animals and microlithics at the two sites certainly point in that direction. These differences in economic strategies would also explain the various degrees of social stratification, especially in the highly stratified Huoshagou burials. In Huoshagou, an economically less-stable society (based on livestock, rather than cultigens) would be reflected in burials with a higher degree of social stratification.¹⁰

A similar scenario is found relatively later in Gansu, in the Shajing cultural context. Here again, small dwelling citadels with fortified walls raised on a mount beneath an alluvial plain were clearly separated from the burial area. According to the evidence coming from plants (especially wheat), animals (bovine, equine and ovine species) and utensils found in burials and within the settlements, Shajing people were semi-sedentary movable herders, practising agriculture, animal husbandry and specialised in crafts such as matting, weaving and leather tannery. However, the available archaeological reports do not provide any detailed analysis of settlement patterning or botanical and zoological data that could help identifying patterns of labour division and social stratification. The only evidence for social stratification is at the moment

⁷ Li 1993: 118.

⁸ KC Chang 1986.

⁹ Li 1993: 117.

¹⁰ This could be just the case of active manipulation of the dead for socio-political reasons of aggrandisement, as proposed by Parker Pearson [1984] on the line of Childe's assumption that when the stability of a society is upset by external contacts, for example, grave goods tend to grow and differentiate in quantity and quality among the burials [Childe 1968: 13-19].

provided by burial inventories, indicating some sort of gender differentiation, with a special role for selected women within the society. In the last few years other sites related to Shajing cultural sphere have been unearthed. Hopefully their data will soon be published for further scrutiny.

Roughly coeval with the Siba Huoshaogou complex are the settlements belonging to the Yanbulake culture. The habitation site at Yanbulake has been summarily surveyed in the archaeological reports, by describing the large rectangular exterior wall made of stamped earth and mud bricks, with a corner tower and several rooms attached to the external side. The residential compound yielded vestiges of domestic walls, bearing traces of wooden materials and reeds together with small, carved mud bricks placed on the original yellowish brown ground level, suggesting above-ground structures with sun dried mud brick, possibly with poles and thatched roofs,¹¹ a type of architecture encountered also in the contemporary Oxus Civilisation of western Central Asia,¹² but no further details are provided on depositional patterns within the enclosure.

At Zhukaigou in the Ordos region instead, a detailed stratigraphic analysis of the residential plan was indeed laid out and variously interpreted.¹³ Storage pits for different goods were largely distributed within the domestic compound, which counted a relatively small number of household units, suggesting a small but formalised social structure composed by familial groups who developed a sedentary economy based on grain cultivation, where the majority of the population used facilities and structures within the village all year long, without necessarily residing in it.¹⁴ Excavated material from the oldest level (late Longshan horizon) further highlighted a partial activity of animal husbandry (pigs, oxen and sheep bones have been located within the refusal area inside the residential compound) and a complementary use of hunting (inferred by the recovery of arrows). In order to assess economic strategies, the environmental context was taken into consideration and paleo-botanic data provided. Zhukaigou is situated in the loess highland south of the Yinshan and north of the Gansu corridor. At that time, the natural vegetation ranged from loess covered by grass and shrubs, to xerophytes to steppes and prairies: not an ideal agricultural-farming area for the sustenance of a large population, whilst the

¹¹Huang Wenbi 1983:3.

¹²This parallel, together with specific burial features (metal inventory and flexed posture) would indicate a western link [Hiebert 1994]. An intermediary link could be provided by the Dashly oasis burials in the Amu Darya region of Bactria [P'yankova 1994: 355-372].

¹³Linduff 1995.

¹⁴Sedentism is partly characterised by the increase of volume of storage facilities (to lessen the risk of surplus failure dependent on meteorological hazards) and by their increased association with individual residences rather than communal areas, as part of formalised village plans. [Plog 1990: 177-99].

fertile plains in the surrounding hills would have been suitable for pasturing large and small hoofed animals.¹⁵

A similar proto-urban morphology is provided by nearby Lijiaya citadel in Qingjian County, which stands on steep terraces forming a natural barrier at the intersection of the Wuding River with the Yellow River. Watercourses have deeply affected the extent of natural erosion on the geophysical landscape, causing a serious disruption of the four archaeological strata. Its roughly rectangular plan measures circa half a kilometre from east to west and circa 200 metres from north to south. Walls of rammed earth delineate the eastern, north-eastern and south-eastern sides, which are the only ones survived to the present. Their construction technique seems to have been derived from late Neolithic Longshan and Shang prototypes. This architectural similarity would point to some sort of connection with Shang centres to the south and would also suggest some kind of administrative centre. Remains of defensive walls have also been detected. Within the citadel, residential units display a square plan with a lateral hearth usually placed by the back wall.¹⁶ Inside the houses different types of utilitarian pottery have been unearthed, pointing to a sedentary economy. Animal bones, evidence of a meat diet, too have been discovered adjacent to the residential walls, probably conceived as some kind of discharge area. In this respect, the spatial differentiation may witness a rather high level of social organisation within the village. Beside these data, no further details are given in the archaeological reports. Indeed the lack of other comparable citadels within the same cultural area poses serious limits to the investigation of settlement patterning. These areas should in the future be extensively surveyed and the main centres with their territories clearly mapped out in order to identify social and political hierarchies.

Xindian sites would seem to provide a better scenario in terms of settlement patterning, inasmuch as most of them (Shanjiatou, Jijiachuan and Zhangjiazui) are indeed residential.¹⁷ However, even here the emphasis has been laid on traditional parameters such as pottery seriation, rather than settlement patterns. Indeed the whole Xindian case has been based on comparative analysis of ceramic typologies and decoration. It would help a great deal to turn the attention on the nature of its dwelling sites. In fact, Jijiachuan site archaeological report provided the only relevant data. At Jijiachuan site two habitation units have been discovered.¹⁸ They feature an

¹⁵ Cribb 1991.

¹⁶ Traces of fire roasting have been detected.

¹⁷ Zhang Xuezheng et al 1993.

¹⁸ Xie Duanju 1980.

almost square plan, sunken floor with a round earthen stove (in the form of a cauldron) in the middle and a western entrance. The remains suggest a wooden building with earthen walls, spread with a grass-clay mixture coat. They represent an important discovery: in fact their structure is not seen elsewhere within the same archaeological horizon and may have been either invented *ex-novo* or imported from some remote source, yet to be discovered. An incredibly high number of storage pits of large, small round or rectangular sizes were also unearthed, containing stone items and ceramic shards. Zoological analysis has been carried out on the animal remains found within the residential compound, between the layers or inside the storage pits. The majority of bones are from either sheep or pigs, suggesting their economic pre-eminence and the importance of animal herding. The recovery of several bone and stone utilitarian tools used for cultivation also reflects the importance of agriculture in Jijiachuan. Interestingly enough, at Zhangjiazui storage pits have also been found, but no residential units have been discovered in their proximity. They yielded various utilitarian tools, along with bone ornaments and a fragment of bronze vessel, a spearhead, three turquoise beads, and two pieces of bronze slag. The high number of storage pits contrasts the total absence of house foundations. It may speak out of an intense and long-lasting 'storing' activity, probably linked to a sedentary economic strategy, yet the lack of dwellings stands out as an archaeological conundrum.¹⁹ The cultural layers further confirmed a long-lasting occupation *in situ*, while leaving unsolved the problem of the lack of architectural remains. Some animal bones were also discovered: cattle, sheep, horses, dogs, pigs and deer played an important role in the economic system of the Xindian-Zhangjiazui people. At this stage only, the horse appeared within the domestic economic frame of Xindian culture. From the scanty archaeological evidence at our disposal, it is clear that Zhangjiazui people engaged in agriculture (many lithic tools), animal husbandry (animal bones in discard areas and storage pits) and hunting activities (deer bones).

The only other example of residential settlement is provided by the few habitations connected to the Sidaogou cultural sphere. Yet data are so fragmentary and the sites so poorly analysed that no further remarks can be made at present.

¹⁹ The pre-eminence of storage pits also occurred in the early stage of the Chust culture in ancient Ferghana Valley. Besides, the absence of formalised burial complexes would seem to parallel again some Chust settlements where the dead were buried outside the residential compound in the desert or in the ruins of a house but not in a formalised cemetery [Askharov 1992:447].

Burial analysis: interred utensils and lifetime labour division

Most archaeologists in China follow the idea of a direct relationship between burial tools and lifetime occupational status. By basing much of this research on burial remains and their description, one has to be aware of the epistemological limitations inherent to this line of enquiry. In theory, tools of production found in dwelling sites are used to infer the division of labour. Even more tools found with males and females respectively in burial contexts are often thought to reflect their occupational status during their lifetime. Finally, quantitative differences in the production tools have often formed the basis of inferences about participation in labour and economic power.

However, in this study it has been stressed how the relationship between burial organisation and social organisation may be neither direct nor quantitatively expressed. Hence to examine the division of labour and the size and composition of local groups, the *internal structure* of each cemetery should be thoroughly investigated. Distribution of tools and ornaments by age and sex should be considered not in terms of quantity but to establish *patterns of shared characteristics*. Both the use of objects and their styles are important as the presence or absence of painted ceramics and their similarities in motifs are. This approach must be applied both on a regional and interregional levels in order to follow systemic relationships. Hence the emphasis on *patterning* within burials is to be considered a useful method of analysis. Complementarities of different use-types of vessels or of motifs may bring an insight into ritual and social sub groupings.

However, such studies that would require the location of every object in every grave or the painted motifs of every decorated vessel are not yet possible with the archaeological reports published so far and would require a fresh scrutiny of all the burial assemblages in each cemetery. The archaeologists working on the Chawuhu burial site have recently taken a first step in this direction by publishing the first comprehensive excavation report.²⁰ Yet in the case of Chawuhu most burials are of the multiple type, in tune with Chawuhu clan-structured society, including even second interment remains, where female and male bodies were buried together, accompanied by numerous items, comprising single handled jugs, bone, stone and wooden spindle whorls, bronze awls and knives. Even when looking at single and couple burials of the same sex it seems that both women and men had access to similar tools and ornaments, suggesting no actual gendered labour division reflected

²⁰ Wang Mingzhe 1999.

in burials. Production patterns could be reflected by the high frequency of recovery of similar artefacts in tombs: looped *guan*-jars and single-handled spouted jugs found almost in every tomb would seem to indicate a steady ceramic industry, whilst spindle-whorls and woven textiles would imply a highly developed weaving production.

Being confined to burial evidence, it is difficult to ascertain a direct correspondence between life and death scenarios. Recently a settlement has been spotted closed to the burial area, yet no excavation report has been published to date. Once available, the report should shed some light on lifestyles, possible production patterns and labour division in Chawuhu. Similar hopes are maintained for almost all the sites analysed in this study. The penury of settlement remains, plus the poor attention to gender, age (and mortality), dietary differentiations and artefacts seriation in burials have so far hindered the investigation on production patterning and labour division. One just must hope that in the future more detailed excavation reports will be compiled providing a better picture.

Age and gender through burial assemblages

Fundamental in the discussion of ethnic affiliation are the modalities of social constructs such as age differentiation and gender division. In this study these social constructs have been partially highlighted through the investigation of children burials and clothing, female and male garments, personal ornaments and body decoration (tattoos and mineral pigments); on the other hand, the relationship between spatial constructions and gender often noticeable in the layout of the household has not yet been carried out.

Children burials and clothing

In archaeology the contribution children have made to past societies has been largely ignored.²¹ But children contributed to the archaeological records whether or not we are able to identify their agency in the past. When searching for children in the archaeological record of north-western China, differences in age concern -albeit highlighted by a limited number of infant burials and the lack of paleo-demographic and biological anthropological data- can still be perceived. Burial preferences linked to age differentiation may have implications in the sphere of ethnic recognition and as such provide useful information on the relationship between different groups of people who occupied these areas during the Bronze and early Iron Age. In this study

²¹ Moore and Scott 1997.

various burial attitudes have been described that may reflect a particular perception of children in society.

Whilst at Huoshaogou clan bondages represented the most important parameter for societal structure and infants were generally buried with adults, further to the west at Yanbulake, children may have been perceived as social *personae*. Small shallow infant pits, furnished with stone ornaments and mimicking adult interments on a smaller scale, were placed in the cemetery but lacked the usual paraphernalia encountered in adult burials (no pots or metal ornaments). Interestingly, such infant burials are invariably dated to the late phase when the proto-Europoid members of the community formed the relative majority. These burials are not apparently gendered, yet their style is comparable with that of the adults. Some authors advanced the hypothesis that these practices reflect early integration of children into the social and economic activities of their respective groups.²² If so, the early integration of children into the social context -by interring them in a proper individual burial- may reflect a number of factors relating to the society itself.

In general group mobility, economic stress, workloads and the regulation of family size are cited among the reasons for the lack of consideration of young children in a wide range of societies.²³ Hence, the relative economic stability found in Yanbulake - a situation that could allow the burial expression to children²⁴- could follow this rule. To confirm it, evidence of equal access to dietary resources should be further provided for Yanbulake; demographic and dietary analysis should be carried out, based on macroscopic, microscopic and chemical data of the human skeletal remains.

Instead, a completely different behavioural pattern may have been practiced in the Ordos region. At Zhukaigou, some children were found buried in urns close to the households, hence suggesting their familiar appurtenance. Yet only a few infant urns were found, when compared with the number of adult burials in the cemetery. This number could be ascribed either to insufficient archaeological evidence, or it could signal a specific practice related to a small selected sub-group, either displaying a distinctive status, having direct access to resources and authority or showing a specific ethnic affiliation. This attitude is well reflected in the penury of children burials, notwithstanding the considerable evidence that in prehistoric times at least half of the living individuals in any given community were indeed children.²⁵ So it

²² Rega 1997, Lillie 1997.

²³ Mays 1995.

²⁴ Lillie 1997: 212-228.

²⁵ Chamberlain 1997: 248-250.

seems that in the case of Zhukaigou, only selected children were buried in this particular way, whilst the large majority of the infant population simply would not be afforded burial interment. The practice of cremating the body further impairs the investigation on social constructs, as it is impossible to determine the relative age or the gender of the occupants.

Not far from Zhukaigou, and culturally related to it, in the citadel of Lijiaya children funerary urns were also detected.²⁶ Differently from Zhukaigou, the skeletons were not cremated, thus allowing the age of the young occupants to be determined. However, at Lijiaya, no organised cemetery has been identified in the proximity, leaving questions of age discrimination unanswered. As mentioned in the introduction, children interments may sometimes yield specific evidence for demic migrations and cultural diffusion.²⁷ The co-occurrence of similar burial behaviours for infants in Zhukaigou and Lijiaya could be ascribed to their cultural affiliation. However, the contextualised analysis of various aspects of Zhukaigou and Lijiaya material cultures, at this moment, would seem to exclude it.

During the early 1st millennium BCE in Xindian cultural area apart from one exceptional example of joint mother and child burial no individual infant burials have been brought to light. Instead, in neighbouring Shajing some children were found buried in the cemetery, mimicking adult burials, but lacking any furnishing or ornaments, a burial behaviour encountered earlier at Huoshaogou, although few details are given in the report of the frequency of occurrence of such behaviour. However, the analysis of various aspects of material culture in both Huoshaogou and Shajing has highlighted the possibility of a direct link between the two cultures, suggesting even a probable migration pattern through time.

Children are again encountered further to the west, at Chawuhu, crammed into the spare space in the adult tombs or together with the adults in multiple burials. Only during the late phase, a few individual children burials appeared, always attached to one side of the adult tomb stone circle. These burials usually present no formal age or sex discrimination, whilst they might have been dictated by principles of clan appurtenance or household composition. The total absence of infant burials during the first phase of cultural development would indicate the non-recognition of infants by the early Chawuhu clan-structured society, which was possibly characterised by less stable economic contingencies. Most children could have been either disposed of, or buried within the domestic enclosures as it happened earlier in Zhukaigou and

²⁶ Zhang and Lu 1988: 50

²⁷ Burmeister 2000.

Lijiaya, although residential compounds related to Chawuhu are yet to be excavated for confirmation.

An interesting custom linked to infant burials in the Chawuhu area, and also found earlier in Yanbulake, is the inclusion of sheep/goat astragali,²⁸ used either as toys or symbols of well-being. Astragali, by being a highly nutritious aliment, were probably considered a precious source of food, particularly suitable for growing young children. This could explain their prevalence in children burials. Astragali were also recovered in connection with children at Lanzhouwanzi and Sidaogou, pointing to some common cultural connections.

Sporadic examples of children burials have been found in other burial sites such as Wupushuiku and Zahongluke, although the limited number of adult burials prevents any patterning analysis. Yet noticeable is the unusual care for details in the Zahongluke 'baby blue' infant burial, possibly indicating a significant role of the infant in life: attempts were made to prolong his life with one of the earliest feeding bottles in history and great care was spent in the funerary arrangement of his single grave. When compared with the other few children buried in multiple burials within the same cemetery, this grave must have belonged to a very special boy. However, in the tomb of the old 'matriarch', two infant boys, one lying naked on a woollen blanket and the other suspended through a hole in the roof, were also found possibly reflecting an act of vengeance. Interestingly enough, both corpses were found without clothes on, in contrast with the beautifully dressed baby blue. Indeed clothing as a mediator for ideology must have played an important symbolic role in these ancient societies.²⁹ The fact that when discovered dressed these children would wear adult-style garments, could indicate that they were recognised in society as having a specific role.

Such an attitude is also encountered at Alagou-related Dongfengchang site.³⁰ Three tombs featuring a lateral burial niche yielded three small children all wearing hairnets and felt caps, woollen robes and felt boots, sometimes also necklaces, following again the adult dressing code, as in the case of Zahongluke. In the future, it would be then worthwhile investigating further the sex of these burials, as clothing is also considered a preferential media for gender communication.

Turning to the Ordos region during the 1st millennium BCE, few are the organised cemeteries, which have been thoroughly surveyed. Maoqinggou provides one such

²⁸ From the ancient Greek word *astragaloi* [Chen and Hiebert, 1995: 281].

²⁹ Sorensen 2002.

³⁰ Zhang Yuzhong 1998.

example.³¹ There, the richest burial was that of a young woman embellished with a belt made of bronze plaques and florets and by a beaded necklace, accompanied by her stillborn baby girl. The lady must have played an important role in life, considering the fact that her assemblage is one of the richest in the cemetery, and her stillborn baby represents a unique example in north-western China.

Further to the west in Gansu and Ningxia children were also allowed proper interment. At Pengpu Yujiazhuang organised cemetery quite a large number of tombs are in fact occupied by children.³² They were interred in either vertical pits or catacomb tombs with a vertical shaft, encased inside a niche surrounded by funerary items, whilst sacrificed animal skulls were sometimes lined in the main pit. As in the case of Yanglang Mazhuang, the head was placed at a lower level than the feet, on a slanting bottom. No garments have survived but among the funerary ornaments many are the round-shaped bronze plaques that once adorned the young occupants' clothes, perhaps mimicking adult costumes. Whilst posture seems to adhere to the general adult custom, it would be interesting to know whether these tombs also followed adult rules in terms of funerary typologies and sacrifices. However, the current archaeological report does not provide a clear picture of each infant burial assemblage, hence no patterning is possible as yet.

Gender: garments and personal ornamentation

As mentioned in the case of children burials, garments can represent an interesting tool of investigation into past social constructs. In fact, the analysis of clothing not only relates to age (for children wearing adult-mimicking costumes) but also and more specifically to the formulation of gender.

Nowadays clothing is recognised as part of a system of communication, although the obvious application of semiotics to costumes - i.e. treating them as signs - has been seldom investigated. Dress implies differences, categories and events (i.e. rites of passage), while providing at the same time a means for transformation, coercion, concealment and pretence.³³ Clothes in the present as well as in the past represent a social artefact: worn or displayed in an emblematic way can denote variations in age, sex, rank, status and group affiliation and it varies in time and space. As such appearance does not represent a state of being, but a process of becoming, hence more difficult to define within the archaeological record, as it is susceptible to constant changes.

³¹ Holliman and Kossack 1992, Psarras 1994.

³² Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1995: tombs M1, M5, M7, M19 and SM3.

³³ Sorensen 2000: 131.

At the moment the study of garments and textile production related to prehistoric north-western China is still in its infancy,³⁴ but could prove crucial in a few years' time, especially considering the wealth of material that is emerging from Xinjiang and Gansu. The most explicit example would come from the peaked hats found in Subeixi and their Saka-Scythian cultural affiliation. Not only the garments' choice of pigments and fabrics, but also their weaving mode, tailoring style and the typological variation within the same group of people would prove instrumental in the identification of similar patterns throughout north-western China and well beyond, into Eurasia, thus corroborating or excluding clues for ethnic affiliation.

Adornments are also closely related to clothing as they are subliminally used to signal specific social categories, such as age, gender and ethnic affiliations; the message is clearly carried in the usage of ornamental plaques and bead necklaces during the 1st millennium BCE in northern China. The problem arises when dealing with the published data, which lack a systematic approach. However, when better-formulated information will be published, the investigation of appearance and its modes should take into consideration a series of different dimensions.

As originally indicated by Sorensen, the analysis should first distinguish between the separate existence of cloth from the body (in terms of production, i.e. weaving, matting, embroidery, sewing, felting, knitting), pieces of clothing (tailoring) and the full costume.³⁵ Secondly, it should concentrate on the usage of clothing on the body: alone or combined with other objects (such as headgears and pouches, utensils and weapons) and if so, in which way. And thirdly, it should consider the relationship between the objects and the body, recognizing that it is culturally constructed in different ways, either continuously open (removable objects: pins or necklaces), semi-movable (objects such as buttons, belt-rings or adornments on headdresses) and permanent (such as earrings and finger rings that cannot be removed and tattoos or other signs of scarification). These objects, documented in the archaeological record, become part of the social body and, as such, they constitute an invaluable tool of investigation into the construes of past gender and, eventually, ethnicity.

In any investigation of costumes, certain elements show clear gender differentiation, some might give a more ambiguous message and others may not be gendered at all. In prehistoric archaeology the analysis focuses on the funerary adornment for the body and how past people related to the bodies of society. In fact we know from

³⁴ Barber 1991, 1994, 1995, 1998, 1999, Good 1998, Bunker 2000.

³⁵ Sorensen 2000:134.

ethnography that for instance permanent markers on the body, such as specific ornaments and tattoos, are often employed to indicate transitional stages in the lifetime of an individual.³⁶ Such marks may represent the visual expression of a given membership that, by being indelible, would further stress the permanent nature of such a social statement. The body as an object of decoration is strongly present in north-western China archaeological record. Differences in body adornment thus indicate distinctions of many kinds within the groups, which are easy to perceive: emphasis upon head and hair are easily detected in Subeixi women burials, with their tall conical hats, as it is the presence of elaborate tattooed designs on their skin. Interestingly enough, tattoos found in Subeixi are closely reminiscent to those encountered in Southern Siberia, in the Tagar culture. Here, as in Subeixi, similar ingredients might have been used to create indelible designs on the skin: the skin was pricked and a dying vegetal agent (soot or charcoal mixed with fat, urine or tree-sap) injected underneath the skin.³⁷ Tattoo motifs are usually considered very conservative, both in style, technique and source of inspiration, and as such, they could constitute an ethnic parameter.³⁸ Moreover, tattoos in ancient societies might have been quite meaningful and closely connected to initiation rituals, often signalling the passage to adulthood. Ethnologic records also suggest that the art of tattooing was mostly practiced by women.³⁹ If so, mineral pigments pouches found at the side of some Subeixi women could have been used for this purpose. Making permanent designs on a human body was likely considered a sacred ritual, after which the inner essence of an individual changed completely. Masters of this craft should have possessed a high rank in the society and were probably affiliated to priests, or to people of abnormal abilities: a conjecture that fits well with the Subeixi priestesses. The Subeixi tattoos were similar to the decorative images noted in their attire, headgear, household utensils and weapons. Seemingly, they represent the symbols of one and the same language. As in any ranked society, in Subeixi, in Wupushuiku, in Zahongluke -similarly to what happened in Pazyryk and in Tagar cultures- some people deserved to have more information recorded on their bodies than others. The location of the tattoos seemed to be meaningful too, and the choice of face and hands might have been linked to a precise belief, not ultimately the need of exposing the signs to the public, free from the garments.

The function of tattoos is not mono-semantic. Tattoos may have various implications: stressing the social rank of an individual, his nobleness, courage or personal

³⁶ Polosmak 2000: 95 ff., Jettmar 1994: 3-14.

³⁷ Physical-chemical analyses were carried out in Novosibirsk [Polosmak 2000: 98-99].

³⁸ Rudenko 1949: 153; Levi-Strauss 1984:81.

freedom; or else, they may have healing or protecting functions, might be done for the sake of decoration or for transmitting sacred information, to secure life after death or may serve as a sign of membership to some clan or ethnic group. Ultimately, it is likely that there were also differences between female and male tattoo designs, although such an analysis is difficult to carry on in north-western China.

Dressing the hair too can be perceived as an important social sexual marker, as it might have been for the old lady in Wupushuiku burial. Furthermore, both the extraordinarily well-preserved wooden figurines from Yanbulake and the pieces of clothing recovered from various sites in Xinjiang represent a compelling evidence for the reconstruction of contemporary costumes, significantly showing a great difference between male and female costumes. Even more important is the analysis of differentiations in costume attires between groups of women within the same group.

Some guidelines can still be proposed for the future: variability in combination of clothes and ornaments (including indelible markers - tattoos -), while being aware of cross-cut differences in wealth, power, age stages and regional traits. It is clear that the articulation of gender through appearance would take many different forms, exploring its various potentials and elements. The social recognition and cultural marking of life stages through rites of passages, including changes in appearance - like tattoos and scarification practices -, for instance, might be considered one of the main cultural means by which gender differences are construed.⁴⁰ By recognising the modes in which gender is formulated through appearance, crucial information on ethnicity can ultimately be extrapolated.

Artistic representation: iconography and ideology

Material culture and its iconography, albeit merely found in burial contexts, may provide valuable information on the sort of belief systems shared by a large group of genetically different people, thus providing the cultural glue for group affiliation. However, the absence of written records pertaining north-western China during the Bronze Age (apart from later Chinese chronicles) poses a serious limit to the interpretation of past material culture in terms of religious beliefs. The polysemous nature of any item of material culture implies that similar or even identical objects or signs could have been perceived, used and transmitted differently by different people, through time.⁴¹ This phenomenon well applies to the Scytho-Siberian animal

³⁹ Polosmak 2000.

⁴⁰ Sofaer-Deverenski 1997.

⁴¹ Hodder 1986 and Pearson M. P. 1995.

art⁴² where a large array of different materials and artefacts bearing zoomorphic designs⁴³ are distributed all over the grasslands of Eurasia, from Ukraine to northern China. Nevertheless archaeological investigations indicated that ceramics, utensils, mortuary practices and other indicators of ethnic and cultural similarities within all the regions of the Scytho-Siberian world are not uniform at all: their similarities are only very general and they demonstrate noticeable spatial differentiation. Thus these elements must be treated always as specific to each culture, and treated accordingly.⁴⁴ This regional individuality in material culture expression further highlights the ethnic disunity of the steppe world. As variously emphasised in the introductory chapter, even the relationship between variation in material culture and the expression of ethnic difference is rather complex, especially if one follows recent anthropological theories purporting the idea of ethnic groups as self-consciously defined.⁴⁵

Iconographic motifs were indeed transmitted at both conscious and subliminal levels, resulting, for instance, in the artistic syncretism produced in the late Warring States and Han periods in central China (Ch. 6). However, the lack of any written source describing specific artistic motifs leaves their inherent symbolism difficult to grasp.

Especially when dealing with early specimens dated to the 2nd millennium BCE, information is fragmentary. Iconographic motifs were first discovered on ceramic or bronze surfaces, prevalently geometric semi-abstract designs (such as the snake pattern on *li*-tripods from the Ordos region), often specifically produced for funerary purposes (as in Shajing painted jars). Both in the case of applied snake-patterned tripods (Zhukaigou) and painted rows of hanging triangles (Yanbulake), similar motifs have been found within different cultural contexts, apparently divorced from their inherent symbolism. This symbolism is difficult to grasp, yet the employment of these designs in different cultural contexts suggests their importance in social exchange, marking the extent of iconographic transmission through the Northern Zone.

Besides the tendency to simple geometries, few anthropomorphic and zoomorphic motifs were employed during the early Bronze Age period. The Lijiaya human and animals figurines cast in bronze on top of ceremonial utensils and weapons represent an isolated phenomenon. Surely, they bore a highly symbolic connotation, whose significance could be related to the petroglyphic tradition of the Eurasian steppes.

⁴² William Watson defined the so-called Scythic Continuum, extending from the Chinese Northern Zone to the north coast of the Black Sea, in the region once called 'Pontic Scythia' [Watson 1971: 96-124].

⁴³ The inventory bearing zoomorphic designs goes well beyond the classification proposed by Grakov and Melukova [1954] who placed the emphasis on weapons, horse harnesses and metal plaques (i.e. Scythian triad).

⁴⁴ Rubinson 2002.

⁴⁵ Hodder 1982 and Wiessner 1983.

Equally, the unique human figure with no head, the hand with three fingers and the foot with two toes found on a red ceramic fragment from Shajing (Ch.3) provides another striking parallel to the Eurasian rock art. The intentional dismembering of the human body and the lack of limbs or toes is often associated with the rite of granting of the shamanic gift, when the spirits, after surveying the candidate's skeleton, would decide whether to elect him or not as shaman and they would then integrate the parts of his body into a whole again.⁴⁶ Supernatural humans in shamanistic belief system may lack some fingers or toes, hence it is possible that the characteristics of the other-world's inhabitants could be transferred to a shaman –they could be inherent in him as a mediator between the world of people and the mythical world of spirits. Okladnikov interpreted similar depictions from Sagan-Zaba Bay close to Lake Baikal as shamans engaged in ritual dances.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the exaggerated triangular torso depicted both in the Baikal and Shajing examples would be traditionally ascribed to mythical figures, with an inhuman, shaman nature. Together with dismembered body depictions, also anthropomorphic images in the X-ray styles are widely known in rock art practically around the world, as connected with 'shamanic ideology'. Interestingly enough, once again the only example of such X-ray style anthropomorphs in northern China during the 2nd millennium BCE is found in Lijiaya contexts, further suggesting the widespread existence of a shamanic practice.

But how can Shamanism be defined? In the shamanistic world, a number of 'souls' are believed to exist in an individual, whose functions are described in various ways. The 'animation' attributed to each element in nature is a special force believed to retain a special power. The balance between such external forces and the human community is orchestrated by the shaman, a specialist with extraordinary power, able to communicate with the external forces such as 'ghosts', 'ancestors', or 'souls'. Moreover the shaman must defend his/her own community against external forces. Such external forces would be generally believed to have the combined shape and qualities of several animals. To meet them, the shaman would advocate the assistance of ghosts, who would also appear in the shape of animals, or the combined attributes of several animals together. Depictions of these assistants would be applied to the costume, the skin of the shaman or to his/her implements, by tattooing, painting, carving and embroidering. Hence the shaman would become the canvas on which religious beliefs would be depicted concretely, when preparing to re-enact a spiritual journey. Shamanistic beliefs have been widely expressed throughout the world, hence denoting quite diverse ethnic groups. Similarly, these

⁴⁶ Devlet 2000.

ideas were widely manifested in the repertoires of different ethnic groups professing similar cultic rituals and beliefs in north-western China during the 1st millennium BCE. The lack of written sources again limits the investigation of the ideological systems professed by these groups. Most of the iconographic elements linked to a possible shamanistic ideology nevertheless seem to point to either southern Siberian or Kazakhstan, suggesting a trend of cultural diffusion from the West. The preference for animal depictions (especially in the case of composite mythological animals) in 'mobile' art objects (metal plaques, clothing and portable utensils) and the presence of more permanent decorations (tattoos) reveal an inclination towards shamanism, which pervades all the Northern Zone. Unfortunately, to date, the extent and the modalities of practice are not easy to define in the archaeological record for lack of corroborating evidence.

Language of the Dead: the elusive linguistic evidence

From the observations raised in this study, it is evident that many were the elements of cultural conjunction between Central Asia and north-western China during the Bronze Age period. Mortuary objects verify the existence of long-distance cultural contacts. Even the slightest clue indicates that cultural and innovative ideas could travel great distances. Homogeneity occurred in symbolic, visual and possibly audible signs over a wide geographical area.

Cultural transmission travelled both ways, operating at different levels, either through demic migrations or indirect iconographic and technical permutations, encouraged by similar environmental and economic conditions. Already by the 2nd millennium BCE northwest China presented a varied network of trading routes and migratory paths, which closely connected her to the wider and more complex Central Asian steppe cultural continuum. It is nevertheless clear that Central Asian and north-western Chinese people were closely intertwined throughout the Bronze Age.

Several scholars have gone farther suggesting that the desiccated corpses of proto-Europoid phenotype found in Xinjiang not only were the first Indo-European to expand eastwards but also the first to speak the ancient Tocharian language.⁴⁸ Clearly the area of early Indo-European expansion to the east was vast and must have been home to a number of non Indo-European people too. The question is important as language, as we know, would represent one of the central, albeit evanescent, parameters for ethnic affiliation.

⁴⁷ Okladnikov 1974: 79.

⁴⁸ Mallory and Mair 2000: 102-131.

The linguistic picture of the early first millennium BCE portrays much of the area west of Xinjiang as speaking Old Iranian languages (Old Persian, Avestan and Scythian⁴⁹), although no written proof of such idioms has ever been found dated to this period. But matching the linguistic picture against the archaeological record has proved harder than imagined. Mair and Mallory pointed out the importance of the Andronovo culture (c.2000-900 BCE) in the transmission of Indo-European languages into eastern Central Asia.⁵⁰ But their assumption is completely dependant on analogies with the earliest Indo-Iranian societal self-model which envisaged a pastoral, chariot-riding society and with the fact that the areas inhabited by the Andronovo were known to have been occupied by Iranians during the 1st millennium BCE. The problem with Andronovo, however, stands in its versatility on impact with other cultural entities: through the analysis of pottery, settlement changes and burial grounds in the valley of Central Asia, archaeologists have noticed that Andronovo people were able to shift their economic structure to accommodate new circumstances, thus reinventing themselves from steppe herders to semi-sedentary agriculturalists. In the Central Asian towns of Bactria and Margiana (Bactrio-Margiana Archaeological Complex) their tracks are more elusive and the best current hypothesis is that, as steppe tribes, they adopted local material culture, before migrating into Northern India, while still carrying with them their original language. A similar 'chameleonic' behaviour could be proposed for the Shajing culture of north-central Gansu, thus moving the presence of Indo-Iranian people further east into China during the 1st millennium BCE, although Shajing settlements are yet to be studied in depth. The migratory path left by the Andronovo into Xinjiang and Gansu,⁵¹ could indeed represent the first great migratory wave of Indo-Iranian speaking people, although no factual evidence of their language is available. Even so, the problem with the Tocharian connection lies in the chronological gap between the Andronovian wave of the 1st millennium BCE and the Tocharian presence dated to the 6th-8th c. CE.

Recently, however, the dating of the ancient Indo-European languages by glotto-chronology has been revived, by applying the latest computational tools used to tease out evolutionary relationships in biology - maximum-likelihood models and Bayesian inference techniques - to a data set of Indo-European languages

⁴⁹ The Scythians were illiterate and left no written record. However few Scythian words survived through Herodotus. According to him, 'pata' meant 'to kill'; 'spou' meant 'eye', 'arima' meant 'one', 'oior' meant 'man'. From these words, the philologists were able to define Scythian dialects as a prehistoric Indo-European language.

⁵⁰ Mallory and Mair 2000: 130.

⁵¹ Fully described in Ch. 6.

developed and refined by lexico-statisticians.⁵² According to the new phylogenetic model, both Tocharian A and B are shown as distinct from the original Indo-European root by 7,000 years BP whilst the Indo-Iranian families diverged from the consensus tree only later, at a time intriguingly close to that suggested for a possible Kurgan expansion (4600 BP, almost coeval with the Andronovo expansion).⁵³ If true, this study would connect the Andronovo to the Indo-Iranian linguistic expansion, but at a much later date than the emergence of the Tocharian languages, thus leaving the two linguistic families distinct.

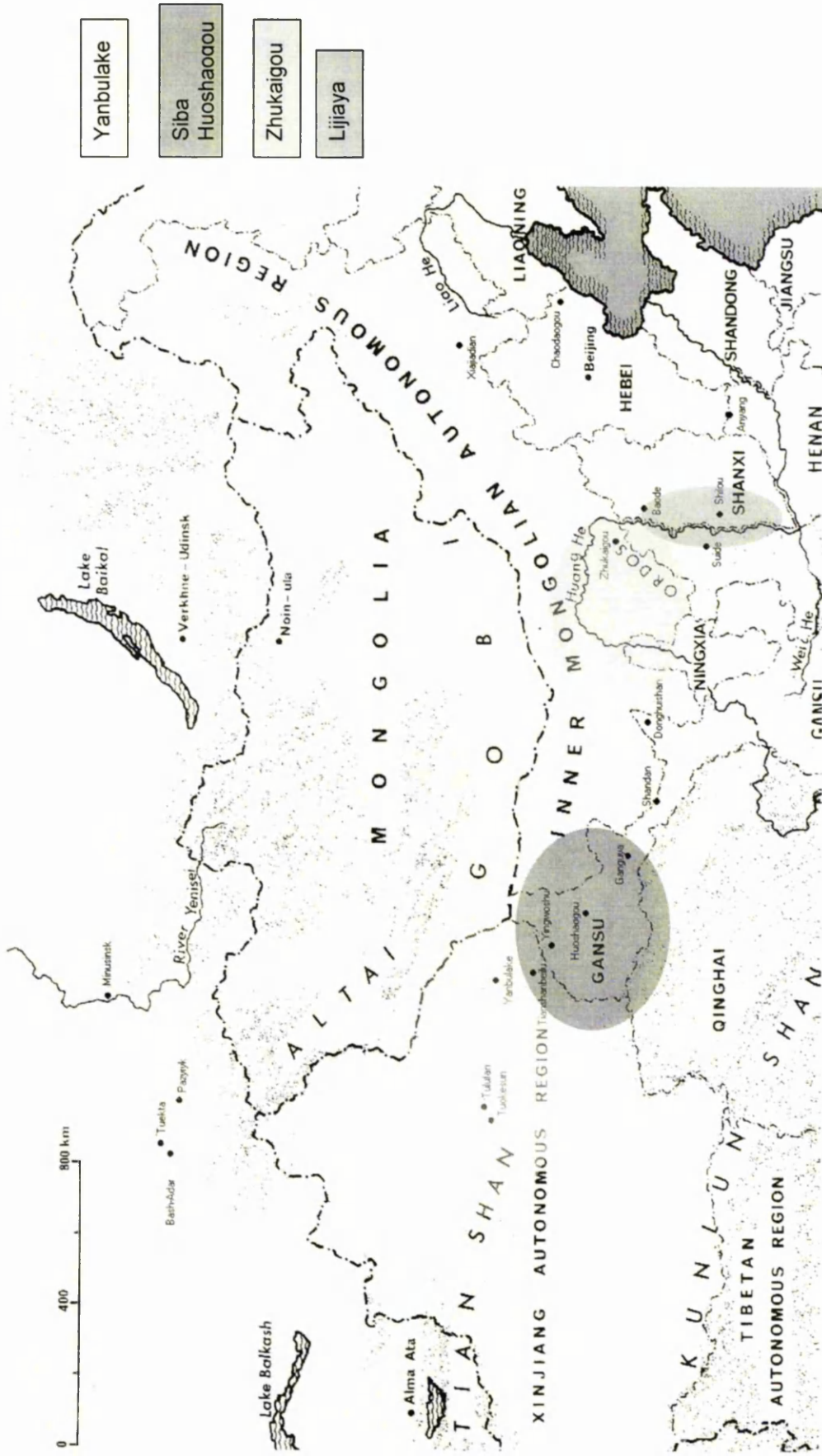
Once again, many are the questions unsolved. By scrutinising different levels of investigation and placing into context evidence coming prevalently from burial contexts, various issues have been highlighted and when possible, investigated.

Especially when turning to important issues related to the identification of ethnicity in the archaeological record of north-western China, such as how gender was formulated or age differentiated, labour divided and crafts specialised, or eventually how and when demic and cultural migrations occurred, the discussion inevitably remains an open one, given the paucity of data referring to settlement patterning.

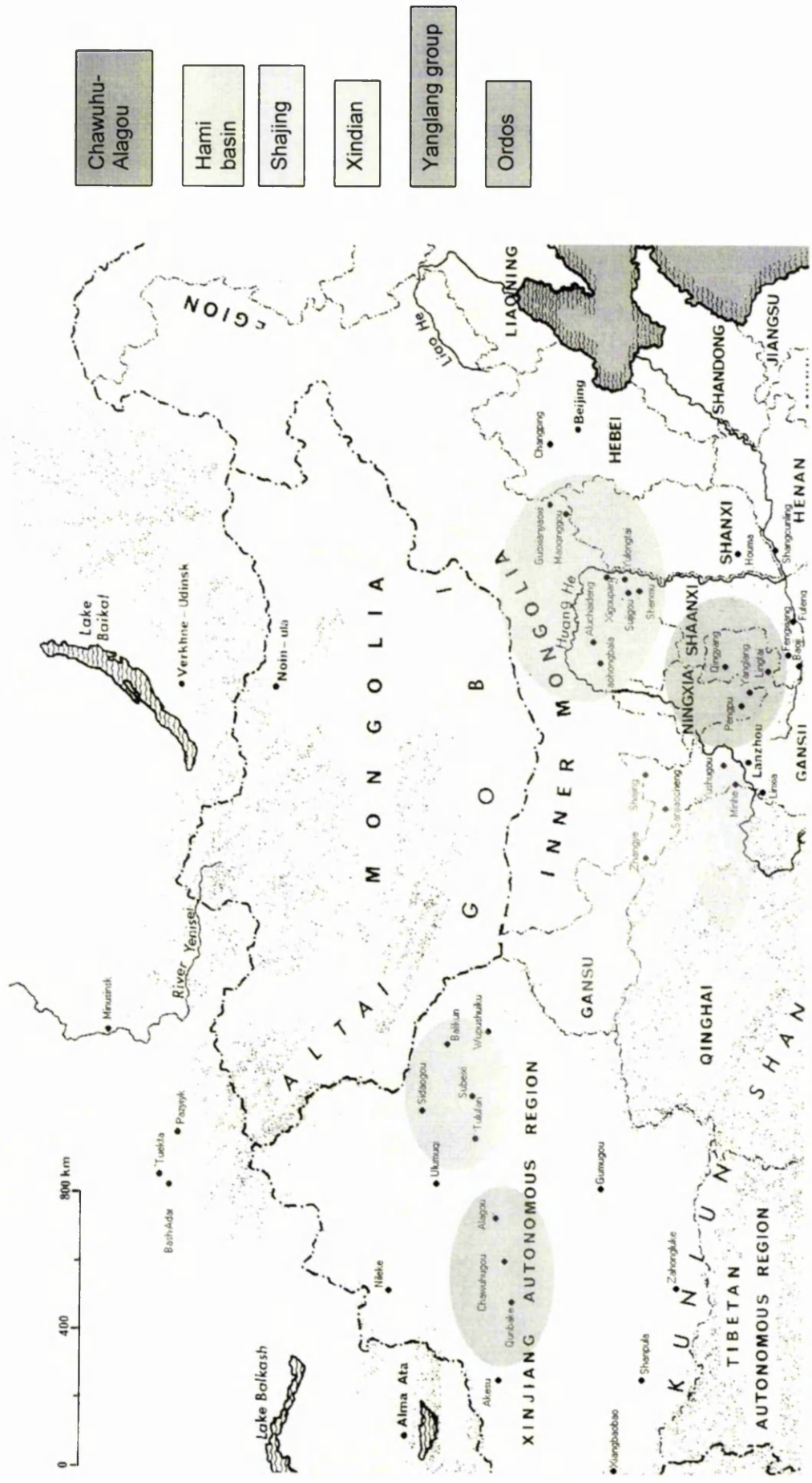
It is indeed a blurred archaeological picture susceptible to constant changes and many are also the clues suggesting new lines of enquiry; with new evidence coming to light literally every day, the task for the archaeologists will be of presenting the data in the most comprehensive and scientifically formulated method.

⁵² For a full explanation of the new methods see Gray and Atkinson 2003 and Searls 2003.

⁵³ The 'kurgan expansion' theory centres on possible archaeological evidence for an expansion into Europe and the Near East by Kurgan horsemen speaking the original Indo-European language [Mallory 1989].



Map 1 Main sites in Northwest China during the 2nd mill. BCE



Map 2 Main sites in Northwest China during the 1st mill. BCE

PERIOD	CULTURAL HORIZON	RELATED SITES
c.2000-1500 BCE	Siba-Huoshagou	Jiuquan xian Xiaheqing, Jiuquan xian Ganguya Minle xian Donghuishan, Yumen xian Shaguoliang, Anxi xian Yinwoshu.
c.1800-600 BCE	Yanbulake	Yamansukuang Yalinban (Tianshanbeilu) Xiaochengbao, Haladun, Lafuqiao. Later on: Wupushuiku and Hanqigou
c.1700-1200 BCE	Zhukaigou	Dakou, Zhangjialuo, Chenjialiang and Zhangjialiang. Jingshuihe xian, Heidaigou, Ashan near Baotou, Huangtupi near Hohhot and other minor sites in Liangcheng county such as Maoqinggou, Shuanggucheng, Bancheng and Xingshubei
c.1300-1000 BCE	Lijiaya	Several sites along both banks of the Yellow River, in Qingjian xian, Shilou xian, Ji xian, Suide xian, Baode Xian in Shaanxi and Shanxi.
c. 1400-800 BCE	Xindian	Jijiachuan, Zhangjiazui in Yongjing xian And Minhe xian Shanjiatou as main sites.
c.1200-900 BCE	Changping Baifu	
c.1200-800 BCE	Zahongluke	Possibly related to the later sites of Xiangbaobao and Shanpula
c.1000-645 BCE	Shajing	Gulang, Minqin, Yongchang, Yongdeng Yushugou and Zhangye counties in Gansu
c.1000-400 BCE	Chawuhu	Qunbake. Cultural boundaries extend also to the western county of Akesu and Wensu, in the sites of Kezier'qi and Baozidong.
c.1000-650 BCE	Sidaogou	Qitai Banjiegou, Qitai Hongqijijiechang, Yiwu Ka'ersan, Shirenzi near Balikun Lanzhouwanzi
c.900-200 BCE	Alagou complex	Alagou I and II, Dongfengchang, Subeixi, Yanghai, Aidinghu
c.600-200 BCE	Inner Mongolia, Ordos complex	Maoqinggou, Taohongbala Xigoupan, Gongsuhao, Yulongtai, Nianfangqu, Sujigou, Aluchaideng, Nalin'gaotu Aluchaideng and Shihuigou
c.600-200 BCE	Yanglang type	Yanglang Mazhuang and Pengpu Yujiashuang in Ningxia Yuanjiacun, Houzhuangcun, Miaoqucun and Hongyancun among the many sites in Gansu.

Table 1 Chronological table of cultural horizons with related sites

Appendix II

Radiocarbon determinations and calibrated dates available for the Bronze Age and early Iron Age sites of North-western China (Xinjiang, Gansu, Inner Mongolia).

	Site	Context	Lab no.	Determination	Calibrated date (1 σ range, BCE-CE)
Xinjiang	Gumugou	M12	WB81-28	4140 \pm 80	2886-2587 BCE
		M38	BK81043	3510 \pm 170	2123-1640 BCE
		M38	BK81042	3390 \pm 100	1875-1530 BCE
	Wupushuiku	M101	WB79-15	3030 \pm 85	1414-1162 BCE
		M19	WB79-12	2990 \pm 65	1380-1127 BCE
		M4	WB79-13	2760 \pm 80	1003-828 BCE
	Yanbulake I	M70	ZK-2187	3300 \pm 75	1684-1515 BCE
	Yanbulake II	M64	Zk-2186	2970 \pm 55	1306-1103 BCE
		M45	ZK-2188	3130 \pm 65	1500-1323 BCE
	Yanbulake III	M54	ZK-2189	2580 \pm 55	805-662 BCE
		M36	ZK-2192	3310 \pm 55	1680-1522 BCE
		M14	ZK-2195	2410 \pm 80	762-398 BCE
	Sidaogou	T2 (5)	WB77-34	2800 \pm 70	1036-896 BCE
		H4	WB77-34	2510 \pm 80	796-432 BCE
		T 4(3)	WB77-30	2400 \pm 65	765-399 BCE
	Subashi	M8	WB82-05	3060 \pm 75	1422-1277 BCE
		M3	WB81-61	2160 \pm 70	360-110 BCE
	Alagou I	M67	WB78-21	2580 \pm 85	827-594 BCE
		M37	WB78-14	2570 \pm 65	805-598 BCE
		M1	BK77003	2520 \pm 90	800-432 BCE
M28		WB77-26	2490 \pm 130	800-400 BCE	
Alagou II	M30	WB77-25	2260 \pm 65	398-211 BCE	
	M30	WB78-02	2010 \pm 80	162 BCE-CE 66	
Chawuhugou I	M035	ZK-2038	2930 \pm 80	1266-1008 BCE	
	M25	ZK-1331	2750 \pm 80	998-823 BCE	
	M09	ZK-2033	2740 \pm 90	998-813 BCE	
	M30	ZK-2037	2720 \pm 90	986-807 BCE	
Chawuhugou II	M2	ZK-2110	2510 \pm 80	796-432 BCE	
	M6	ZK-2111	2380 \pm 70	753-394 BCE	
	M15	ZK-2112	2330 \pm 75	478-379 BCE	
Qunbake I	M2	ZK-2114	2720 \pm 100	990-810 BCE	
	M3	ZK-2116	2620 \pm 75	832-665 BCE	
	M3	ZK-2115	2600 \pm 90	831-603 BCE	
	M27	ZK-2145	2550 \pm 80	804-452 BCE	
	M10	ZK-2144	2480 \pm 95	793-408 BCE	
Qunbake II	M7	ZK-2289	2600 \pm 75	829-662 BCE	
	M4	ZK-2288	2570 \pm 80	813-593 BCE	
	M12	ZK-2291	2530 \pm 75	799-447 BCE	
Shanpula	M02	WB84-11	2780 \pm 90	1036-833 BCE	
	M02	WB84-19	2230 \pm 65	392-205 BCE	
	M02	WB84-15	1940 \pm 75	88 BCE-CE 130	

	Site	Context	Lab no.	Determination	Calibrated date (1 σ range, BCE-CE)
Gansu	YUMEN HUOSHAOGOU	M84	BK77010	3350 \pm 100	1750-1520 BCE
		T43(3):2	ZK-0408	3300 \pm 85	1687-1513 BCE
		T42(3):3	BK77008	3250 \pm 100	1670-1430 BCE
		T1(2)F	Zk-0409	3490 \pm 100	1950-1689 BCE
	YONGCHANG SANJIAOCHENG	Huo zeng	BK79030	2530 \pm 90	802-435 BCE
M5		BK79062	2650 \pm 95	900-789 BCE	
M11		BK79063	2600 \pm 125	894-453 BCE	
M14		BK79064	2500 \pm 90	796-412 BCE	
M15		BK79065	2870 \pm 160	1310-840 BCE	
M18		BK79066	2770 \pm 90	1022-828 BCE	
YONGCHANG HAMADUN	Huo zeng	ZK-0739	2600 \pm 100	888-595 BCE	
	M14	ZK-0789	2470 \pm 80	789-409 BCE	
LINXIA LIANHUATAI (XINDIAN)	M3	BK84103	2540 \pm 120	830-414 BCE	

Hebei	CHANPING BAIFU	M1	WB77-05	2810 \pm 100	1100-840 BCE
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Inner Mongolia	HANGJINQI TAOHONGBALA	M1	ZK-0266	2540 \pm 105	810-434 BCE
	LIAOCHENG MAOQINGGOU	M23	BK80005	2470 \pm 90	791-407 BCE
		M25	BK80006	2230 \pm 90	397-174 BCE
Y1		BK80026	2550 \pm 70	802-454 BCE	
YIJINGHUOLUOQI ZHUKAIGOU I ZHUKAIGOU II	T23(5)	BK79053	4320 \pm 90	3037-2788 BCE	
	V(2)H5018	BK80028	3320 \pm 70	1731-1521 BCE	
	I (3) H1055	WB84-77	3190 \pm 85	1527-1408 BCE	

Glossary

Aluchaideng	阿噜柴登	Hami	哈密
Aidinghu	艾丁湖	Hangjin qi	杭锦其
Akesu	阿克苏	Hanqigou	干气沟
Alagou	阿拉沟	Heishantou	黑山偷
Aletai	阿乐泰	Hejing xian	和静
Baifu	白浮	Henan	河南
Balikun	巴里坤	Houlanjiagou	后兰家沟
Banjiegou	半截沟	Houma	侯马
Baode	堡德	Huangniangniangtai	皇娘娘台
Baoji xian	宝鵬	Huizuishan	灰嘴山
Baozidong	包孜东	Huoshagou	火烧沟
Bianjiazhuang	扁家庄	Jijiachuan	姬家川
Changping xian	昌平	Jingjiazhuang	景家庄
Chaodaogou	抄道沟	Jingjie	旌介
Chawuhu	察吾呼	Jiuquan	酒泉
Zhujiaju	褚家峪	Jungar Qi	准格尓
Dacaotan	大草滩	Ke'ermuqi	克尔木齐
Dongfengchang	东风场	Kezi'erqueqia	克孜尔埭恰
Donghuishan	东灰山	Kongque	孔雀
Dongsheng	东胜	Lafuqiaoke	拉甫乔克
Fengxiang xian	凤翔	Lanzhouwanzi	兰州湾子
Fufeng xian	扶风	Liangcheng xian	凉成
Ganguya	干骨崖	Lianhuatai	莲花台
Gansu	甘肃	Liujia	刘家
Gaohong	高红	Lijiapan	李家畔
Gongsuhao	公孙貉	Lijiaya	李家崖
Guifang	鬼方	Lingshi xian	灵石
Gumugou	古墓沟	Lingtai	灵台
Guyuan xian	固原	Linxia xian	临夏
Haladun	哈拉墩	Lihudong	柳湖墩
Hamadun	蛤蟆墩	Liulin	柳林

Lixian	礼县	Sujigou	速机沟
Luntai xian	轮台	Suide xian	绥德县
Mazhuang	马庄	Tacheng	塔城
Maoqinggou	毛庆沟	Takelamagan	塔克拉马干
Minhe xian	民和	Talimu	塔里木
Minle xian	民乐	Tangwang	唐汪
Minqin xian	民勤	Taohongbala	桃红扒拉
Miquan	米泉	Tianma-qucun	天马-曲村
Mulei xian	木累	Tianshanbeilu	天山北路
Nalin'gaotu	纳淋高兔	Tulufan	吐鲁番
Nanwan	南湾	Waertugou	瓦尔吐沟
Nianfangqu	碾房藁	Wulumuqi	乌鲁木齐
Ningxia	宁夏	Wupu	五堡
Pengpu	彭堡	Wusun	乌孙
Pengyang xian	彭阳	Xiaheqing	夏河清
Qiemo xian	且末	Xiangbaobao	香宝宝
Qinglong xian	青龙	Xigoupan	西沟畔
Qingyang xian	庆阳	Xindian	辛店
Qunbake	群巴克	Xinjiang	新疆
Rujiazhuang	茹家庄	Xintala	新塔拉
Sai (Saka)	塞	Xinyuan	新愿
Sanmenxia	三门夏	Yalinban	雅林办
Shajing	沙井	Yamansukuang	雅满苏矿
Shandan xian	山丹	Yanbulake	焉布拉克
Sanjiaocheng	三角成	Yanchi xian	盐池
Shanjiatou	山家偷	Yanghai	洋海
Shanpula	山普拉	Yanglang	杨朗
Shanshan xian	鄯善	Yanqing xian	延庆
Shangdongcun	上东村	Yijinghuoluo qi	伊金霍洛 期
Shenmu xian	神木	Yili	伊利
Shihuigou	石灰沟	Yimencun	益门村
Shilou	石楼	Yingwoshu	英窝树
Shirenzi	石姊子	Yongchang xian	永昌
Siba	四坝	Yongdeng xian	永登
Sidaogou	四道沟	Yu'ergou	鱼尔沟

Yuezhi (Rouzhi)	约氏
Yujiazhuang	于家庄
Yulin	俞林
Yulongtai	玉隆太
Yumen xian	玉门
Yushugou	榆树沟
Zahongluke	扎洪鲁克
Zhangjiazui	张家咀
Zhukaigou	朱开沟
Zhuyuangou	竹园沟

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