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Fantastic Beasts Of The Eurasian Steppes: Toward A Revisionist Approach To Animal-Style Art

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Abstract

Animal style is a centuries-old approach to decoration characteristic of the various cultures which flourished along the Eurasian steppe belt in the later half of the first millennium BCE. This vast territory stretching from the Mongolian Plateau to the Hungarian Plain, has yielded hundreds of archaeological finds associated with the early Iron Age. Among these discoveries, high-end metalwork, textiles and tomb furniture, intricately embellished with idiosyncratic zoomorphic motifs, stand out as a recurrent element. While scholarship has labeled animal-style imagery as scenes of combat, this dissertation argues against this overly simplified classification model which ignores the variety of visual tools employed in the abstraction of fantastic hybrids. I identify five primary categories in the arrangement and portrayal of zoomorphic designs: these traits, frequently occurring in clusters, constitute the first comprehensive definition of animal-style art. Each chapter focuses on the materiality and strategic placement of a different type of animal-style object: headdresses, torques and plaques often embellish the body of the deceased whereas felt, leather and silk textiles used as ceiling hangings, rugs, and coffin covers serve to define the tomb's spatial parameters. Lastly, the dissertation also delves into the continuous retention of animal-style motifs in the arts of the Eurasian steppes after the dawn of the first millennium BCE thus challenging the narrative that animal art disappeared after the Iron Age. I demonstrate that elite members of the various pastoral societies perched along the peripheries of sedentary empires invented local interpretations of a common visual language made of tropes and devices (such as "visual synecdoche" and "frame narrative") resulting from ingenious interpretations of the above-mentioned five categories. In so doing, they aimed to tackle an identical conceptual problem: the attendance of a real audience of a certain social stature during the funerary ceremony and the presence of an imagined (divine) one in the afterlife. The dissertation thus deconstructs the politically-motivated role of animal-style items in elite burials and argues that animal art was a constructed visual language intelligible to a small nucleus of elites whose sociopolitical status and network of influence were in fact inextricably linked to their level of fluency in it.

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FANTASTIC BEASTS OF THE EURASIAN STEPPES:

TOWARD A REVISIONIST APPROACH TO ANIMAL-STYLE ART

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Acknowledgement

This dissertation would not have been feasible without the generous support, encouragement, advice, honest critiques and friendship of many scholars, friends and family members. First, no words can sufficiently express my immense gratitude to my academic advisor Dr. Nancy Steinhardt, who has remained the most vital and inspirational figure in my academic career. I am indebted to Dr. Steinhardt for her continuous encouragement, unparalleled kindness, and professional and emotional support throughout this arduous journey. I consider myself exceedingly fortunate to have had Dr. Steinhardt as a mentor and teacher. I am thankful to her for introducing me to countless educational and professional development opportunities, and for always remaining my biggest supporter in my pursuit of exciting opportunities in Art History, Sinology and Inner Asian Studies. She has invested an incredible amount of energy and time into supervising my research projects and career endeavors, one of which is this dissertation. My interest in Central Asia and Northern China was sparked by the breadth of Dr. Steinhardt's own research and the classes she teaches. Her constructive advice related to my first-semester final papers at Penn sparked my interest in historical archaeology and the ancient cultures of Inner Asia. I am also grateful to Dr. Steinhardt for encouraging me to make full use of my native language Bulgarian and the several foreign languages I have learned along my journey to and at Penn. She helped me develop a passion for writing, and showed me ways in which to inject agency into the works I produce. As a result, I learned how to interlace my voice and authority as a writer into the fabrics of my dissertation, which, in its own right, is nothing more than a kaleidoscopic projection of my own musings, travels, dilemmas, blind spots and research aspirations. I owe the breadth of my research,

would have never been possible without his support. I am always going to remain grateful to Dr. Atwood for giving me the chance to work with him on a joint publication during my graduate school years: the opportunity to learn from and work alongside a scholar like Dr. Atwood is one of the highlights of my graduate student experience. Our joint research made an impact on my dissertation as it made me rethink some of the early antecedents of zoomorphic imagery as depicted on deer stones and rock sites across Mongolia and further west (as the readers will see in my occasional unabashed citations of our publication in the current study). My recent fieldwork in Mongolia and the opportunity to study Mongolian at Penn have shaped much of the content of Chapters Two and Three. My Mongolian teacher T. Tsermaa is also a large part of my dissertation process as I was able to access and read secondary sources in Modern Mongolian after taking an intensive summer course with her.

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The idea to write about animal-style art and seek to redefine, rewrite and build upon extant scholarly narratives regarding this ancient approach to decoration was born during one of the many classes I took with Dr. Paul Goldin. His Early China class played a key role in my graduate career as I became familiar with the early Iron Age culture of the Ordos Loop. I am incredibly indebted to Dr. Goldin for encouraging me to explore the

possibilities in the field of early China and the invaluable academic advice and professional support he has offered me over the years.

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ABSTRACT

FANTASTIC BEASTS OF THE EURASIAN STEPPES:

TOWARD A REVISIONIST APPROACH TO ANIMAL-STYLE ART

Petya Andreeva

Nancy Steinhardt

Animal style is a centuries-old approach to decoration characteristic of the various cultures which flourished along the Eurasian steppe belt in the later half of the first millennium BCE. This vast territory stretching from the Mongolian Plateau to the Hungarian Plain, has yielded hundreds of archaeological finds associated with the early Iron Age. Among these discoveries, high-end metalwork, textiles and tomb furniture, intricately embellished with idiosyncratic zoomorphic motifs, stand out as a recurrent element. While scholarship has labeled animal-style imagery as scenes of combat, this dissertation argues against this overly simplified classification model which ignores the variety of visual tools employed in the abstraction of fantastic hybrids. I identify five primary categories in the arrangement and portrayal of zoomorphic designs: these traits, frequently occurring in clusters, constitute the first comprehensive definition of animal-style art. Each chapter focuses on the materiality and strategic placement of a different type of animal-style object: headdresses, torques and plaques often embellish the body of the deceased whereas felt, leather and silk textiles used as ceiling hangings, rugs, and coffin covers serve to define the tomb's spatial parameters. Lastly, the dissertation also delves into the continuous retention of animal-style motifs in the arts of the Eurasian steppes after

the dawn of the first millennium BCE thus challenging the narrative that animal art disappeared after the Iron Age. I demonstrate that elite members of the various pastoral societies perched along the peripheries of sedentary empires invented local interpretations of a common visual language made of tropes and devices (such as "visual synecdoche" and "frame narrative") resulting from ingenious interpretations of the above-mentioned five categories. In so doing, they aimed to tackle an identical conceptual problem: the attendance of a real audience of a certain social stature during the funerary ceremony and the presence of an imagined (divine) one in the afterlife. The dissertation thus deconstructs the politically-motivated role of animal-style items in elite burials and argues that animal art was a constructed visual language intelligible to a small nucleus of elites whose sociopolitical status and network of influence were in fact inextricably linked to their level of fluency in it.

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Chapter 1: Mapping out The Early Narratives: Animal Art at a Crossroads

"Who then will dare say that there is nothing left for us but to copy the five or seven-lobed flowers of the thirteenth century?"

- Owen Jones, "The Grammar of Ornament", 1865

The artefacts associated with the hunting and herding peoples who were once active across the Eurasian steppes come from tombs, hoards and caches dispersed across a large geographic domain. The area in which the archaeological sites in question are located incorporates the following geographic regions: Middle Yellow River (Ordos loop), the Eastern Mongolian steppes, Western Mongolian and Tuva Basin, the mountainous region east of Lake Baikal, the Kazakh Uplands, the grasslands between Zündharia and the southern Urals, the Pontic-Caspian Steppes stretching to the Dnieper Valley of the Northern Black Sea steppe and parts of the Pannonian Basin framed by the Carpathian Mountains. (See Fig. 1.1) The vastness of the territories associated with these excavations coupled with the uncertainties regarding the chronology of the sites and the ethnic origins of the tomb occupants has created hindrances in constructing a reliable framework in which to examine the finds. The successful completion of a comprehensive study of the material culture of Eurasian nomads and their sedentary neighbors is a herculean task for these and other reasons which I set out to investigate throughout this study.

1.Manchurian plain. 2.Transbaikalia. 3.Tuva. 4.Minusinsk valley. 5.Dzungarian Gate. 6.Ordos. 7.Tarim valley. 8.Kerch Strain. 9.Hungarian plain.

Figure 1.1 Map of Central Eurasia

In its simplest definition, the term "animal art", also known as "animal-style art" or simply "animal style", is at the core of this dissertation. This umbrella term is traditionally (and rather loosely) used to describe a specific type of metalwork which incorporates zoomorphic motifs depicted in dynamic scenes of vigorous animal interaction such as combat, predation, hunt, and supernatural transformation.[1] "Animal style" is sometimes used to indicate the presence of a zoomorphic juncture, that is, the substitution of a full animal figure with specific parts of the same or other animals' anatomy. There is however no uniformly accepted definition and classification criteria of animal-style art, which, all too often, for the lack of a better word, has been used to describe any art which employs zoomorphic or theriomorphic patterns regardless of their respective context.

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[1] That said, this study will also refer to objects which incorporate an individual animal or separate animals at a distance in a single scene as animal art. While I acknowledge that a distinction between scenes of single animals and scenes of animal or human-animal interaction must be drawn, I will consequently show that it is appropriate to use the term animal art to refer to the incorporation of zoomorphs into decorative funerary art objects in more than one context.

We shall go far beyond the "animal style" described by Russian historian Michael Rostovtzeff (1870-1952) in the early 20th century to specifically refer to the combat scenes in personal adornments, horse trappings, drinking vessels and textiles from the State Hermitage Museum collection in St. Petersburg.[2] Rostovtzeff argued in favor of what would ultimately become a minority theory, that is, the "profoundly Iranian" source of animal style, a theory which was never fully substantiated in his early 20th-century works.[3] The narrative proposed by Rostovtzeff who traces the development of animal style to the depths of Iranism (*nedra iranstvo*) is further complicated by the early occurrence of animal combat scenes on a vase from the Mesopotamian site of Uruk and objects with animal motives from the Ziwiye hoard uncovered near Lake Urmia and associated with cultures which flourished in the Iranian plateau around 700 BCE; these eclectic discoveries from ancient settlements in the Near East give credence to the West Asian origin theory. Rostovzeff's narrative places the forms of what he refers to as "Scythian" animal-style art, as we have come to know it from sites in the Pontic-Caspian steppe of the Northern Black Sea, in the ancient cultures of the Iranian Plateau based on superficial examples from the Near Eastern visual tradition.[4] Such origins are presumed rather than elaborately supported in his otherwise groundbreaking works. Rostovtzeff reached the conclusion that the *yuezhi* (pastoral nomads who he claims originated from the Tibetan Plateau) had been the primary agents of the transmission of animal style from west to east; thus, his monograph is divided

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[2] Rostovtzeff, Michael Ivanovitch. 1929. *The Animal Style in South Russia and China; Being the Material of a Course of Lectures Delivered in August 1925 at Princeton University under the Auspices of the Harvard-Princeton Fine Arts Club*. Princeton: Princeton University Press
[3] We shall return to and discuss in more depth the problem of origin and the respective competing theories at a later time in this chapter.
[4] Meyer, Hans-Caspar. 2013. *Greco-Scythian Art and the Birth of Eurasia: from Classical Antiquity to Russian Modernity*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 110

into three primary sections into what the author identifies as periods in the development of animal style: Scythian, Sarmatian, Zhou dynasty Chinese and Han Dynasty Chinese. Rostovtzeff goes as far as making the following bold claim about animal-style art: "we first find this style in its most elaborate form, free from any notable influence from the outside, in the graves of South Russia of the seventh and sixth century BCE".[5] Having now come in touch with a significantly vaster and more diverse amount of archaeological material which has helped expand and refine such one-faceted theoretical frameworks, a twenty-first century reader of Rostovtzeff's books cannot help but wonder if there even exists the possibility of an artwork completely devoid of borrowed and/or adapted artistic elements derived from an external cultural sphere, a process which Rosttovtzeff has, in line with the widely-accepted terminology of his time, described as "influence". While Rostovtzeff's early work is a pivotal precursor to the development of later studies of animal style, it has apparent limitations in terms of scope. Rostovtzeff's works[6] regarding the subject were written at a time when only a small fragment of the archaeological data from Central Asia and China available to us today was yet known or systematically studied. Excavations in recent years have uncovered portable luxury goods decorated with scenes of dynamic animal interaction which defy the conventional interpretation of animal-style art as "images of animal combat" and which shall be duly studied and analyzed in this dissertation.

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[5] Rostovtzeff 1929, p. 17

[6] Rostovtzeff, Michael Ivanovitch. 1969. *Iranians & Greeks in South Russia*. New York: Russell & Russell.; Rostovtzeff, Michael Ivanovitch. 1925. *Skifiia i Bospor: Kriticheskoe Obozrienie Pamiatnikov Literaturnykh, Arkheologicheskikh*. Leningrad: Rossiĭskaia akademiia istorii material′noĭ kul′tury.

While Rostovtzeff's theories are not without their significant logical fallacies and outdated theoretical frameworks, they have to a surprisingly high extent carried onto present-day scholarship about animal style, chiefly due to the overall lack of a better alternative. A more recent interpretation proposed by Emma Bunker however offers some respite as she steers the field in a new direction. Her discourse on animal style is relatively distant from debates regarding provenance, as it describes animal style as an idiosyncratic manner of ornamentation, comprised chiefly of zoomorphic imagery, created by mounted warrior-herdsmen who roamed across Asia and Europe and whose economy was primarily based on herding and plunder.[7] That being said, the vast corpus of her own work has largely focused on the art of the Eastern steppes.

The current study does not make the claim of solving the myriad complex issues which have continuously plagued the field of Chinese and Inner Asian studies but animal-style art does shed light on them. As an art historian, I do not adopt a philological approach to the investigation of nomadic entities across the Eurasian steppes, nor do I adamantly pinpoint the ethnicity and origin of the various peoples who owned and produced these objects; I thus do not anticipate to fully define or redefine terms other than "animal-style art" with regard to its various contexts and its role in the history of decorative art. However, the process of revisiting the external and often inherently false narratives surrounding this generic term requires the recognition of a clear set of problems derived from methodological flaws and gaps in several fields beyond art history; such issues have indubitably contributed to the lack of understanding with regard to animal style and the

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[7] Bunker, Emma C., Bruce Chatwin, and Ann R Farkas. 1970. *Animal Style Art From East to West: [catalogue of an Exhibition.* [New York]: Asia Society; Distributed by New York Graphic Society

artistic traditions of the Eurasian steppes in general. Therefore, a brief critical evaluation of the methodological, epistemological and sociopolitical problems which have hindered the development of novel methodologies in the study of this otherwise compelling subject is not only necessary but also crucial to the construction of a revisionist approach to animal-style art.

Politics, Language and Script: Lost in Translation and History

A large number of politically driven misconceptions, misrepresentations and paradoxes have hindered the study of steppe ethnic groups and their material cultures both before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. These issues must be examined prior to the introduction of the animal art field and its own vast lacunas. The systematic use of the term "Central Asia" brings about a variety of geopolitical questions which have surfaced in the process of using Russian-language sources dated to the Soviet era. The terms and precepts proposed by Soviet scholarship including archaeological reports and subsequent monographs of the region identified as Central Asia in these sources, albeit fundamentally useful, can also hide potential pitfalls. A mechanical translation of foreign-language terms with geopolitical connotations clearly rooted in a rigid political ideology creates ambiguous and geographically inaccurate spatial boundaries which scholars outside Russia (and the former USSR) have often blindly embraced and perpetuated in their own works. Russian monographs, depending on whether they were written during or after the end of the Soviet Period, make a distinction between the terms "Srednaya Aziya" and Tsentral'naya Aziya", which translate to, respectively, "Middle Asia" and "Central Asia". The former traditionally refers to the territories of the former Khokhand and Bukhara Khanates

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subjugated by the Russian Empire in the late 19th century. The domain of Middle Asia thus roughly incorporates the political borders of four modern-day republics once governed by the Soviet Union: Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tadzhikistan. This term leaves out modern-day Kazakhstan which is coincidentally the largest landlocked country in the world. The Kazakh steppe had already been incorporated into the Russian Empire during the campaigns between 1822-1848. The term "Central Asia" is generally used in Russian monographs to refer to these four republics as well as Kazakhstan.[8] Mongolia and parts of South Siberia, specifically the Tuva, Buryatia, and Altai Republics of the Russian Federation, are sometimes also included in the domain of "Central Asia". (See Figure 1.2) The Great Soviet Encyclopedia (Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya) provides two sub-categories in the following entry description of 'Middle Asia":

1. Middle Asia: Part of the Asiatic territories of the USSR enclosing a territory defined by the Caspian Sea to the west, the Aral-Irtysh region to the north, to the border between Afghanistan and Iran to the south. Before the "National Expansion"[9] in 1924-1925, the territory of Middle Asia was named "Turkestan", which was then substituted by the term "Middle Asia" (not to be confused with Central Asia); in foreign literature, the terms Central and Middle Asia are sometimes used interchangeably".

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[8] In 1990, a meeting of the heads of the newly formed republics was held in Tashkent and it was decided that Central Asia will incorporate all five republics, including the largest country in the region, Kazakhstan. For a more detailed description of the climatic differnecces between Middle and Central Asia, see Rachkovskaia͡, E. I., E. A. Volkova, V. N. Khramt͡sov, and N. I. Akzhigitova. 2003. *Botanicheskaiya Geografiiya Kazakhstana i Sredneĭ Azii: v Predelakh Pustynnoĭ Oblasti (Botanical Geography of Kazakhstan and Middle Asia with the Desert Region*. Sankt-Peterburg: Botanicheskiĭ Institut im. V.L. Komarova.

[9] This process is also known as the "national territorial delimitation" (*natsionalno-territorialnoye razmezhevaniye*); it was marked by the establishment of a standardized territorial administrative system based on centralized control from Moscow.

2. Middle Asia: The territory which includes Uzbek SSR, Kyrgyz SSR, Tajik SSR and Turkmen SSR. These altogether form the Middle Asiatic Economic Region.[10]
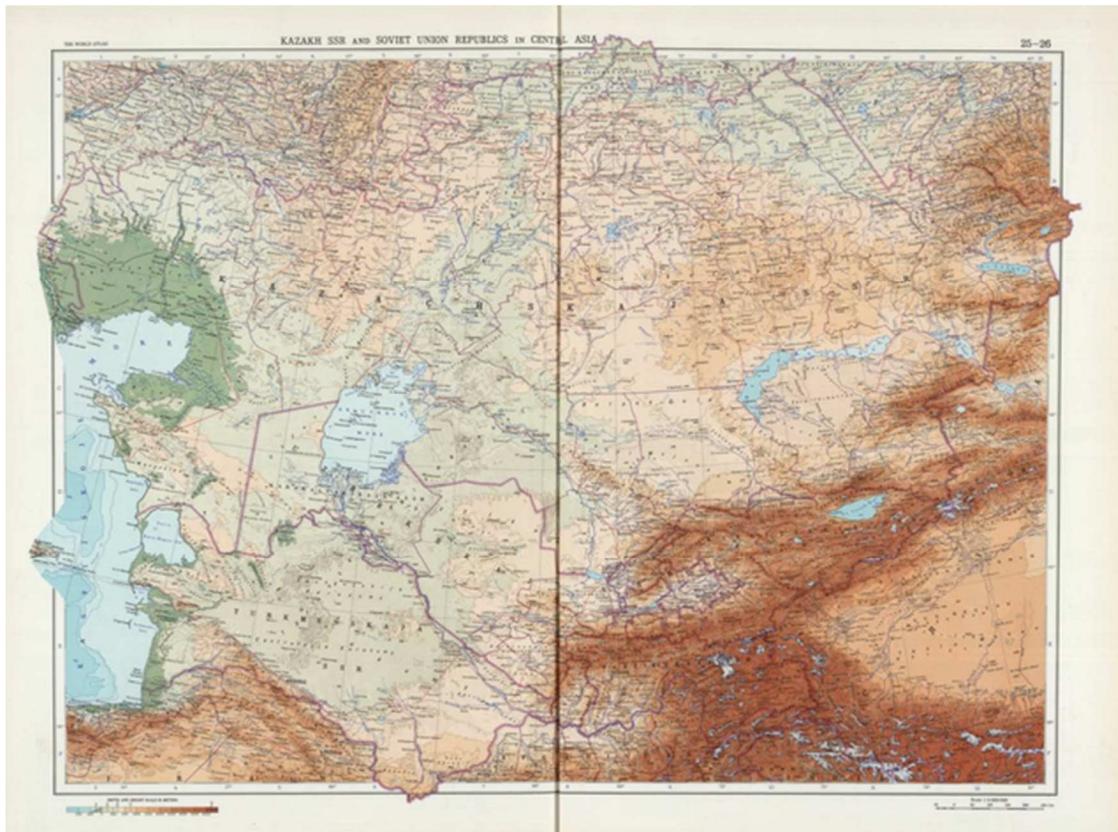
Figure 1.2 Map of Kazakh SSR and Soviet Union Republics in Central Asia.

However, the Soviet references to Middle Asia, which is ultimately synonymous with Russian Turkestan or "Soviet Central Asia", have more often than not been taken to refer to a vaster and more diverse geographic polity. Soviet-period geographic and cartographic products and monographs falsely referred to mountains in modern-day Kazakhstan as "Middle Asian" while simultaneously leaving Kazakhstan out of the

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[10] Vavilov, C. I. 1949. *Bol'shaya sovetskaya éntsiklopediya*. Moskva: Sovetskaya Éntsiklopediya.; See also the following later edition, translated into English: Prokhorov, A. M. 1974. *Great Soviet encyclopedia*. New York: Macmillan.

officially accepted term "Middle Asia".[11] Geographies of the later Soviet Period (1980s)

sometimes go as far as separating Kazakhstan from "Central Asia'. In his 1983 geography

of the Soviet Union, Howe refers to "the Soviet macro-region of Kazakhstan" as separate

from Central Asia. He briefly considers Soviet Central Asia in geographic terms describing

it as the relief region comprised of the Caspian-Turanian plain area of the Caspian-

Balkhash basin.[12] Then he goes on to describe Middle Asia in purely political terms as

comprised of five republics, as opposed to the traditional four, thus including Kazakhstan,

Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan in its domain.[13] UNESCO's "Arid

Zones Search" series seems to eliminate the term "Middle Asia" altogether: the main arid

regions of "Central Asia" are loosely described as desert zones of USSR, Mongolia and

parts of China (the Taklamakan Desert in Southern Xinjiang, Züngharia, and the Ordos

Loop at the mouth of the Yellow River).[14] The notes make a specific reference to

Kazakhstan (the desert area north of the Caspian Sea, east of the Aral Sea and south of

Lake Balkhash), Turkmenistan (Karakum Desert) and Uzbekistan (Kyzylkum Desert) as

the main regions being incorporated in the arid zones of "Central Asia'. This map and the

notes accompanying it are significant: despite the mention of politically-defined entities

such as USSR, they provide a rare early glimpse into a classification model based on

physical geography and climate zones with their respectively diverse flora and fauna. A

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[11] Suslov, S. P. 1961. *Physical Geography of Asiatic Russia*. San Francisco: W.H. Freeman.;
Cole, J. P., and Frank Clifford German. 1961. *A Geography of the USSR; the Background to a Planned Economy*. London: Butterworths.
[12] Howe, G. Melvyn. 1983. *The Soviet Union: a geographical survey*. Estover, Plymouth: Macdonald and Evans.
[13] For a comprehensive examination of all Soviet-era geographies with regard to their usage of the two terms, see: Cowan, P.J. 2006. "Geographic Usage of the Terms Middle Asia and Central Asia'. *Journal of Arid Environments 69,* p. 359-363
[14] UNESCO, 1979. Map of the World Distribution of Arid Regions. Explanatory Note. UNESCO, Paris.

similar study by A. G. Babaev from the Desert Institute of Turkmenistan describes the deserts of Central Asia as stretching from the east shore of the Caspian Sea to to the piedmonts of the Tianshan and Altai.[15] (See Fig. 1.3). However, his discussion betrays a limited understanding of the climactic and sociopolitical differences between Middle and Central Asia as evidenced by his overly generalizing statement which outlines "Middle Asia, the African coast of the Mediterranean and Central Asia" as three distinct major regions having suffered from desertification in the past.[16] Even scholarship produced in Russia and Central Asia nowadays shows some gaps and inconsistencies in definitions of Middle and Central Asia. This confusion has been carried onto translations and original monographs and maps in Europe and North America.
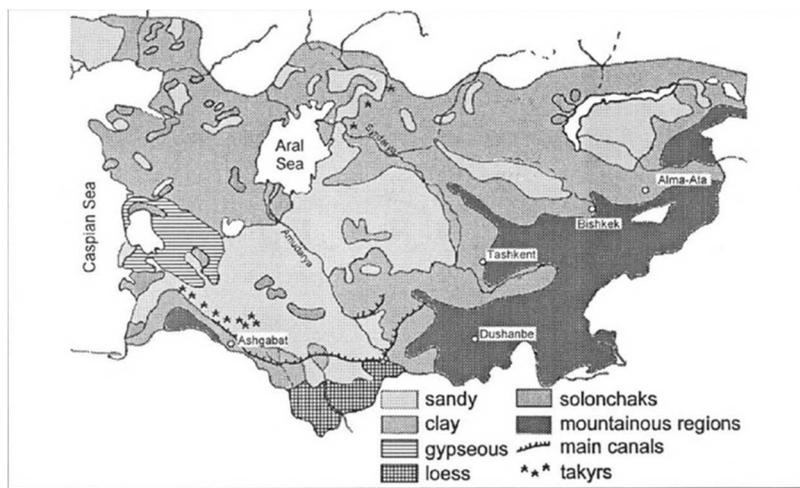
Figure 3.1 General Map of Central Asian Deserts

The confusion which stems from the dichotomy between the terms "Middle Asia" and "Central Asia" has persevered in recent monographs, such as Kappeler's informative "History of the Russian Empire" in which he uses the term "Middle Asia" to refer to the

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[15] Babaev, A. G. 1999. *Desert Problems and Desertification in Central Asia: the Researches of the Desert Institute*. Berlin: Springer.
[16] Ibid, Chapter 5

four former Soviet states while referring to Central Asia in much broader terms which include Mongolia and Xinjiang.[17] All too often, modern constructs of Central Asia have also included Afghanistan.[18] Some definitions of Central Asia are even more inclusive and incorporate the territories of the Caspian Basin, and the Southern Caucasus, a territory which is home to the former Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (modern-day Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan). All of these terms, however, are, to some extent, reliant on political boundaries rather than physical or cultural geography. In reality, decades of inconsistency in terminology in Soviet and post-Soviet publications coupled with incorrect Western translations and equally inconsistent English-language terminologies have resulted in the lack of a clear definition of Central Asia that is unanimously agreed upon. The obstinate refusal to let go of political boundaries, likely the result of the turbulent political events which unfolded throughout the twentieth century, have left us with artificial terms with colonial undertones which often defy attempts to draw a clear archeological map of ancient cultures. At present, Central Asia has still remained ingrained in the mind of the modern reader as a collective term for all the former

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[17] Kappeler, Andreas, and Alfred Clayton. 2001. *The Russian Empire: a Multiethnic History*. Harlow, England: Pearson Education.

[18] The remains of ancient sites associated with the *Yuezhi* such as Tillya tepe, Termez, Surkh Kotal, Ai- Khanoum located between the Hindu-Kush mountains and the Oxus river in ancient Bactria (modern-day Afghanistan) have recently become the subject of increased scholarly attention in museum catalogs and conference volumes. The wars plaguing Afghanistan for decades have had a profound impact on the archaeology of the Greco-Bactrian Kingdom and the Kushan Empire: the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha by the Taliban regime is a telling example of the toil political and religious conflicts have taken on the ancient cultural heritage of this war-torn area.[18] The lack of a solid classification system regarding the ancient treasures of Bactria, as evidenced by the numerous golden finds unearthed at the necropolis of Tilliya tepe in modern-day Afghanistan dated to around the 1st c CE, results in its tentative and only occasional inclusion in surveys and comprehensive studies of metalwork of Central Eurasia.

Soviet states regardless of their disparate topography, climate, biodiversity, ancient histories, and ethnic make-up.

On a separate note, the part of Central Asia often referred to as Russian Turkestan[19] includes several former Soviet Republics which became independent states around the year of 1991 but still bear Russia's strong geopolitical influence. This fact is of utmost importance in evaluating the field of Central Asian archaeology. While the current study tries to steer clear of politically-driven discussions and conclusions, it must be noted that it is not always feasible to surmount the inherent political challenges which lay at the heart of the study of this contested region. None of the artificially-created, political boundaries reflect organic cultural or topographic entities despite the fact that Soviet scholarship of the twentieth century has treated them as organic sub-elements of a larger homogenous unit.[20] Political ideology with regard to but not limited to the Cold War had for many years prevented extensive contact between Western scholars and their colleagues working in this region. Due to this lack of contact, a great number of excavation reports, museum

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[19] Belenitsky, Bussagli and Rowland all insist on this term. See: Belenitsky 1968; Bussagli 1963; Rowland 1974.

[20] The borders of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan were defined by the Soviet Union in the early twentieth century. In the late 19th century, a large portion of the region had been conquered by the Russian Empire which gradually subjugated all major urban centers in the various khanates of Central Asia at the time. Thus, Tashkent was occupied in 1865, Samarkand fell in 1868, and the Russians extended their control over Turkmenistan in the 1880s. The subsequent efforts for expansion towards Afghanistan in 1885 were blocked by the British. Nevertheless, the Russian conquests of the late 19th century marked the establishment of the so-called Russian Turkestan with the Emirate of Bukhara and the Khanate of Khiva becoming protectorates of the Russian Empire prior to their complete annexation. In the 1920s and early 1930s, the policy of national-territorial delimitation assigned territories to ethnic groups and nationalities. Consequently, a set of national institutions were implemented within each national territory. Although all political borders are more or less artificially defined, in the case of USSR, national language planning played a central role in nation building, thus language seems to have trumped economic interests as a factor of nation building.

collections and monographs produced in the Soviet Union and China had remained outside the focus of Western scholarship until the early 1990s.

Similar issues exist in literature related to the eastern part of Central Asia (often defined as the Chinese northern periphery) known by multiple, mostly politically-constructed names which are often at odds with the natural topography of the respective region. Present-day Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, once a province of the Qing Empire, is comprised of two geographically and historically distinct areas: Züngh+aria (Junggar Basin 準噶爾盆地) to the north of the Tianshan Range, and the Tarim Basin 塔里木盆地 to its south. (See Fig. 1.4) In terms of their geography, these regions do not seamlessly form the single entity designated by the political boundaries of Xinjiang. Züngh+aria encompasses large steppe areas and a semi-desert basin surrounded by the Tianshan mountains to the north, the Tarbagatai Mountains to the northwest and the Altai mountain range to the northeast. In the center of Züngh+aria (Junggar Basin), one would find the Gurbantünggüt Desert flanked by the Manas and Ailik Lakes to the west. The Tarim Basin, dominated by the Taklamakan desert, is locked between the Tianshan to the north and the Kunlun Mountains of the Tibetan plateau to the south. Historically, Züngh+aria (Junggar basin) has seen relatively lower temperatures due to the impact of the climate conditions in neighboring Siberia. Before the Qing conquest in the 18th century, the make-up of the populations inhabiting these regions on opposite sides of the Tianshan was also different. Züngh+aria had been occupied mostly by a sub-group of the steppe-dwelling Oirats (Zünghar Mongols) who were Tibetan-style Buddhists. The Tarim Basin, on the other hand, was predominantly inhabited by sedentary populations of Muslim Uyghur

farmers.[21] (See Fig. 1.5.) After their conquest of the Zünghar Khanate, the Manchu Qing dynasty killed off most of the local Zünghar population, and started the resettlement of Uyghur, Han and Hui people into Züngharia. Most of present-day Mongols inhabiting Xinjiang are not descendants of the Zünghars, but the Torgud and Khoshud Kalmyks who fled Russian control in the late eighteenth century.[22] Until 1884, the two areas of modern-day Xinjiang were governed separately by the Qing. As the political center of Xinjiang province was located in the Ili basin, the Qing built nine fortified cities along the Ili river in Züngharia, made present-day Yining (Ili) the capital of Xinjiang, and relocated a large number of Uighurs from the Tarim to the Ili basin.[23]

The political strategy of forced migrations, resettlements and intermingling of ethnically unrelated peoples and the establishments of urban centers led to an explosion of new terminology with regard to this region. It was Russian turkologists who invented the term "East Turkestan" in the 19th-century to replace the term Chinese Turkestan which originally referred to the Tarim Basin. The term "Turkestan" continued to be used by 20th-century travelers and scholars such as Sven Hedin and Sir Aurel Stein.[24] That said, this name was not widely adopted by the Turkic-speaking local people of the Tarim Basin, who instead used the word "Altishahr" meaning "six cities" in Uyghur. Other locally-used names were *yeti shahr* (seven cities) and *dorben shahr* (four cities).[25] Most 19th-century

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[21] Millward, James A., 1998. *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759-1864.* Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press

[22] Atwood, Christopher Pratt. 2004. *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol empire*. New York, NY: Facts On File, p. 423

[23] Liu, Tao Tao., and David Faure. 1996. *Unity and Diversity: Local Cultures and Identities in China.* Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press., p. 69

[24] Stein, Aurel. 1975. *Ancient Khotan: detailed report of archaeological explorations in Chinese Turkestan*. New York: Hacker Art Books.

[25] Newby, L. J. 2005. *The Empire and the Khanate: a political history of Qing relations with Khoqand c. 1760-1860*. Leiden [u.a.]: Brill., p. 4

Western sources refer to the region south of the Tianshan as "Kashgharia", "Little Bukhara" or Eastern Turkestan", but the Qing documents generally mention it by the names *Huijiang* ("the Muslim periphery"), *Bacheng* (eight cities) or *nanlu* (southern circuit).[26] ZÜngharia, was known in Chinese by several names: Zhunbu 準部 (Zünghar region), Tianshan Beilu 天山北路 (Northern March), "Xinjiang" 新疆 (New Border).[27]
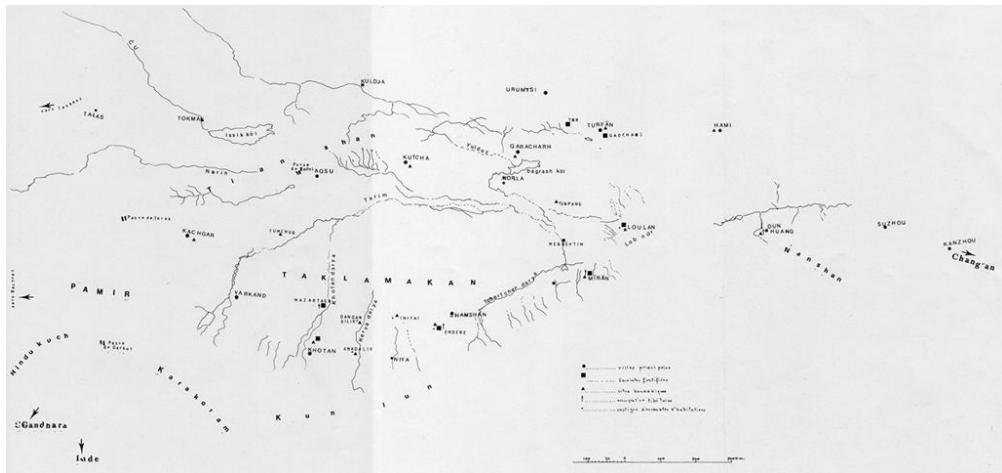
Figure 1.4 Map of the Tarim Basin
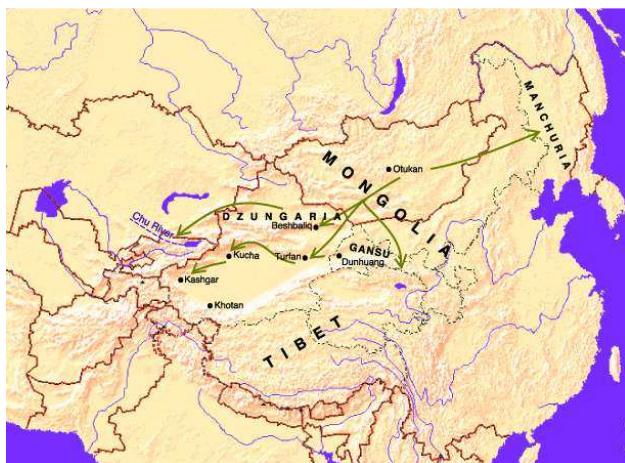
Figure 1.5 Dispersion of the Orkhon Uyghurs into ZÜngharia

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[26] Ibid
[27] Ibid

The settlements in the Tarim Basin in present-day Xinjiang Autonomous Region in Northwest China have since been referred to as Chinese Turkestan, Chinese Central Asia, Eastern Turkestan, Kashgharia, Chinese Tartary, and Serindia.

The more generic and somewhat less politically charged term "Inner Asia" has arguably been successful in terms of inclusivity, accuracy and independence from political bias as along with the regions discussed thus far, it also incorporates parts of the Northern Tarim Basin and the Mongolian-Manchurian steppe. Inner Asia, however, is mostly used by scholars in North America, and it is no less generic. The *locus classicus* for Inner Asia is Owen Lattimore's work "Inner Asian Frontiers of China". [28] Lattimore's main contribution in the introduction of his concept of Inner Asian frontiers is his opposition to nation-state, ethnocentric historical frameworks and his unprecedented acumen as seen in his early attempts to place Inner Asia in the context of World History. Alternatively, archaeologists studying Bronze Age cultures and the biogeography which shaped their migration routes frequently define the area from the Minusinsk Basin to the north to the Northern Mongolian Altai to the south as "North Asia". Alternative definitions have designated North Asia as an equivalent for the Russian Far East, the region between Lake Baikal in Central Siberia and the Pacific Ocean, as well as Japan and the Northern Korean Peninsula.[29] Modern-day South Korea, Japan, Mongolia, North China and Nepal have also been regularly added to the mix. From an economic standpoint, China, Japan and South Korea have often been described as major "northeast Asian economies". There is no static

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[28] Lattimore, Owen. 1940. *Inner Asian Frontiers of China.* London: Oxford Univ. Press; See also Lattimore, Owen. 1929. *The Desert Road to Turkestan.* Boston: Little, Brown
[29] Forsyth, James. *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony, 1581–1990.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992

definition or explanation of the term, as its usage is entirely dependent on context.[30] However, archaeologists dealing with the interdisciplinary study of this key region have all too often fallen back on the convenience of indiscriminately and interchangeably using the terms "Central", "Middle", "Inner" and "North" Asia, thus failing to acknowledge the subtle yet important discrepancies in the underlying connotations of these vocabulary choices. The ambiguous spatial and geopolitical relationships in Central Asia have become an impediment to the desired completion of an in-depth and comprehensive study of any component of the cultures which inhabited the region in the ancient past. A. Frank returns to Herodotus by reiterating a fundamental question in his important essay on the role of Central Asia in World History: why should one feel the need to so neatly distinguish between Europe and Asia, when geographically and even historically, the two form the more or less homogenous entity, Eurasia.[31] This is especially accurate in light of the fact that Eastern Europe, as far west as Dobrudzha and the Hungarian plain, and the Volga region of the Urals include an expanse of land which has throughout history been inhabited by nomadic and semi-nomadic groups such as Thracians, Bulgars, Türks, Slavs, Avars, all of which have unclear origins and migration routes. The confusion regarding the usage of the term "Central Asia" originates from the sedimentation of various historical usages, none of which has replaced the others. Perhaps the solution lies somewhere in the middle. While the broader terms "Central Eurasia" or "Inner Asia" could still be relevant in wider discussion, in spite of their inherent dependency on discipline, more narrow and specific terms such as "steppe belt" should be adopted in references to particular geographic and

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[30] Institutions such as the World Bank have divided the region of Northeast Asia in terms of developed and emerging economies in the area.
[31] Frank, A. G., 1992. "The Centrality of Central Asia". *Studies in History. Vol. 8 (1):* p.43-97

cultural zones.[32] The present study adopts the term "Central Eurasia" as the archeological investigations undertaken in it reach all the way to the Great Hungarian plain and Crimea in modern-day Europe. The study also makes use of less generic and targeted terms such as "Eurasian steppes", "Ordos Culture" in some of the more focused discussions of archaeological discoveries.

Another related problem exists in the Romanization or English translation of sites and monuments' names. At present, depending on their date and country of publication, monographs tend to use different versions of the same name to refer to a single geographic location.[33] As Esther Jacobson along with numerous other scholars of Eurasian art and archaeology have continuously pointed out, there is no traditional transliteration system which is entirely satisfactory for rendering terms originally written in Russian Cyrillic.[34] The general lack of familiarity with existent transliteration systems of Mongolian Cyrillic and Bulgarian Cyrillic titles and names (both of which will occasionally appear in this work) has caused further ambiguity and technical inconsistencies. The issue of Romanization[35] coupled with the usage of dated geopolitical concepts to delineate

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[32] Atwood, Christopher. 2011. "Is there such a thing as Central/ Inner (Eur)Asia and is Mongolia part of it?" In *Mapping Mongolia: Situating Mongolia in the World from Geologic Time to the Present,* ed. Paula L.W. Sabloff, pp. 60-84. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

[33] Esther Jacobson has proposed to remedy this problem by referring to entries in the United States Board of Geographic Names with the exceptions of terms which have entered the English language with a non-conforming spelling such as Kiev.

[34] Jacobson, Esther. 1993. *The Deer Goddess of Ancient Siberia: A Study in the Ecology of Belief.* Leiden: E.J. Brill.

[35] The Soviet standard for the Romanization of Russian Cyrillic (GOST) was the basis for later developments of transliteration systems. The United Nations put forward a proposed transliteration system in 1987, which was never officially used but examples of it can be found occasionally in cartography. The American Library Association system has been in use by libraries in North America since 1975. In this dissertation, I will make use of the relatively intuitive system developed by the US Board on Geographic Names.

geography has resulted in the rather unabashed treatment of culturally and linguistically diverse spheres as homogenous, organic units.

The issue of consistency in the field does seem to stem from being, so to say, "lost in translation". Until the 1930s, both the monumental and decorative "minor" arts of Central Asia had been virtually unknown to the world. For instance, Arthur Pope's well-known 1938 monograph "A Survey of Persian Art", features 257 plates, of which only one relates to the arts of Central Asia prior to the Islamic Invasions.[36] Pre-Islamic Central Asia has puzzled scholars due to various linguistic and historical issues. Historically, the polity of Central Asia incorporates various regions and peoples, each with their own burial customs, languages, spiritual beliefs, and sociopolitical structure. Thus, the knowledge of languages such as Khotanese, Sogdian (both of which were once the *lingua franca* of the Silk Road), Tocharian, as well as Classical Chinese, Uyghur, Sanskrit, Tibetan etc. is critical in evaluating a number of excavated documents from all these regions. The necessity for linguistic competence and familiarity with various scripts presents a great challenge for the usual scholar who would often be proficient in no more than two of these languages or scripts. If one were to successfully bridge the material culture of Greater Gandhara and the Tarim Basin, for example, one would need to have an expansive linguistic knowledge of different writing systems, as not all the relevant documents were written in the Kharosthi script. Most scholars who addressed the Arts of Central Asia as an organic whole, a continuum, were trained in a single school, be it Hellenistic, Indian, Iranian or Chinese, and thus had little experience in cross-cultural and area studies. Consequently, the fathers of the Central Asian archaeological field inadvertently brought

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[36] Pope, Arthur Upham, and Phyllis Ackerman. 1964. *A Survey of Persian Art, from Prehistoric Times to the Present*. London: Oxford University Press.

with them the biases and mindset of their own fields of study which were often "Euro-centric" or "Sino-centric" and thus had little in-depth understanding of the complex processes and phenomena unique to the region of Central Asia. One of the pioneers of the Central Asian art history field, Benjamin Rowland, for instance, wrote his dissertation on a Catalonian painter and had previously received extensive training in Western art. For years, Rowland was a professor of South Asian art at Harvard. However, in his survey of Central Asian art, he provides an extensive discussion of the arts of Sogdiana and the Tarim Basin.[37] His groundbreaking book, which up to now regrettably remains among the very few usable textbooks dedicated to the visual culture of pre-Islamic Central Asia, puts a tremendous amount of emphasis on the arts of Gandhara and the arts of Iran from Achaemenid to Sasanian periods, both of which Rowland designates as the "ultimate prototype" of Central Asian art.[38] In addition, his study along with most comprehensive background texts of Central Asia of the seventies, mentions only in passing the minor arts of nomadic cultures as if they were only passive consumers rather than active shapers of visual traditions. This "favoritism" of certain regions in the discourse of Central Asia may simply stem from the author's own biases and limited expertise as related to his earlier training in Western art and its penchant for monumental art rather than the portable decorative objects of the steppe warriors, often referred to as "minor arts". It is out of this cloud of ambiguity that the field of Central Eurasian Studies has emerged and attempted to mature.

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[37] Rowland, Benjamin. 1974. *The art of Central Asia*. New York: Crown, Introduction
[38] Ibid, p. 25

Setting the Textual Record Straight

Cultural contact along the Eurasian Steppes in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age is an issue of utmost complexity. Its convoluted nature stems from the lack of written sources produced by the various steppe pastoralist groups which interacted with each other, as well as the consistent politicization of historical archaeology in the region. Nonetheless, studies of the material culture of early Iron Age Eurasian nomadic groups encounter challenges beyond these two factors. Establishing a reliable model for grouping the thousands of excavated burial sites, both east and west of the Caspian Sea, is contingent on reaching a consensus about the migration routes of pastoral nomads as well as the simultaneous developments occurring in major areas of nomadic activity, a task which often proves impossible to complete. In the end, intense migration activity always generates a domino effect, as one major migration gives rise to multiple interconnected waves of resettlement.[39] For instance, whether the Scythians came to the Northern Black Sea area from northeastern Central Asia, that is, the region east of the Caspian Sea, or they were simply the successors of the Late Bronze Age timber-grave Srubnaya Culture (18th - 12th c BCE) which flourished along the Dnieper River west of the Urals, still remains one of the big conundrums of Central Eurasian studies. The archeological literature has been inundated with terms such as "Scytho-Siberian Cultural Unity" and "Scytho-Sarmatian Material Culture". In addition, more often than not, monographs fail to draw the boundary between the "Scythians" and "Saka", simply implying that the later were the Asian counterparts of the Pontic Scythians. The term "Scythian" has been expanded beyond

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[39]Baumer, Christoph. 2012. *The History of Central Asia. London: The Age of the Steppe Warriors*. I.B. Tauris, p. 175

reason and has thus lost its relative original clarity. In order to shed light on these discrepancies, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at the early primary sources regarding the nomadic groups whose material culture will be the main object of study in this dissertation.

The largest corpus of knowledge regarding the so-called Scythians come from Book IV of Herodotus' "Histories", an ancient historical source which offers a detailed idiosyncratic historical account of the rise and military campaigns of the Persian Empire, particularly the Greco-Persian Wars during the first half of the fifth century BCE. The work has been divided into nine books in modern editions.[40] In Book Four, Herodotus provides an ethnographic description of the Scythians who inhabited the Black Sea area. His account is based on his travels by ship to the Northern Black Sea region and his stay in the port city of Olbia, a Greek city at the periphery of Scythia and a major trading post for the Scythians. He points out that the land of the Scythians extends from the Danube to the Don River area. According to his account, they called themselves the Scolotoi. Legend has it that they were descendants from Zeus (Papaios) and a daughter of the river god yet the neighboring sedentary Greeks often regarded the first Scythian king as the son of Hercules and Echidna.[41] Herodotus cites the Greek poet Aristeas of Prokonnesos, who claims that the Northern Royal and Pontic Scythians lived to the west of the Sauromatians, who in turn were residing north of the Massagetae and the Issedonians.[42] Northeast of the Issedonians, one could find the Arimaspians, and further northeast, the gold-protecting griffins.

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[40] Original fragments from the Book One of the manuscript can now be found in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Library. The three fragments are written on papyrus, and were originally part of the larger archaeological discovery of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri in Egypt.
[41] Herodotus, *Histories* Book IV, p. 6
[42] Baumer 2002, p. 174; Herodotus, *Histories* IV, p. 13-32

According to the poet's account, the Arimaspians drove out the Issedonians, who in turn encroached on the land of their neighbors, the Scythians, who had no choice but to drive the Cimmerians out of their territory in the Northern Caucasus and the Black Sea area.[43] (See Fig. 1.6)

Herodotus provides a detailed account of the rise and fall of the Scythians. They emerged on the political arena in the seventh century BCE. As such, they played a significant role as key allies or adversaries to the great sedentary powers fighting for dominance: Urartu, Assyria, Media, Egypt, Babylonia, and Lydia.[44] The Scythians witnessed the fall of the Assyrian Empire; material evidence for their numerous military campaigns and victories comes from archaeological remains of gold swords, scabbards, daggers, drinking and eating vessels, and personal embellishments, a great number of which likely came into their possession as booty. Herodotus states that by the end of the seventh century, the Scythians had already established a relatively neighborly relationship with the Greeks who were actively building settlements in the Northern Black Sea region. Port cities such as Olbia near the Sea of Azov, Pantikapaion and Nymphaion located on the Kerch Peninsula in Crimea were the major hotbeds for commercial activity which entailed dynamic interactions between the Scythians and Greeks.

The turning point in Scythian history, according to Herodotus, was the three-year military campaign of Darius I, a war which took place between 515 and 512 BCE. It is worth noting that although Herodotus adamantly attributed this invasion to the constant

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[43] Ibid

[44] Alexeyev, Andrey. 2012. *The Gold of the Scythian Kings In the Hermitage Collection.* St. Petersburg: The State Hermitage Publishers, p. 12

incursions made by the Scythians during their Southwest campaign in the seventh century, earlier Persian rulers had already attempted (and failed) to conquer some of the nomadic groups which occupied the Pontic steppe. The Persians were unsuccessful under King Cyrus I who had struggled to conquer the Massagetae in 530 BCE.[45] Darius likely planned his attack on the Scythians as the first step toward his desired victory over the Greeks. His armies were, however, defeated by the Scythians and suffered enormous losses as a result of the Scythians' "scorched earth" tactic which left the Persian army suffering from enormous losses without any direct confrontation in battle.[46] Herodotus claims that after he advanced to the Sea of Azov, Darius I abruptly decided to abandon his wounded soldiers and fled with his army. This incident cannot be corroborated. A pertinent account of the end of the war (likely entirely a flight of fancy) comes from the Greek historian and physician Ctesias who lived in the fifth century and accompanied King Artaxerxes II on his military campaigns. Based on the Persian royal archives, his works *Persiká* and *Indiká*, written in the Ionic dialect, for the most part counter Herodotus' views of the events of the Persian campaigns. Ctesias recounts the end of the war differently offering the reader a highly imaginative description of what sounds like an implausible encounter between the two parties: as Darius marched northward for two weeks, he faced the Scythian leader and exchanged bows with him only to find out that the Scythian bow was much bigger, thus causing him to flee in terror and leave the wounded behind.[47] What one can attest to with

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[45] Ibid

[46] It should be noted that the details regarding the reality of the Scythian-Persian War are still rather unclear. Some scholars have contested the very existence of such a military campaign in the first place.

[47] Ctesias' works were primarily historical descriptions of the rise of the Persian empire coupled with fanciful stories of love affairs and personal vendettas which the author most likely invented or exaggerated: notable examples include his extensive narrative of the love story between the Median Stryangaeus and the Saka Queen Zarinaea, as well as the purported hostility between the

certainty is the noticeable decline of Scythian dominance towards the end of the third

century BCE; the waning of their power led to the establishment of the settlement called

Scythian Neapolis near present-day Simferopol, Crimea. The settlement was mentioned in

Strabo's *Geographies*. The population was likely mixed as Greeks and sedentary Scythians

co-inhabited the small Scythian domain stretching between the lower Dnieper River and

Crimea. The settlement ceased to exist during the Goth invasions in the third century CE.
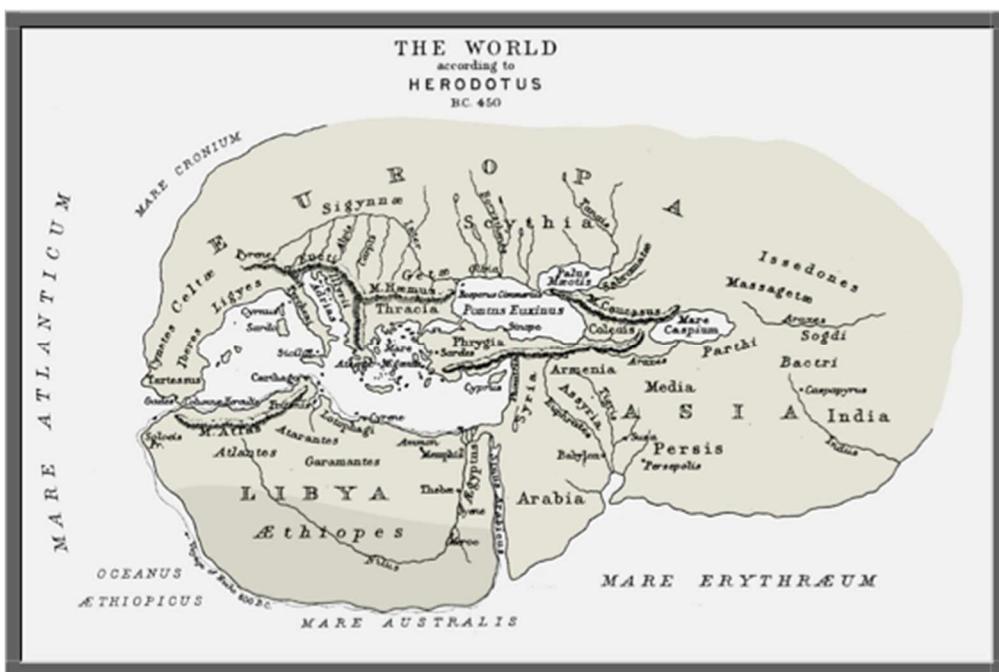
Figure 1.6 Map of Herodotus' Worldview as presented in his Histories

Accounts of the origins of the Scythians are equally full of ambiguous and

contradictory references. Herodotus presents several different accounts of the origins of

the Scythian nomads, but he strongly favors one theory. He states that it is most likely that

under pressure from the Massagetae, the Scythians crossed the Araxes river and came from

Persian Parsondas and the Babylonian Annaros. See Bigwood, J. M. "Ctesias as Historian of the Persian Wars." *Phoenix* 32, no. 1 (1978): 19-41.

Asia to reside in the Pontic steppes of the Northern Black Sea. Contrary to some interpretations of his writing, Herodotus never states which part of Asia they came from. The Pontic steppes had been inhabited by the Cimmerians whom the Scythian invaders attacked and forced to flee. In the first century BCE, the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus describes the Scythians as having first lived along the Araxes river, and migrated further into the Northern Caucasus and Northern Black Sea area, ultimately extending their power all the way to the Nile river.[48]

The ancient sources hardly mention the peoples living east of the Caspian Sea. The Avesta is arguably the oldest source which mentions nomadic groups inhabiting the land of Central Eurasia by referring to them as the "Tura with fast horses" who were in conflict with the sedentary Iranian population. Other Near Eastern sources use the name "Saka" to collectively refer to the enemies of the Achaemenids: thus, for instance, the word "Saka" can be found on relief inscriptions in Behistun and Persepolis from the 6th -5th century BCE.[49] According to their own origins myth, the Saka claim to be the descendants of the Kushtana Maurya, the son of the Indian emperor Ashoka. [50] It is worth noting that the Persian records do not distinguish between Scythians and Saka and thus, they treat these groups as a homogenous entity, as confirmed by Herodotus who points out that the Achaemenids referred to all Scythians as "Saka" thus creating the "broad Scythians" versus the "narrow Scythians" designation issue.[51] The theory of the east-west axis of migration

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[48] Diodorus of Sicily. *The Library of History*, trans. C.H. Oldfather. Cambridge, Mass: Loeb Classical Library., Vol. 2, p. 43

[49] Aruz, Joan. 2007. *The Golden Deer of Eurasia: Perspectives on the Steppe Nomads of the Ancient World*. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press

[50] Mallory, J. P., and Victor H. Mair. 2000. *The Tarim Mummies: Ancient China and the Mystery of the Earliest Peoples From the West.* New York: Thames & Hudson, pp. 77-81

[51] Herodotus, 6

which pinpoints the origins of the Pontic Scythians as "Asian" still has its vehement opponents as some scholars are convinced that they emerged out of the late Bronze Age culture of the Northern Black Sea grassland.[52]

Accounts provided by ancient Greek writers other than Herodotus support the "eastern origin" hypothesis. Information about this nomadic entity come from the works of Pliny and Strabo, both of whom propose that the eastern Scythians lived against "India" or on the other side of the Jaxartes.[53] Pliny the Elder seems to have been of the opinion that the Persians gave the name Saka to the nomadic groups residing to the east of their territory, thus distinguishing between the Saka and Scythian people.[54] Whether one was perhaps a branch of the other, or the two ethnonyms were essentially referring to the same people is a question still encased in uncertainty, one which this dissertation does not claim to resolve.

Just as one thinks the narrative of Scythian origins has reached its highest point of complexity, one is confronted with even more bizarre references. The Scythians are briefly mentioned in the Bible's New Testament. A passage from Colossians 3:11 states: "Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or not, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and is in all".[55] This statement's occurrence in the Letters of Paul seems bewildering for several reasons. First, this is an isolated mention of the Scythians in the New Testament. We are left with no contextual support in our attempts to understand this reference. Second, since the other categories described are, more or less, mutually exclusive and lie on

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[52] Grakov, B. N., and Alexander Häusler. 1978. *Die Skythen*. Berlin: Dt. Verl. der Wiss.
[53] Ibid
[54] Pliny, trans. H. Rackham. 1938. *Natural History*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press., Book IV, p. 19
[55] Martin, Troy. "The Scythian Perspective in Col 3:11." Novum Testamentum 37, no. 3 (1995): 249-61

opposite ends of a spectrum, the pairing of Scythians and barbarians does not seem to make sense when taking into account the not so nuanced traditional Greek narratives. It is unclear whether here the culture of the Scythians is considered as a more civilized form of barbarianism, or, if, on the contrary, the name "Scythian" serves to highlight an extreme example of uncivilized conduct. Another isolated reference to the Scythians, which seems unrelated to any of the ethnographic and historical accounts by Herodotus, comes from the Greek poet Hesiod who lived in the eighth century BCE. Hesiod calls them the "mare-milking Scythians" who seem to have belonged to a group he calls Hippemolgi.[56] The names Hippemolgi (Greek: mare-milkers) and Galactophagi (Greek: living of milk) also appear in Homer's *Iliad* (Book XIII:1-7) where they are mentioned as inhabitants of distant lands, alongside the Thracian horsemen, the Mysians and the Abii; this reference could indeed refer to a broader entity which Herodotus would have designated as Scythians.[57]

The ancient sources also mention a group of East Iranian people named Sarmatians who first appear in the early 7th century south of the Urals and east of the River Don. The ethnonym varies and sometimes the term "Sauromatian" is used in place of "Sarmatian"; the two may be referring to the same peoples or the latter could have been used by the Greek thinkers as a reference to the early phase of Sarmatian culture, but this matter remains unresolved. Greco-Roman ethnographies have come to use the word *sarmatae* as an exonym for a group of people much larger and more diverse than the original brunch designated by the name *sarmatae*. Pliny the Elder and Jordanes use

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[56] Hesiod., Reinhold Merkelbach, and M. L West. *Fragmenta Hesiodea.* Oxford: Clarendon P., 1967.; See also Homer and Richmond Lattimore. 1951. *The Iliad.* [Chicago]: University of Chicago Press., Book 13: 1--7
[57] Jacobson, Esther. 1995. *The Art of the Scythians: The Interpenetration of Cultures at the Edge of the Hellenic World.* Leiden: E.J. Brill, p. 13

the prefix "sauro-" and "sar-" as interchangeable, thus implying that the Sarmatians and Sauromatians are essentially the same people. Modern-day archaeologists, namely Boris Graykov, have often disputed this synonymous usage by referring to the earliest phase of Sarmatian history as Sauromatian.

According to Herodotus' early account, their ethnicity developed through the intermarriages of Scythian men and Amazon women.[58] Their military might reached its peak in the 1st c CE when their territory reportedly stretched from the Vistula River to the Danube delta. In the 4th -3rd centuries BCE, part of the groups inhabiting the Southern Urals settled into the Lower Volga river area thus mixing with the local Sarmatians living there, and giving birth to newly formed entities such as Aorsi, the Roxolani, and the Alans.[59] The issue of identifying Sarmatian archaeological records is complicated by Strabo's distinction between two different Sarmatians, the nomadic group of the Northern Black Sea area and the Volga river, and the mixture of nomadic and sedentary populations of the Caucasus.[60] At the beginning of the third century BCE, they are reported to have entered into a series of military conflicts with the Pontic Scythians, ultimately replacing them as a major military power. Since for a long period of time they occupied roughly the same territories as the Scythians with whom they likely shared many cultural traits, notably a language of the northwestern Iranian family[61], the archaeological and historical record on the Sarmatians is frequently ambiguous.

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[58] Herodotus, Book IV, 21
[59] Sinor, Denis. 1990. *The Cambridge history of early Inner Asia*. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press., p. 112
[60] Ibid
[61] The Alanian or so-called Scytho-Sarmatian language was originally spoken by a group of Iranian people in the 8th -7th century BCE and might be an early form of modern Ossetian.

The discrepancies in the ancient accounts of the nomadic peoples of Central Eurasia referred to as Scythians, Saka and Sarmatians, are further augmented by the lack of written records left by the people themselves, thus leaving much space for speculation and historiographical embellishments. This leads me to a related problem which, at the risk of being seen as an excessive digression from the core of the present discussion, could shed further light on the significance of the "Scythian vs. Saka" problem. The ethnic and linguistic origins and affiliations of Iron Age peoples such as the Scythians still remain a frequent cause for heated debates between authorities in the field whose opinions lie on the opposite ends of the spectrum. The "Scythian" case is not alone in causing controversy with regard to the equation of ethnicity and language: there are numerous historical examples of exonyms constructed by historians with a political agenda.

The existence of a linguistic group should not directly lead us to the identification of an overlapping ethnic group, and it certainly does not warrant the frequently parroted, yet deceptive claim that the two are essentially synonymous or overlapping categories. For instance, the contested ethnogenesis of Germanic tribes presents conceptual problems similar to those posed by the Scythians. The discipline devoted to the study of these peoples of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages who were especially active during the Völkerwanderung (Migration Period) is known as "Germanische Altertumskunde" (Germanic Antiquity): in modern German history, the anxious search for a Germanic ancestor coupled with the need to unravel a glorified ancient past has often created a demand for information which exceeds the supply of extant (reliable) sources which could provide this information. Recent studies of Germanic tribes have been shaped by the heavy presence of the New German Constitutional History, which took sway in the 1930s and

continued to prevail in German doctrines until at least the 1950s: the theories postulated by this school of thought labelled the early Germanic peoples (*Germanen*) as quintessentially aristocratic in structure and especially cognizant of leadership (*Führertum*) which consisted of noblemen with God-given agency and talents.[62] Thus emerged the notion of "sacral kingship" rooted in the idea of divine legitimacy. The new school assumed a homogenous German antiquity and the transmission of ancient Germanic traits to the Middle Ages.[63] The Nazi doctrines further tainted the study of Germanic Antiquity by using it for political purposes; ultimately, the field was saved from its imminent fate of dying out by Reinhadt Wenskus who developed the concept of "Traditonskern" ("kernel of tradition") in his seminal book.[64] Wenskus' groundbreaking ideas were rooted in the previous findings of Austrian anthropologist Wilhelm Mühlmann and the famous Russian ethnographer S. Shirogorov who developed the term "subjective ethnicity". In direct opposition to the Soviet concept of "ethnogenesis", that is, the formation and development of tribal unity based on ethnicity, Wenskus claimed that the early medieval Germanic tribes were not structured around a common biological origin, but were rather based on the meticulous construction of a belief in such common origin.[65] He describes a nucleus, a core group of elites who managed (often through the projection of military dominance) to gain the allegiance of other, ethnically diverse groups who in turn would subscribe to and identify with the invented narrative of common origin. In other words, the newly formed

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[62] Goffart, Walter. "Two Notes on Germanic Antiquity Today". *Traditio* 50 (1995), p. 10
[63] Ibid
[64] Wenskus, Reinhard. 1961. *Stammesbildung und Verfassung; das Werden der frühmittelalterlichen Gentes*. Köln: Böhlau.
[65] Ibid; For a more recent detailed discussion of Wenskus' approach, see Curta, Florin. 2001. *The Making of the Slavs: History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, Ca. 500-700.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 19

larger entity was not by any means held together by common ethnicity; rather, all members adhered to a specific narrative, a kernel of tradition to be transmitted through origin legends. While this theory has been highly contested and its merits and deficiencies could (as they have) warrant an entirely separate study, for the purposes of the present work, it is sufficient to say that Wenskus and the later proponents of his theories, notably medievalist Patrick Geary, have rightfully identified the idea that national character is a steady fixture derived from a distant historical past as a pure flight of fancy.[66] The fight against the trend for manufactured historical links between ethnogenesis and language echoed a larger sentiment in European schools of thought in the 1930s: the Vienna School produced vehement opponents of Classical Humanism such as art historian Joseph Strzygowski whose primary mission appears to have been to expose the limitations of the *Orientalistik* ("oriental studies") with its pure emphasis on philology. In *Orient oder Rom*? he criticized Classical art historians for their disproportionate emphasis on the Orient's reliance on Greek art forms as well as Christian archaeologists who invented evolutionary narratives linking Byzantine forms to late Roman developments.[67] Despite their excessively pompous rhetoric and at times unjustly dismissive, one-sided approach, Strzygowski's repeated references to a much needed Aryan "awakening" from Renaissance classicism and his lifelong criticism of the construction of racial historiographies remain among the important early voices of reason with respect to the ethnogenesis theory.

The making of nations, ethnonyms and ethnicities is not constrained to the origin

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[66] Geary, Patrick J. 2002. *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press
[67] Marchand, Suzanne L. "The Rhetoric of Artifacts and the Decline of Classical Humanism: The Case of Josef Strzygowski." *History and Theory* 33, no. 4 (1994): 106-30

myths of the *Germanen*. Modern claims to a presumed rather than carefully studied cultural heritage from antiquity have in fact plagued the study of the so-called Phoenicians, who in the early 19th century were viewed as a coherent ethnic unit; these claims were enhanced by the decipherment of the Phoenician alphabet in the 18th century.[68] The Phoenician language belonging to the Northwest Semitic group of languages of the Levant was spread in the Eastern Mediterranean world by merchants and has been considered an ancient precursor of the Greek alphabet; the undeniable historical significance of the Phoenician alphabet has thus been exploited to no end to denote the pertinent existence of a coherent ethnic unit called "Phoenicians". Although various peoples in the Near East claim to be descendants of the Phoenicians, recent revisionist studies have shown that in reality, there is no evidence of the existence of a people who called themselves Phoenicians and identified themselves as a collective based on a common ethnic genesis. The obsession with Phoenician culture was ignited by the travel records of Ernest Renan who went to the Syria and Lebanon in the 19th century to study them and lit the fire of the modern mania for Phoenician culture.[69] Even at present, the tendency to identify artefacts which likely belonged to heterogeneous, ethnically-unrelated peoples of the ancient Eastern Mediterranean has hindered the proper presentation of important art to the public in museum catalogs and exhibitions. Assyrian ivories, some of which have inscriptions rendered in the Phoenician alphabet on the back, have come into the possession of the British Museum and Metropolitan Museum of Art. Ivories excavated from the ancient city of Nimrud, for example, have often been described as "Phoenician". This repeatedly

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[68] Rawlinson, George. 1889. *History of Phoenicia.* London: Longmans, Green
[69] Renan, Ernest, and Thobois. 1864. *Mission De Phénicie.* Paris: Imprimerie impériale; For a recent revisionist approach to the subject, see Quinn, Josephine Crawley. 2018. *In Search of the Phoenicians*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

recurring trend in creating "imagined communities" or "situational ethnicities" is also common in the making of the prehistoric Slavs, who as Florin Curta has convincingly shown were more or less an artificial invention of sixth century Byzantine authors. The notion that there existed a language called "Common Slavic" which all Slavs once spoke is nothing more than a a wild assumption not supported by a single shred of historical or linguistic evidence; moreover, even if one assumes that such common language did indeed exist, there is no reason to assume that all people who spoke "Common Slavic" were in fact of the same ethnicity.[70] As is the case with "Saka", the equation of what we now refer as "Slavs", a historically constructed name with no agreed upon meaning, to mentions of people named "Schlavenes" or "Sclavus"(by the Roman aristocrat Jordaness) does not enrich our understanding of their origins and ethnic affiliations. In his truly revisionist study of the Slavs, Curtis envisions a form of group identity, which could (debatably) be called ethnicity and which only arose in response to Justinian's implementation of a building project in the Danube region in the Balkans. The Slavs, in other words, did not come from somewhere in the North, but "became" Slavs only after their contact with the Roman frontier.[71] All these examples, seemingly detached from the Saka problem, serve to show that historians alone drew the connecting lines between ethnicity and language, and in addition, found creative, often politically motivated ways in which to invent nations, and embellish or expand exonyms beyond reason in order to create a narrative.[72] Thus,

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[70] Curta, Florin. 2001. *The Making of the Slavs: History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, Ca. 500-700.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 3
[71] Ibid; See also Curtis, Florin. "Four Questions for those who still believe in prehistoric Slavs and other fairytales".
[72] We see this constructed collectivism in the politicization of archaeology (the reluctance to excavate Byzantine sites in modern-day Istanbul among many others), and in the making of "national literature" (The Song of Roland for the French, The Kalevala for the Finns and Karelians, Ossian for the British Celts etc.).

when discussing the material cultures of such highly contested entities, one needs to at the very least be aware of the pitfalls hidden in such attribution of ethnogenesis to disparate groups of people with common historical fate.

That being said, the absence of reliable written documents and the various historiographical embellishments associated with Indo-European peoples such as those referred to as Scythians should not preclude us from exploring the possibilities which exist in the world of historical archaeology. It is plausible that there exists a polycentric provenance of the material culture of the diverse entity known as Scythians; cultural transfer between neighboring nomadic groups and sedentary states nearby does not inhibit the development of independent local variations of a larger tradition, or even completely individual cultural systems.

Similarly, the origins of the so-called Xiongnu 匈奴 who occupied the northern Chinese periphery and their connections with other nomadic entities across Eurasia, are still encased in uncertainty. Texts produced by the Chinese chronicles comprise the sole body of written records about this confederation of northern nomads. The first occurrence of the name Xiongnu is from the *Records of the Grand Historian*, henceforth referred to by its Chinese name, *Shiji* 史記 . The section dedicated to the Xiongnu, known as *Memoir of the Xiongnu* (*Xiongnu liezhuan* 匈奴列傳) states that the Xiongnu Confederacy thrived from the 3rd c BCE until the 1st c CE and occupied a vast territory spanning from Lake Baikal to the north, the Chinese Great Wall to the south, the Greater Khingan Mountains

to the east and the Altai mountains to the west.[73] In 208, under their leader Modun, the Xiongnu allegedly expanded their territory which stretched from the Mongolian steppes all the way to the Tarim Basin. The Xiongnu are also described in the dynastic histories *Hanshu* (compiled in the 1st to early 2nd c CE*)* and *Hou Hanshu* (compiled in the 5th century CE). Apart from the dynastic histories, there is a mention of the Xiongnu in the *Xinshu* by Jia Yi (201-169 BCE).[74] The collection of the Han politician contains a chapter dedicated to the Xiongnu: it details a proposal by a Han court political advisor on how to combat the Xiongnu and their ruler, the *chanyu*.[75] The limited number of comprehensive received texts is somewhat augmented by the recently excavated wooden manuscripts from the sites of Dunhuang and Juyan in Gansu province. The most intriguing among them are Wang Mang's edict to send the Generals of Five Majesties (*wuweijiang* 五威將) on a military campaign against the *Xiongnu*.[76] There are also documents discovered at Dunhuang which detail important Han laws regarding the Xiongnu, such as ordinances for rewarding Xiongnu men who surrender and statutes on arresting Han subjects who desert or submit to the Xiongnu.[77]

However, the groups of people living in the Chinese frontier zone in the Han dynasty certainly did not arrive in the region overnight; according to archaeological data, the Ordos Loop, which occupies a plateau on the south side of the Middle Yellow River,

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[73] Sneath, David. 2007. *The Headless State: Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, & Misrepresentations of Nomadic Inner Asia*. New York: Columbia University Press., p. 23
[74] International Conference on Xiongnu Archaeology, Ursula Brosseder, and Bryan Kristopher Miller. 2011. *Xiongnu archaeology: multidisciplinary perspectives of the first steppe empire in Inner Asia*. Bonn: Vor- und Frühgeschichtliche Archäologie, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn., p. 21
[75] Ibid
[76] Ibid, p. 22
[77] Ibid

had been inhabited by horse-riding nomads starting from the 5th century BCE before the time when the polity referred to as Xiongnu supposedly took sway in Central Asia.[78] However, sources earlier in date than the *Shiji* mostly use the umbrella term *hu* 胡 with regard to nomadic polities along the Chinese northern border during the Warring States Period (475-221 BCE). Paul R. Goldin has successfully demonstrated that while referring to sites contemporaneous with the Han dynasty such as Noin Ula[79] as "Xiongnu" is potentially acceptable as it is no more objectionable than referring to Lugdunum as "Roman" simply because it had been inhabited by non-Romans, it is a folly to refer to the people who inhabited the region of Ordos prior to the second century CE as "Xiongnu" as the term may not even have existed.[80] Scholars of early China have continuously expressed doubt about the idea of a homogenous Xiongnu culture even after the Chinese sources acknowledge their existence in the region.[81] In reality, there is no entirely satisfactory term which can be used to describe the idiosyncratic polity which formed along the northern frontier of the Han Empire and turned into a menace to its political stability. Terms such as "state" and "empire" are misleading, and so is "confederation" (albeit to a lesser extent): judging from the Chinese records, the Xiongnu seem to have been on the way to forming an empire, yet simultaneously, they were an uneasy alliance of semi-autonomous leaders.

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[78] The following section sheds light on these people.

[79] The archaeological culture of Noin Ula is located along the Selenga river, north of present-day Ulaanbaatar and has been dated, based on the tomb's inventory, to the period the so-called Xiongnu were active in the region. It will be discussed further in the following chapters.

[80] Goldin, Paul. R. 2011. "Steppe Nomads as a Philosophical Problem in Early China", in *Mapping Mongolia: Situating Mongolia in the World from Geologic Time to the Present.* , ed. by Paula L. Sabloff. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

[81] Di Cosmo, Nicola. 2002. *Ancient China and its enemies: the rise of nomadic power in East Asian history*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Due to the large scope of this work, both in terms of time and geography, it is worthwhile to consider another problem related to the Xiongnu alliance, that is, their alleged affinities with the later Huns, a group which appeared from the Volga region and overtook the territories of the Alans, ultimately reaching the Danubian periphery of the Roman empire in the 4th century CE. Christopher P. Atwood's recent in-depth philological study of the possible origins of the word "hun" has convincingly shown that despite recent newly increased enthusiasm among scholars like Etienne de la Vaissiere, any attempt to equate the Hun and the Xiongnu has serious methodological implications supported by methods of historical philology, a gap which he fills by highlighting the evolving phonetics and the role of India in sound change.[82]

In light of all this, I do not consider discussions and groupings of archaeological sites and monuments based, partially or entirely, on historical politonyms such as 'Scythians" to be productive in terms of elucidating the cultural bearings and aesthetic choices of nomadic and semi-nomadic groups across such a large geographic region. I do not anticipate to identify and attach specific sets of material choices to ethnonyms, which, in their original context in the ancient world likely did not carry the weight we place on them today. This study considers the funerary objects themselves as co-agents rather than mere products in constructing what I recognize as a carefully planned ritual and theatrical space.

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[82] Atwood, Christopher. P. 2012. Huns and Xiongnu: New Thoughts on a Old Problem. In *Dubitando: Studies in History and Culture in Honor of Donald Ostrowski*. Brian J. Boeck, Russell E. Martin, and Daniel Rowland, eds. Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2012, 27–52.

Lost in Time: The Issue of Chronology

A. Belenitsky was among the first to point out as early as the 1960s that chronology constitutes the most difficult challenge facing students of Central Asia.[83] Every educator who has been tasked with constructing a coherent, systematic and comprehensive chronology for a textbook or a syllabus on Central Asian art and archaeology would concur that this is a herculean task. A lot of the empires and steppe people from the late first millennium BCE until the Arab conquest of Transoxania were active simultaneously in highly contested regions and their interactions are hard to track through time and space. As a result, the objects excavated from tombs in Central Asia have such mixed iconographies and fusion of styles that creating a systematic base for dating the sites and objects is sometimes impossible. Since steppe people like the so-called Xiongnu and Scythians did not leave any written records, we need to rely exclusively on often problematic Chinese and Greek sources and scattered archeological data to trace their historical tracks and make up the chronology of their activities. Similarly, the rule of the Hephtalites (White Huns) over Tocharistan overlaps with the reign of the Sasaninds in the region. The Sogdians, as the main traders on the Silk Road, were active in various parts of Central Asia from 2-8th c CE, but their interactions and movements varied through time. The issue is further complicated by the fact that Soviet scholars have often used a nationalist approach to chronology, emphasizing only the regions which they had previously excavated such as Sogdiana in Russian Turkestan, often ignoring the Sogdian finds in China. One has yet to

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[83] Belenitsky, A. M. 1968. *Central Asia*. Cleveland: World Pub. Co., p.209-210

find a monograph which successfully bridges the Sogdian sites in the former Soviet Republics and China.[84]

While the present study is extremely indebted to major developments and findings of historical archaeology, the author also recognizes the toll political conflicts, economic barriers and national identity crises have taken on the study of Central Eurasia due to its vast territory and historical fate. This is significant in many instances, but particularly when faced with discrepancies and gaps in museum and archaeological data. During one of her lectures on Central Asian Archeology, Dr. Nancy Steinhardt shared her shrewd observation that "Central Asia has all too often become the dumping ground for the inexplicable". This astute observation seems to sum up a large portion of the issues surrounding the study of Central Asian art and archaeology: when art historians, archeologists and museum curators alike attempt to steer clear of making adamant statements about the provenance of an object which exhibits a high level of syncretism, they often designate it under the ambiguous category "Central Asian". The problem of chronology is the core of this unfortunate tendency, which in turn results in the proliferation of superficial narratives which fail to recognize the complexity of potentially independent cultural and artistic developments unique to Central Eurasia. Thus, they betray a limited understanding of Central Eurasia, one in which the polity is viewed only marginally, as a periphery which could shed light on its neighbors (namely China and Russia) but is on its own too complex and vast to be studied independently.

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[84] In his newly published book, "Sogdians in China", Patrick Wetmann discusses at length all the relevant sites on Chinese territories, but only mentions in passing Panjikent, and does not at all mention other sites in Russian Turkestan. He does not provide convincing comparisons with Northern Wei and Northern Qi excavated tombs.

Lost in the Search for Provenance: The Deceptiveness of the "Single Prototype" Narrative

I would like to offer some marginal yet pertinent observations regarding a persistent idea in the field, that is, the incessant need for finding a "prototype". This problem is inextricably linked to the political, historical and linguistic issues discussed so far. It appears that in order to alleviate the tension that exists between written records and archaeological findings, archaeologists and art historians have been guilty of designating a prototype to a set of cultural remains and perpetuating external narratives of, for instance, a Chinese versus Central Asian versus Near Eastern prototype which supposedly triggered a wave of production across a larger geographic domain through movements of peoples due to warfare, calamities, trade or diplomacy. Here I will use two seemingly unrelated examples in order to shed light on the general theoretical deficiency behind the "single prototype" hypothesis. One of the unanswered questions at the beginning of the twentieth century was that of the relationship between the material culture of Greater Gandhara and the Greco-Roman artistic tradition, as Gandharian sculpture exhibits traces of Hellenistic influence. The field was concerned with the extent and scope of the legacy of Alexander the Great and its tangible traces on the material culture of the region. A brief digression is justified here.

Perhaps the best example of how this question was answered is hidden in the study of the site of Ai Khanoum in present-day Afghanistan. In 1964, the excavations of the French DAFA mission led by Paul Bernard uncovered remarkable archeological finds: monumental architectural discoveries including private and public buildings, sculptures, and documents with Greek inscriptions. Thus, Ai Khanoum became the turning point in the study of Greco-Bactria and disproved previous nationalist theories proposed by Soviet

scholars about the lack of tangible Greek traces in the area. Two decades later, not far from Ai Khanoum, Soviet archeologists Litvinskiy and Pichikiyan found the temple of Oxus in the ancient city of Takhti-Sangin in present-day Tajikistan. Ai Khanoum and Takhti-Sangin became the focal points of all later publications about Bactria and served as case studies in the more comprehensive analysis of Greco-Bactrian archeological treasures.[85] Robert delved into the epigraphy of Ai Khanoum's excavated monuments such as dedications to Hermes and Heracles as well as Delphian (local ancient Greek dialect) aphorisms.[86] Francfort discussed several architectural discoveries at Ai Khanoum and found important analogies in Greek and East Asian artistic traditions.[87] He points out that the Ai Khanoum palace is a typical example of post-Alexander buildings, which are also similar in some ways to Darius' palace at Susa.[88] The town is divided into upper and lower parts like most of the ancient Greek towns, and the author shrewdly observes that most public buildings such as the mausoleum, gymnasium and shrine are examples of traditional Greek buildings.

To fully answer the question of Hellenistic influence at this site and region, in the year 2000, a Japanese team completed a number of CG images to create a documentary about the site. The final goal of the reconstruction was to create a model showing the

[85] Litvinskiĭ, Boris Anatolʹevich, and I. R. Pichikian. 2000. *Ėllinisticheskiĭ hram Oksa v Baktrii, Yuzhnyĭ Tadzhikistan*. ("The Hellenistic Oxus Temple in Bactria, South Tajikistan") Moskva: Vostochnaiya lit-ra RAN This work coupled with several other volumes by Litvinskiy take the Oxus temple as the main actor in the Greco-bactrian narrative but Ai Khanoum and its layout are mentioned mostly in comparative contexts.
[86] Robert, Louis. 1966. *Deux inscriptions grecques d'Aï Khanoum (Bactriane)*. Comptes Rendus des Séances De L'Académie Des Inscriptions Et Belles-Lettres. PERSEE.
[87] Bernard, Paul, and Henri Paul Francfort. 1978. *Études de géographie historique sur la plaine d'Aï Khanoum, Afghanistan*. Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique.
[88] Ibid

geographical relief of the site. The gymnasium is composed of a large square courtyard surrounded by buildings, with a portico constructed at the center of each side of the courtyard. This plan immediately invites the idea of a typical Greek monument. The plans of the dwellings , however, did not follow the Greek model: the courtyard always situated on the north side and the great reception hall in the middle of the building, surrounded by corridors, are basic features of Eastern-style buildings.[89] (See Fig. 1.7) The excavated objects from the ruins of Ai Khanoum also point us to the notion of syncretism and some sort of Hellenistic influence. The worship of the mother-goddess Cybele was introduced from Phrygia into the ethnically Greek colonies of present-day Anatolia as early as the 5th c BCE. Her depiction on several round plaques excavated at Ai Khanoum further confirms the idea of Greek traces in a local context.[90]

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[89] Lecuyot, Guy. "Ai Khanoum Reconsidered" in Cribb, Joe., and Georgina Herrmann. *After Alexander: Central Asia before Islam.* Oxford: Published for The British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2007., p. 158

[90] Elfirede Regina Knauer has offered compelling evidence to support her thesis that one of the major deities in the Chinese pantheon, the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu), was in fact derived from the Greco-Roman goddess Cybele (Kybele). See Elfriede R. Knauer, "The Queen Mother of the West: A Study of the Influence of Western Prototypes on the Iconography of the Taoist Deity", in Contact and Exchange in the Ancient World, ed. Victor H. Mair. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006: 62-115

Figure 1.7 Reconstructed 3-D view of Ai Khanoum: View from the gymnasium courtyard

The fusion of Persian and Hellenistic artistic styles at Ai Khanoum is telling and fills some of the gaps which previously existed in scholarship. More obvious examples of the Hellenistic and Roman artistic styles incorporated into the arts of Greater Gandhara are given by Rowland who dedicated two of his chapters to this matter. Some of the excavated examples from the Greco-Buddhist archaeological site of Hadda, situated in present-day Afghanistan, serve to illustrate the issue of transmission. The special spiritual qualities of the Hadda head stuccos is either an inheritance of the late Hellenistic Bactrian art of Khalchayan or a reflection, perhaps through the intervention of provincial Roman craftsmen, of the revival of the Hellenistic *Sturm und Drang* in Roman art of the Antonine Period.[91] By now, scholars have more or less established the role of Hellenistic influences in the arts of Greater Gandhara and the possible fusion with Iranian motifs. Thus, the question of the influence of Gandhara on arts of other regions, comes to light. This issue, too was most systematically addressed by Rowland and Bussagli. The later looks only at

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[91] Rowland, Benjamin. 1974. *The Art of Central Asia.* New York: Crown Publishers, p.32

wall painting, and argues that there is a Gandharan source for the wall paintings at Miran. According to Bussagli, the murals contain reminiscences of classical art, not only in the treatment of the drapery, but also in the skillful use of *chiaroscuro*, obtained by means of a light clear coat of paint laid in over the highlights.[92] He makes a connection with Byzantium and the Damascus mosaics, which at a first glance seems far-fetched. However, it is likely that Bussagli's observation here is correct for this technique is a method previously utilized in Byzantine mosaics such as the one at Petra.[93]

Bussagli's argument becomes even stronger in the analysis of a fragment which depicts a sacred figure seated on a throne wearing some sort of royal regalia. The perspective effects invite immediate associations with Gandharan carvings. Bussagli does not deny the existence of some of the Iranian elements in the paintings such as the so-called "Iranian gesture", which has been further investigated by Carol Bromberg and Jamsheed Chomsky in their brief articles.[94] The case study of Miran, executed rather shrewdly by Bussagli, brings us back to the bold claim made by Rowland regarding the two "prototypes" of Central Asian arts which I mentioned earlier: the arts of ancient Iran and the heritage of the Hellenistic world, including Greater Gandhara. While such an overly simplified statement ignores the introduction of Chinese elements in Eastern Central Asia as early as the Han, and does not accomplish much in terms of analyzing the completely unrelated styles which appear in other parts of Central Asia, it also has its merits. As one observes in the later murals of the cave sites in Kucha and less so in the arts of Khotan,

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[92] Bussagli, Mario. 1963. *Painting of Central Asia*. Geneva: Skira; [distributed in U.S. by World Pub. Co.]. p. 21
[93] Bromberg, Carol. ``An Iranian Gesture at Miran,'' *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 5 (1991): 45-58
[94] Choksy, Jamsheed. ``Gesture in Ancient Iran and Central Asia,'' *Bulletin of the Asia (*1990): 201-207

Indo-Iranian elements continue to appear in the mural programs of sites in the Tarim Basin. Rowland's argument on the Gandharan legacy at Miran is similar to Bussagli's except that he is even more strongly in favor of what he calls "purely Gandharian" style of the Buddhist sculptures found at Miran, in particular the Devatā from Shrine II. Thus, the Gandharian or simply Hellenic legacy and the question of Gandharian "prototype", perhaps infused with Iranian elements, was one of the major questions which received attention in scholarly research on Central Asia throughout the twentieth century.

This lengthy digression is warranted for it sheds light on the heavily misguided theories behind the idea of a "prototype", particularly when Central Eurasian material is concerned. The term "prototype" here is significant because it brings us back to another major issue in studying the archaeology of early Central Eurasia, that is, the notion of the Scytho-Siberian prototype in the animal art of the steppes. This is a question, which unlike the issue of Hellenistic traces in Central Asian art, still needs to be addressed in more depth. It is thus worth noting that while some chronologies of Central Asia do not actually deal with arts of the Eurasian steppes as they focus on sedentary empires, due to the omnipresence of animal motifs and animal art in tombs throughout Central Asia, one must include the archaeological data of Iron Age nomadic groups in their discourse on Central Asia. Esther Jacobson has answered a lot of the related questions in her investigation of what she refers to as "axial order" in the depiction of animals on golden headdresses and other golden ornaments from Scythian, Sarmatian and Pazyryk burials from 5-3rd c CE in Southern Siberia and Kazakhstan. She talks about the famous Aru-Chaidam (Chinese: Aluchaideng 阿鲁柴登) headdress excavated in Ordos (and often associated with "pre-Xiongnu groups") and the turquoise bird on top, and then brings in comparative examples

of identical birds (also once attached to headgear) from the Scythian Collection of Tsar Peter the Great in the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. [95] Through a plethora of strategically chosen examples, Jacobson addresses the question of Scythian influence and argues that later minor arts of the Chinese northern periphery have a Scythian or perhaps Pazyryk prototype. Similarly, the catalogue "The Golden Deer of Eurasia" examines Sarmatian burials in the Filippovka kurgans[96] in the Ural Mountains and traces the deer motif throughout Eurasia, yet further supporting a Scytho-Siberian prototype for all animal style art in later centuries.

Theoretically, the question addressed here is not profoundly different from the issue of proto-Gandharian or Hellenistic prototypes in Central Asian art proposed by Rowland and Bussagli. Methodologically, however, these issues should not be addressed in the same fashion. Talking about one quintessential prototype in the animal arts of the steppes is problematic. Scythian art carries its own complex problems of craftsmanship and patronage: considering the Scythians' extensive contacts with the Greeks and the spread-out location of their settlements, one expectedly finds Hellenistic motifs in the execution of the golden objects from Scythian burials. Such elements are almost completely lacking

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[95] Jacobson, Esther. 1993. *The Deer Goddess of Ancient Siberia: a Study in the Ecology of Belief.* Leiden: E.J. Brill., p. 75

[96] Vasmer, Max. 1953. *Russisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Heidelberg: C. Winter.
The term kurgan came be traced back to the Old East Slavic language (also commonly referred as Old Russian) used in the 10th -15th centuries in the State of Kievan Rus' but most likely has a Turkic origin. In modern Turkish, "kurgan" has two primary meanings: "fortress" or "burial mound". Its rough equivalents can be found in the Latin-derived word "tumulus" and the English word "barrow". The term "kurgan" came to be widely used in Soviet archeology since Rudenko's excavation in 1927; in his subsequent publication about the Pazyryk finds, he used the term to refer to structures which resulted from heaping layers of earth and stones over wooden chambers in the sites located in the Pazyryk valley., p. 2424

in the animal art of the Xiongnu, which is contemporaneous with the Chinese Han dynasty (202 BCE-220 CE). Some artefacts designated (perhaps hastily) as "Xiongnu" were found in a unique cemetery complex in Majiayuan, Gansu province in China, and date to around the 3rd c CE. The animal motifs there, as is the case with Xiongnu metalwork from the Mongolian steppes, the Ordos Loop and the region west of Lake Baikal, have been reduced to purely abstracted forms; unlike in what Jacobson calls Scythian "prototypes", here the previously recognizable zoomorphs have been reduced to the level of unrecognizability. Gone is the animal combat scene, and so are the idealized proportions of animals of Hellenistic source.

Bringing up the issue of animal style immediately after my discussion of the arts of Greater Gandhara is that one of the problematic frameworks which are still being adopted in the study of Central Asia is the tendency to fall back on the convenience of using a prototype for many of the monuments in question. For instance, a lot of the metalwork found in Xiongnu burials might have been manufactured in Han dynasty China, as was the case with lacquerware inscribed with Chinese characters by Han imperial workshops. We also know that the Chinese-style and Hellenistic-style mirrors incorporated into nomadic burials along the Chinese northern periphery were likely produced in far-flung places which had contact with the Xiongnu.[97] The question of local production needs to be further explored by scholars of Central Asian art history and archaeology.

It seems to be the case that studies of early pastoral peoples focus on an external

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[97] Miller, B. K. (2009). *Power Politics in the Xiongnu Empire* (Order No. 3405356). Available from Dissertations & Theses @ University of Pennsylvania; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

narrative of continuity, shared features, and homogeneity based on superficial similarities of archeological findings dispersed throughout an extremely vast domain. The underlying premise in such narratives is that since all pastoral nomads have an economy dependent on animal husbandry which entails the seasonal use of pasture with a certain set of climate and topographic conditions, one would be able to detect a large number of other shared features, including consistencies in belief systems, associated funerary rites and material cultures. Such conjectures create a false "one fits all" model which leads to the obstinate refusal to recognize clear discrepancies and unrelated phenomena in the cultural domains of different pastoral groups. The desire to find or perhaps even invent a narrative of uninterrupted cultural transmission is rather noticeable in the great majority of works dedicated to the study of Central Eurasia. Whereas the burial of goods of foreign provenance in tombs associated with Indo-European nomads[98] could serve as evidence of a dynamic and well-functioning trade system, it must be noted that a culture normally recognizes and chooses to embrace and retain foreign elements in its own belief system only as long as the alien motifs in question fit well within the symbolic system which had already been in place.[99] Our understanding of an established system of beliefs among early nomads, however, is limited and based on three distinct sets of evidence beyond a limited set of textual sources, which have often been erroneously treated as a single set: inventories from burial complexes, treasures from hoards and monuments above ground (most notably,

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[98] The appearance of Achamenid textiles in the tombs of the Pazyryk culture of the Altai dated to 5th -3th c BCE is one of the most vivid examples of trade or diplomatic exchanges between the elites of two distinct centers of power.

[99] This issue of receptivity is one of the main problems examined in this dissertation. For an in-depth archaeological perspective, see Stockhammer, P.W. 2013. *From Hybridity to Entanglement, from Essentialism to Practice in Archaeology and Culture Mixture*. Archaeological Review from Cambridge 28.1, ed. W. P. Van Pelt. pp 11-28.

rock art and steles). It is worth noting here that in terms of form, function and content, rock art (petroglyphs) is often discussed as if it is conceptually equivalent to images of similar themes which appear in entirely different contexts. Such an approach is utterly flawed and lacks analytical credibility: while seeking to find a relationship between a set of images above and under ground is a worthwhile endeavor and will, in fact, be attempted at times in the present discourse, a direct connection between items from the inventory of a burial chamber and the petroglyphs found in a nearby rock complex cannot not be immediately established unless one were to make a giant logical leap. Similarly, a major misconception in the field of Central Eurasian archaeology comes from the tendency to analyze objects of utilitarian and funerary function as if they had both been consciously designated by the patron to represent a belief system; a stable analytical framework makes a distinction between the usage and reception of an object in a variety of contexts and thus acknowledges the limitations of "mixing and matching" data from a variety of archaeological contexts.

Problems in the Study of Animal Art of the Central Eurasian Steppes

Museum catalogs have continuously treated animal-style art as limited to scenes of ferocious animal combat in which there is a clear-cut distinction between predator and prey, as the former devours the latter. Such an overly simplified designation model stems from the tendency to take the so-called Scytho-Siberian gold embellishments[100] dating to 6th -3rd c BCE as the sole prototype of all animal style. While it mostly steers clear of debating the origins of animal-style art, this study rectifies the narrow view of the repertoire

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[100] The majority of those treasures are now in the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, and a smaller number are preserved in the Ukrainian Museum of Historical Treasures in Kiev and the Magyar Nemzeti Museum in Budapest. A list of museum collections of animal art is found in the Appendix.

of zoomorphic motifs and concepts employed by ancient artisans and their patrons by emphasizing the strategic, often politically motivated depiction of certain animals on decorative objects. I have thus identified several categories which in combination constitute the definition of animal-style art.

In this dissertation, "animal style" is used to describe portable decorative objects which exhibit one or more of four characteristics. A number of the pieces buried in the tombs and parts of hoards discussed in this study are made of at least one zoomorphic juncture, a type of assemblage which consists of the anatomical parts of separate animals: for instance, such a zoomorphic juncture could be comprised of a raptor's beak, deer antlers, and a feline body thus resulting in the creation of a fantastic hybrid. Each segment is often highly stylized and abstracted, sometimes reaching the extent of unrecognizability. I refer to such ingenious replacement of a complete, anatomically-accurate animal as a visual synecdoche: a rhetorical trope which is transferrable to visual vocabulary and can be helpful in articulating the conceptual tools employed in the making of animal art and its incorporation into the larger decorative program of a burial.

The second type of animal-style object is a piece in which mirror images of "twin" animals are reflected on each side of a vertical axis, each appearing as the mirror reflection of the other. This arrangement is most frequently encountered on metal plaques or, in rarer cases, woven onto the fabric of textiles placed in an elite tomb. This category of animal-style is the most persistently present beyond the Iron Age, which, we shall see, marked the peak of animal-style production. Vestiges of this approach to decoration can be found later in Sogdian textiles in early medieval China as well as the arts of the Türks in Central Eurasia and the arts of the Mongols.

Thirdly, animal-style objects could also be composed of a pair of otherwise anatomically complete animals with bodies so contorted and intertwined into each other that they end up forming a homogenous, stylized amalgam of lines and shapes, rather than a hybrid beast or, any recognizable animal, for that matter. This approach to animal style should not be confused with the concept of zoomorphic juncture (visual synecdoche) as the purpose here is not to replace the whole with a fragment, but rather to accentuate the interaction between the zoomorphic figures as well as the abstraction and distortion of their shapes, thus suggesting tension between form and meaning. Such visual interweaving of the animal images has been misinterpreted as "animal combat"; indeed, one sometimes encounters the depiction of a predator biting or grabbing onto the body of its prey, an herbivore of some sort, but in other cases, there is no apparent emphasis on predation as the contours of the two bodies simply complement each other.

The fourth variation of animal-style art describes a type of composition, a specific arrangement of images rather than the content of the images themselves: several animal figures are perched along a purposefully elongated vertical axis, such as in the case of tall, pointed headdresses which exhibit a hierarchy of animals positioned in a vertical arrangement.

The fifth and final category refers to the noticeable exaggeration of specific anatomical parts, usually deer antlers, goat horns or wolf snouts. This accentuation is generally contained within the head of the animal.

It should be noted that the occurrence of one of these five components does not impede the simultaneous presence of one or more of the other components. In many cases,

we shall examine pieces composed of zoomorphic junctures placed as mirror images along a vertical axis; as such, three of the five categories would be present at the same time. The classical period of animal art, that is, the early Iron Age, sees the increasing emphasis on the strategic clustering of these five traits in innovative ways: the local cultures of different geographic regions demonstrate a proclivity toward some of these clusters and thus repudiate the animal-style traits which do not organically fall into the local aesthetics. As each of these five categories has its own origin, historical fate and trajectory of development and social life, it is virtually impossible (and more importantly, futile) to attempt to pinpoint a single origin for animal style, as such likely does not exist. Each of the four categories may indeed have a provenance (for instance, the number of objects with deer antlers serving as a visual synecdoche is the largest in the Iron Age cultures of South Siberia), but the mindful, creative mixture of these categories does not have a single origin and is the result of experimentation, among other factors, of artisans in various centers of production. Therefore, this thesis will show that while the contributions of Rostovtzeff, Gryaznov, Bunker and many other scholars of animal art have been substantial and instrumental to the advancement of the field, they have continuously focused on the wrong thing: the "origin" narrative. Any misrepresentation of animal style has occurred as a consequence of this logical fallacy which in itself is the result of repeatedly asking the wrong questions: one must not seek the origins of animal-style art when, in fact, animal style is a complex term which was never fully defined by any of the leading scholars working on this subject.

The goal of the employment of such variety of visual tropes reliant on zoomorphic images is the making of one unique visual language which can ultimately be defined as

"animal-style". There are three recurrent visual tools which result from the employment of one or more of the said four categories of animal style. Firstly, we have visual metamorphosis as defined by the gradual transmogrification of a said zoomorphic shape into a different zoomrphic shape, or (in rarer instances), into a vegetal pattern of some sort. Such metamorphosis is easily observable in vertically elongated headdresses where the transformation unravels downward, often as imagery placed on a spiral. Secondly, animal style imagery often manifests itself in what I refer to a "frame visual narrative". This visual device conceptually mimics the literary technique which features a story within a story, also known as a "frame narrative" (such as the story of Shahrazad which serves as a background, a framing device for the main stories she tells the Sassanid king every night). As such, one of the four traits such as "twin images" is depicted within the visual frame a second category such as a three dimensional zoomorphic juncture (we encounter the usage of this device in the Pazyryk burials of the Altai). Lastly, the "horror vacui" (from Latin: fear of empty space) device appears repeatedly in almost all of the depictions which shall be discussed throughout the study: regardless of the exact nature and arrangement of the zoomorphic motifs, they are all too often crowded into a narrow space, leaving almost none of the pictorial plane unfilled. As we shall see, this device can be traced to the Bronze Age "deer stone" monuments which feature a vertical slab decorated with visual synecdoche (most often, antlers). To whom and why this sophisticated visual language was intelligible shall be explored in the main body of this work.

Even when provided with these clear-cut categories, one is left with lingering questions. Is Rostovzeff's definition of it being derived from "the depths of Iranism" discussed at the beginning of this chapter, satisfactory in terms of its comprehensiveness

and accuracy? Does the definition of animal art vary depending on the belief system and geographic as well as sociopolitical circumstances of the culture which it is associated with? I already alluded to the tendency to designate all steppe cultures under a common denominator through the "one fits all" model, and all too often, it appears that such superficial categorizations are carried over in scholarly discourses regarding animal art. The fact that animal combat scenes of a predator devouring a smaller animal, supposedly its prey, abound in Scythian art and can also be seen in the art of the Sarmatians and later the Xiongnu, does not automatically lead to the idea that these distinct nomadic groups had largely similar beliefs and aesthetic systems. Similarly, in recent years, several monographs have adopted the approach to trace down a single motif throughout time and space: an example of this method is the tracing of recurrent images of female goddesses under trees or deer with exaggerated antlers. While it is curious that such specific motifs appear repeatedly throughout several nomadic domains, it does not automatically entail the notion of cultural transfer, and it most certainly does not anticipate cultural homogeny measured through the "one fits all" model. Thus, the overly simplistic observation that ancient Iron Age nomads in Eurasia all depicted zoomorphic shapes because animals served as symbols in similar spiritual systems needs to be reexamined through a close study of the specific circumstances of each nomadic group's sociopolitical realm, including the historical backdrop of its migration routes, possible interactions with sedentary populations as well as the peculiarities of its geographic area.

This brings us to a related problem, that is, the discrepancy between real (domesticated and wild) and fantastic animals. The former category refers to animals depicted in an anatomically accurate way, while the latter may point to three different kinds

of zoomorphs: 1. Animal hybrids such as half-deer, half-wolf syncretic beasts 2. Highly stylized, abstracted and thus unrecognizable animals usually depicted through geometric shapes 3. Well-known mythological animals such as griffins or dragons 4. Animals with anthropomorphic features such as bearded goats 5. Life-like animals, depicted individually or in some sort of interaction with each other. The present work marginally explores the potential relationship of the "fantastic" element and the spiritual as well as sociopolitical systems of the groups responsible for the production of these pieces. I propose that it is highly feasible that not all animal motifs in the minor arts of the steppes served as what many have hastily labeled as "symbols". The "animals as symbols" narrative, albeit convenient, is further weakened by the objects' function. A great number of the objects examined in this study come from tombs while others were found in hoards, that is, eclectic treasures of objects buried by the owner with the intention of coming back to retrieve the treasure.[101] The foreign provenance of many items buried in hoards indicates that they were likely given to the owner as gifts or were acquired through military campaign and foreign trade. Thus, their utilitarian function need not be confused with the ritual or highly symbolic function of animal art incorporated in burials. How and why some animal art objects from external cultural spheres were incorporated successfully into the local sphere, is at the core of the present discussion.

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[101] For example, the 14th century Simferopol hoard, associated with the Golden Horde, yielded 328 gold and silver ornaments, many of which are decorated with inlaid precious stones, filigree, openwork chasing, niello, engraving etc. The objects at this site include head ornaments, plaques, sets of belt buckles, earrings, covers for prayer texts and charms, silverware, and *paiza*. The detailed analysis of the items has enabled researches to distinguish between several distinct groups of objects in this hoard, each bearing the stamp of their individual workshop or artisan. The hoard includes objects which were clearly imported from Western Europe and South Asia, as well as goldwork produced within the Mongol empire.

One also needs to challenge the narrative that animal art is solely the art of the early nomads. Sedentary populations along the Northern Black Sea Coast were key producers of animal art as indicated by archaeological finds from the region. In the first century BCE, the Scythian nomads who migrated to the Pontic steppe became largely sedentary and adopted features characteristic of the Greek lifestyle. The Scythians, perhaps due to their cultural interactions with Greek settlers in this region, erected their political and economic center in what is now known as Kamenskoe Gorodische on the Lower Dnieper River. Sarmatian groups inhabiting the Volga region of the Northern Black Sea area most likely led a nomadic lifestyle as evidenced by their grave structures and goods; however, this is not the case with Sarmatian groups who resided in the Caucasus.[102] The archaeological record in the Terek basin, Kuban and Lower Don Basin supports Strabo's claims that some Sarmatians led a sedentary lifestyle.

The analysis of animal style objects in burials, however, entails yet another question: what is the relation between animal and non-animal art in the construction of the burial process and related notions of the afterlife. Does the placement of animal style objects in undisturbed tombs matter and does our perception of the possible symbolic nature of the zoomorphic imagery change when considered together with the rest of the burial's inventory? An excellent example of the strategic importance of such placement is the "frozen" tomb of Berel located in the Altai mountains, modern-day Kazakhstan. Archaeologists uncovered two human and thirteen horse bodies in the kurgan, all adorned with numerous plaques, textiles, harnesses and other decorative objects. Not all the items exhibit the presence of animal forms, although golden and silver animal style

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[102] Sinor, Denis. *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia.* Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

embellishments were prevalent among the tomb goods. The meticulously organized arrangement of the horses in the burial program as well as the decorative masks and plaques point toward a comprehensive ritual which included both animal and non-animal art objects. There was some underlying logic behind the placement of objects, including animal-style art, into the carefully planned interior space of the tomb and the human body.

The incorporation of foreign goods into elite burials could have served a number of purposes. Several notable examples, which have received individual attention, are the Bactrian silver ewer with Hellenistic scenes, Sasanian glass bowl and ringset from Li Xian's tomb of the Northern Zhou (557-581)[103], and a similar silver vessel depicting a hunting scene from the Northern Wei (386-535) tomb of the military official Feng Hetu[104]. Chinese-style bronze mirrors and Chinese inscribed lacquer from nomadic Xiongnu burials in Mongolia, Egyptian ivory and Chinese lacquer from the Kushan city of Begram add to the evidence. Foreign items often receive different treatment in the preparation of the burials, and this is particularly true, for example, of the Chinese-style mirrors found in Xiongnu tombs. Almost all Chinese mirrors were found smashed in a particular pattern while mirrors of Hellenistic and Central Asian origin in the same tombs were discovered intact and placed within luxurious boxes. Incorporating objects of foreign iconography and/or manufacture into a funerary context could potentially have served a double purpose. First, it points to the high status of the deceased, most likely a member of the highest echelons of society as it serves as evidence of his ability to acquire such exotic goods. The

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[103] Zhuo, Wu. "Notes on the Silver Ewer from the Tomb of Li Xian." *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, New Series, 3 (1989): 61-70
[104] Harper, Prudence O. "An Iranian Silver Vessel from the Tomb of Feng Hetu." *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, New Series, 4 (1990): 51-59.

display of nomadic objects in sedentary Chinese burials and vice versa, is often the result of "exotcizing the other". Second, it is feasible that these foreign items played a special role in the construction of the realm in the afterlife: perhaps they were incorporated in funerary ceremonies, or were meant to commemorate the occupant's cosmopolitan endeavors into the afterlife. Given the absence of written documents, one cannot single-handedly determine whether these items had a purely utilitarian function and were only later placed in the inventory of the tombs, or if they were constructed solely for burial purposes, any inflexible insistence on cultural transfer based on such fragmentary finds remains superficial at best. It is important to consider animal art not as an independently occurring form of aesthetics, but also to view it in the context of other styles and conceptual approaches to decoration. This can be accomplished by moving the focus away from speculations regarding the origins of the object and moving towards a close examination of its "materiality", that is, the role its specific appearance and function played in the burial program of the tomb and the life of its owner above ground.

Between Materiality and Visuality: Revisiting Animal-style Art

The present introductory chapter has outlined some of the issues in the methodology and proposed narratives related to the field of Central Eurasian Studies and has pointed to some of the glaring gaps and issues in the study of animal-style art. In this dissertation, I consider each example of animal art first and foremost in terms of its material presence, as defined by its physical manifestation in the burial program of a tomb. The next chapter offers insights into various approaches to decorating the head of the deceased. Headdresses (crowns, diadems), head ornaments and tools (wreaths, combs, masks) are frequently placed on or in close proximity to the heads of the tomb occupants. At times,

the deceased is buried with multiple horses or other animals commonly used by nomads in the earthly realm; these animals also tend to be buried with head ornaments. As such, headgear plays a strategic role in the cosmic arrangement of the burial ceremony and the envisioned space in the afterlife. The study considers the parallels and differences in the head decorations of early Iron Age nomads and their sedentary neighbors. The zoomorphic arrangements in these embellishments of the head frequently unravel through a vertical axis. Time after time, the composition features a particularly elongated arrangement of an amalgam of fantastic hybrids in the process of mystic transformation thus alluding to the notion of movement between realms. All too often the highly abstracted animal imagery is at odds with the conventional interpretation of these convoluted pictorial narratives as animal combat or hunt. As such, the chapter considers the logic and strategies behind the particular placement of luxury ornaments such as belt buckles, horse trappings, ornamental plaques with animal elements directly on the body of the tomb occupant. The repeated placement of certain zoomorphic compositions on specific parts of the body points to something beyond a particular aesthetic preference; it is perhaps indicative of specific spiritual beliefs or funerary practices which included prescribed treatments of the body to accommodate a smooth journey into the afterlife. I qualify and problematize terms such as "totemism" and "animism" which have been used to theorize about animal art and explore the question of how the factor of audience shaped the decisions of the artisan.

Chapter 3 delves into the interior decoration of the tomb, that is, deciphering the animal art imagery encoded into textiles such as rugs, wall and ceiling hangings, and coffin covers, as well as tomb furniture. Chinese tombs from the Zhou and Han dynasty (a prominent example being the 2nd c BCE Mawangdui tomb at Changsha, Hunan) exhibit

rich mural programs replete with diverse painted imagery supposedly meant to guide and nurture the soul in the afterlife. The tombs of the steppe nomads (or sedentary border populations which vigorously interacted with nomads) are generally devoid of wall paintings in their interior design. The lack of murals does not reveal an absence of interest in making use of the burial space; instead, the formula relies on a mixture of zoomorphic, human and landscape imagery embedded within textiles placed around the tomb. Thus, I explore the usage of depictions consistent with the visual tropes of animal-style in funerary interior decorations, and in doing so, I seek to revisit the conventional perspectives on both nomadic funerary art and the function of animal style within this context. It is worth noting that in all three sections of this study, I do not consider animal imagery as isolated depictions but also examine how zoomorphic representations interact with images of human figures and landscape elements which occasionally appear in these narratives. The last section of the chapter addresses the possibility that the depiction of zoomorphs, specifically with regard to deer antlers, has its provenance in the Bronze Age megaliths known as "deer stones" thus ultimately challenging the designation of animal art as Iron Age steppe art.

Having had such a strong presence in the material culture of various nomadic groups across Eurasia, animal style certainly did not disappear overnight; in fact, it continued to be an important agent in the funerary and other decorative arts of nomadic and semi-nomadic populations within the Eurasian steppe belt. Chapter 4 thus revisits and rewrites the "disappearance" narrative. The Komi, Udmurt and Saami people whose settlements flourished along the Kama River in the Ural region from the 7th c BCE to 14th c CE left behind objects which offer novel interpretations of animal-style art, known as

Permian Animal Style. In addition, little has been written about zoomorphic depictions of animal predation and transmogrification in the arts of the Xianbei people who succeeded the Xiongnu polity in the Eastern steppes. The legacy of animal style continued to live in the arts of the Turkic groups which consolidated their political clout in Central Asia from 6th-8th c CE. Animal elements in the Turkic artistic tradition had certainly not disappeared overnight as seen through archaeological remains from the burials of Türks in the Altai. For instance, the Kudyrge tomb complex features close parallels with the traditional animal style associated with Scythian and Xiongnu aesthetics. A facing for a saddle arch made out of horn features a dynamic hunting scene which reiterates some familiar elements of the Saka animal style: the coiled deer is depicted with its head turned backwards. Other 7th - 8th century tombs in the Tuva Republic and the Silk Road oasis of Otrar (present-day Kazakhstan) have also yielded examples of reinterpretations of animal art which had once been abundant in *kurgans* from the region. Lastly, animal style images with symmetrical depictions of animals and intertwined abstracted zoomorphs also appear in the arts of the early Golden Horde (1240s-1502), a successor state of the Mongol Empire. Decorative objects consistent with animal style have been excavated from burials and hoards in the Mongol Empire domain, specifically the Crimean Peninsula, Lower Volga region, and Trans-Ili Alatau (northern Tianshan) Range. The study explores the possible factors which prompted the conscious retention and gradual reinterpretation of animal style in the region of Central Eurasia throughout such a long time period. We begin, however, in the middle of the first millennium BCE when the story of animal style unfolds.

Chapter 2: The Cosmic Headdress: The Theater of Politics of Animal-style Regalia

In its most commonly encountered usage, a head ornament appears at the top of a set of regalia strategically placed on the body of a person of elite status. Prominent variations in symbols of power and wealth exist in the execution of headdresses in different parts of the ancient world, thus conveying the notion that each political entity made a conscious decision to exhibit its political clout in a specific way. The usage of the term regalia here carries the possibility of a failure to discriminate between different possible functions of headdresses depending on their context of usage. While some of the lavish headpieces which once decorated the heads of the members of the nomadic elite could have simply emulated the regal look of the deceased in their life on earth, there also exists the possibility that certain headdresses were manufactured specifically for the burial ceremony and thus served a purely ritual purpose as part of the funerary tradition. The presence of a headdress in a funerary context carries at least two possibilities for its original function. Due to severe plundering in the majority of graves throughout the Central Eurasian steppes, headdresses were rarely found directly placed on the head of the deceased. Most of the current data with regard to headgear in ancient Central Eurasia comes from later reconstructions based on scattered objects such as textiles, fragments of human hair, and precious metal plaques, all of which are discovered in close proximity to the tomb occupant's head.

It is thus significant to consider the headdress not as an isolated component of the attire of the deceased, but as an organic element of a calculated formula which also includes other body embellishments meant to enhance its visual and psychological impact, its potential as an agent enacting a space of performance. As will be observed throughout this

section, headdresses often served as the "peak" of a mountain-like, pyramid-like, or spiral hierarchical construction of a whole body suit made of lavish jewels. It creates a lively visual narrative rather than a static decorative scheme.

The discussion does not follow a temporal sequence. Due to the scarce findings in previously looted graves, their extremely large geographic scope, as well as the uncertainty with regard to the dating of many tombs which were looted or unlawfully excavated, a discussion based on chronology is almost impossible and would certainly fall short of addressing the stylistic themes, continuities and independent developments in the multiple regions discussed in the study. The easternmost discoveries in the Ordos Cultural zone in Northern China are roughly contemporaneous with the archaeological culture of their west neighbors, the Pazyryk-type cultures of the Altai mountains as well as those of the Kazakh steppes. The earliest site in the eastern steppe zone is Arzhan-1 which has been tentatively dated to the 8th century BCE, but has not yielded a large number of animal-style objects. Tombs west of the Caspian Sea, once designated by Rostovtzeff as a possible prototype for animal art have yielded a significant amount of animal-style art, the earliest of which dates to the seventh century and is thus later than the site of Arzhan in the Tuva basin of South Siberia. We start out discussion east-west not in an attempt to propose the possibility that animal style has its provenance in the eastern steppes. As mentioned earlier, this study does not argue in favor of a single prototype or antecedent. Rather, we explore in detail the aesthetic choices made by nomadic (and sometimes sedentary border) elites in each "stronghold" of production along the Eurasian steppes.

Envisioning the Body: Animal-style Regalia between East and West in the early Iron Age (7th -3rd c BCE)

In light of the recent boom in scholarly interest in the exchange between China and its Central Asian neighbors, it is essential to keep in mind that China's geography is such that there existed two natural conduits for exchange with the rest of Eurasia in the first millennium BCE and the early years of the first millennium CE. In reality, in the ancient past, there were only two practical routes which would have led travelers into Central Asia. One route was the Hexi corridor on the northern edge of the Tibetan plateau, running between the Qilian mountains and the Gobi Desert. The travel was facilitated by the construction of the Yumen Pass by Han Wudi (r. 141 BCE- 87 BCE) just west of Dunhuang in present-day Gansu province. The pass led to the desert edge roads which extended into the Taklamakan Desert.[105] The second route for transmission ran across the narrow steppe region north of the Yellow River around the Gobi desert ultimately leading to the Mongolian steppe, the Altai mountains and further west into the Kazakh steppe. The introduction of new copper and bronze technologies as well as artistic products from the West most likely happened through the steppe route. Indeed, the principal movement of nomads between the seventh and second century BCE started from the Mongolian-Manchurian grassland. As such, the cultural zone covering the Ordos grassland which takes up a prominent section of the northern frontier just to the east of the Tarim Basin, was a strategic center of nomadic activity, particularly in light of the archaeological finds discovered in the region.

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[105] Cunliffe, Barry. 2015. *By Steppe, Desert, and Ocean: the Birth of Eurasia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press., p. 97

Animal Art of the Ordos Loop in the 7th-3rd c BCE

A Chinese archeological expedition in 1972 unearthed 218 golden objects from two graves in the sandy lands of a commune near the site of Aluchaideng 阿魯柴登, a vast area of grassland located in the Hanggin Banner 杭錦旗 of modern-day Inner Mongolia at the bend of the Yellow River. [106]Aluchaideng is strategically situated in the Ordos (E'erduosi 鄂爾多斯) Plateau at the edge of the Muu Us sandyland. The expedition's data led Chinese scholars to the conclusion that this valuable group of objects, which also happened to contain a significant number of silver items and stones for inlay, might have belonged to a nomadic group known by the name *Linhu* 林胡, or "hu of the forest". There does not exist any clear historical record regarding this group of people. The only two references to them come from the *Shiji*, which briefly mentions that the vicinity of present-day Taohongbala (桃红巴拉), one of the Ordos Cultural Zone's major archeological sites, was once inhabited by nomads called *Linhu*.[107] The *Xiongnu liezhuan* mentions the *Linhu* in a general discussion regarding the generic group of the Donghu, during the reign of Duke Wen of Jin and Duke Mu of Qin in the 7th century BCE:

當是之時，秦晉為彊國。晉文公攘戎翟，居于河西圜、洛之閒，號曰赤翟、白翟。秦穆公得由余，西戎八國服於秦，故自隴以西有綿諸、緄戎、翟、獂

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[106] Tian, Guangjin, and Suxin Guo. 1986. E'erduosi qingtong qi. 鄂尔多斯式青銅噐. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe

[107] Nienhauser, William H. and J. Michael Farmer. 2010. *The Grand Scribe's Records Volume IX, Part II*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 250, 285

之戎，岐、梁山、涇、漆之北有義渠、大荔、烏氏、朐衍之戎。而晉北有

林胡、樓煩之戎，燕北有東胡、山戎。 [108]

By that time, the Qin and Jin were the most powerful states. Duke Wen of Jin ousted the Di people and forced them to flee west of the Yellow River, in the area between the Luo and Yun rivers, where they were called the Red Di and the White Di. Soon after, Duke Mu of Qin, having secured the assistance of the Youyu, managed to make the eight western kingdoms resign to his power. Thus to the west of Long, there were the Mianzhu, the Hunrong, and the Diyuan; in the area north of Mount Qi and Liang and the Jing and Qi rivers, there were the Yiqu, Dali, Wuzhi and Quyuan. North of Jin, there were the Linhu (Forest Hu) and the Loufan; north of Yan, there were the Eastern Hu and Mountain Rong.

In the same section, Sima Qian goes on to describe how the briefly mentioned *Linhu* might have been defeated by the state of Zhao during the Warring States Period in 265 BC:

其後義渠之戎筑城郭以自守，而秦稍蠶食，至於惠王，遂拔義渠二十五城。惠王擊魏，魏盡入西河及上郡于秦。秦昭王時，義渠戎王與宣太后亂，有二子。宣太后詐而殺義渠戎王於甘泉，遂起兵伐殘義渠。於是秦有隴西、北地、上郡，筑長城以拒胡。而趙武靈王亦變俗胡服，習騎射，北破林胡、樓煩。[109]

Thereupon, the Yiqu of the Northern Barbarians erected walls and towns for their own defense, yet, the State of Qin slowly encroached on their territory. By the time of King Hui, the Qin had subjugated twenty-five walled cities. As King Hui attacked the State of Wei, the later handed the Xihe and Shang commanderies[110] over to Qin. During the reign of King Zhao of Qin, the King of the Yiqu had a love affair with King Zhao's mother, who went on to have two sons. The mother deceived the King of Yiqu, murdered him, mobilized troops and destroyed the Yiqu. Thus, the Qin State procured the commanderies of Longxi, Beidi, and Shang, and erected a wall to defend (themselves) against the nomads. Yet King Wuliang of Zhao changed the customs by wearing nomad attire, studying mounted archery; he destroyed the northern Forest Hu and Loufan.

After the defeat of the Forest Hu and Loufan, King Wuliang (r. 325-299) ordered the construction of a great wall starting from Tai at the foot of the Yin Mountain range. The Forest Hu people were never mentioned by Chinese historians after that.[111] It is plausible that they fled to join the alliance which formed along the Chinese northern frontier after the 2nd century BCE, or that they became culturally encased. Various theories regarding the languages spoken by the nomadic groups in the Chinese northern zone have been proposed. E. Dulleyblank's argument is particularly noteworthy: there is a good reason to believe that the Di and Xiongnu in Han times spoke an Altaic language, and the

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[110] The Shang commandery corresponds to modern-day Northern Shaanxi province. The Xihe commandery was located in present-day northern Shanxi province.

[111] Ma, Liqing. 2005. *Yuan Xiongnu, Xiongnu lishi yu wenhua de kaogu xuetan suo*. Huhehaote Shi: Nei Menggu da xue chu ban she., pp. 220-225

Xiongnu were in fact successors of the Yiqu and appeared for the first time in the Ordos zone in pre-Han times.[112] According to Pulleyblank, the polity which became known as the Xiongnu were akin to people known earlier as Rong or Di who led a sedentary lifestyle in the the uplands of Shaanxi and Shanxi Provinces between the Wei and Fen Valleys and the steppe; their conversion to pastoral nomadism was a consequence of the spread of new military techniques from the west around the year 800 BCE.[113] Nevertheless, the countless, scarcely documented migrations in and out of the Ordos Loop during the Warring States, the brief Qin conquest and the Han dynasty seem to indicate that it is virtually impossible to reconstruct the exact ethnicity and affiliation of the elite member of nomadic society buried in Aluchaideng or any other of the Ordos sites.[114] One clarification must, however, be made here: the cultural remains found in Ordos dated prior to the Han dynasty likely belonged to a group of people who were not closely related to the later northerners, known collectively as Xiongnu. Thus, the unfortunate tendency observed at museums around the world to classify objects uncovered in Ordos as "Xiongnu" regardless of their date and style has caused misrepresentations of important funerary art, one of which is the inventory from the Aluchaideng site.

The findings from Aluchaideng date to the period between 403 and 221 BCE and they are thus contemporary with the Warring States Period in China.[115] Various regalia

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[112] Pulleyblank, E. "The Peoples of the Steppe Frontier in Early Chinese sources". Migracijske teme 15 (1999), 1-2: 35-61
[113] Ibid, p. 37
[114] Other Ordos sites which date to the Warring States include Taohongbala, Buertage Xiang, Guosinyaozi, Xigoupan, Yulongtai, Sujigou, Maoqinggou. The majority of these archaeological treasures did not contain headdresses, yet they will be examined in our discussion of other types of objects in the following chapter.
[115] Tian Guangjin and Guo Suxin. 1980. "Neimenggu Aluchaideng faxian de Xiongnu yiwu" (The Xiongnu remains discovered at Aluchaideng, Inner Mongolia): *Kaogu,* no.4, pp. 343-349

were excavated here, but the highlight of the discovery is a golden headdress, embellished with a plethora of animal motifs. The idiosyncratic headpiece consists of a cap-like upper segment which is attachable to a second component, a spiral base which functioned as a headband. (See Fig. 2.1) The whole piece would have been sewn onto a larger textile and placed on the individual's head, thus probably serving the function of a crown to be used either during a funerary ceremony or a feast in celebration of a military victory. Regardless of whether the object was meant solely for use in the afterlife or had been previously worn in the tomb occupant's life on earth, there is no doubt that the headdress points to the elite status of the patron and the exceptionally high quality of the craftsman's execution. The top is lavishly decorated with a large golden eagle which stands 7.3 cm high. The bird has a movable head made out of turquoise and its feathers are rendered in a rather naturalistic fashion. Indubitably, the craftsman had consciously placed emphasis on the visual presence of the bird as the focal point of the composition, hence its prominent placement on the very top of the arrangement coupled with the choice of a vivid color and realistic proportions of the bird. The movement of the head is made feasible due to the attachment of the bird's head and tail to its body through the usage of golden wires to allow movement every time the person wearing the headpiece tilts their head.[116] The granulation technique, which can be traced to Mesopotamia in the third millennium BCE, is employed here in the making of the bird's neckband.[117]

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[116] Zhao, Fangzhi. 1996. *Cao yuan wenhua: youmu minzu de guangkuo wutai.* 草原文化：遊牧民族的廣闊舞台 Di 1 ban. Xianggang: Shang wu yin shu guan., p. 99
[117] So, Jenny F., and Emma C. Bunker. 1995. *Traders and Raiders on China's Northern Frontier.* Seattle: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, in association with University of Washington Press, p. 74
In Aluchaideng, archaeologists also uncovered an earring made with granulation.

Figure 2.1 Headdress from Aluchaideng, 5th -3rd c BCE, Inner Mongolia

Animal motifs have a strong presence in the execution of the scalloped cap of the headdress. The meticulously implemented ornamentation on the cap features four wolves preying on four rams. The depiction of a scene in which a ferocious wolf is attacking a caprid is not only repeated four times, thus enhancing the sense of closed directionality within the pictorial plane of the narrow bands, but in each case, the image itself is highly stylized and hardly identifiable. Since there is no attempt to recreate realistic anatomical proportions, at first glance, it is almost impossible to distinguish the predator from the prey. There is a strong sense of hybridity in the zoomorphic motifs. The term hybridity is being used here to point out the blurred or lacking visual boundary between the various zoomorphs present in the composition: instead of drawing a stark contrast between the predator and its prey, the craftsman has chosen to depict them as an organic, composite being, as if one gradually transforms and terminates into the other.

The notion of graphic transformation continues to develop in the rest of the piece. The lower part of the headdress, a three-part handband, takes on a meandering form which creates a natural visual continuity. (See Fig. 2.2) The spiral incorporates three bands of

curvilinear shapes to emulate the so-called "braided rope design". The very end of each band culminates into the image of a different animal--a ram with curved horns, a kneeling horse, and a crouching wolf with a slightly exaggerated snout. The placement of these images, specifically the manner in which they are embedded into the piece, is meant to emulate the notion of dynamic transformation rather than animal combat in which animals hunt, bite and devour each other. The transition from the ram, which in a typical hunting scenario is considered prey, towards a rapacious predator supports the notion of transfiguration: the small animal has gradually turned into a beast, and thus, the ornament serves as a pictorial plane within which the narrative of transfiguration can unfold.

Figure 2.2 Lower part of the Aluchaideng headdress

The "braded rope" pattern of ornamentation is common among various nomadic peoples in the Altai Mountain region of Siberia[118], which was once home to the Pazyryk steppe culture to be discussed later in this chapter. Whereas this decorative pattern could be the preserve of steppe cultures to the northwest of Ordos, on the other hand, the presence of a bird at the very top and the integration of wolves and birds within the body of the

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[118] A great number of torques with this pattern were likely plundered from Siberian tombs and entered the famous collection of Tsar Peter the Great

object, are redolent of Zhou dynasty bronze styles. [119] In this piece, one observes a symbiosis between artistic elements characteristic of sedentary and nomadic cultures inhabiting adjacent geographic regions around the 4th century BCE. It appears that the notion of visual hybridity is not only present in the style of the headpiece, but it is also at the core of its production.

That said, the presence of syncretic, composite beings which defy nature's realistic dimensions and proportions is not tantamount to a lack of search for visual order among the Ordos nomadic consumer of the early Iron Age. The creation of an imagined world where a hybridity of motifs takes precedence should not be confused with the absence of a strictly defined order in the visual impact of the piece. For instance, the incorporation of a clearly demarcated vertical axis into the carefully sectioned cap divides the goats and predators into two groups of mirror images, thus creating the illusion of perfect symmetry.

Equally successful is the conscious attempt to arrive at a symmetrical, mirror composition in four of the fifty-five golden animal-style plaques found at Aluchaideng. The objects, worn separately from the headdress as part of the occupant's attire show a clearly delineated axis which separates the scenes into two mirror images. (See Fig. 2.3 and 2.4) The sense of symmetry in this piece is also conveyed through a vertical axis. While the optics of the head ornament create a spiral, top-to-bottom axial order that unravels the narrative in a gradual, meandering motion, in the plaques, the vertical arrangement manifests itself in a simple mirror image. [120] The symmetrical composition features two

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[119] One example is a 5th-century bronze vessel decorated with a stylized eagle-shaped bird on the top excavated from Shandong province.

[120] Reflected images were not uncommon in the Central Plains at the time of the Warring States period, and thus, the preference for this symmetrical order might have a provenance from the heartland of China. An example redolent of the Aluchaideng symmetrical imagery was excavated

tigers attacking an ox; the imagery is once again stylized and has reached a high level of abstraction. Altogether, there are four heads of feline-like creatures, two on each side of the vertical axis. The small holes at the edges of the plaques exhibit traces of wear as a result of having been attached to belt hooks.[121] The ornaments were once likely placed symmetrically as pairs on the opposite sides of a belt worn by the wealthy tomb occupant. The number and arrangement of animal creatures echoes that of the golden cap which also depicts four pairs of animals. Here, the predators appear in pairs of reflected images, while the supposed prey, a stylized ox, is placed at the very top of the arrangement. This strategic placement is strongly reminiscent of the Aluchaideng headdress where the bird was placed on the top of a complex set of predatory scenes leading to metamorphosis.

Figure 2.3 Gold Plaques with Tigers Preying on an Ox from Aluchaideng, Warring States (480-222 BC)

from Tomb 30 at Xinzhuangtou, Yi Xian, Hebei province as well as Shihuigou in Ejen Khoroo Banner, Western Inner Mongolia. The trend of producing reflected imagery might have continued all the way through Northern Qi (550-577).
See Valenstein, Suzanne G. 2007. *Cultural convergence in the Northern Qi period: a flamboyant Chinese ceramic container: a research monograph*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art.
[121] Kessler, Adam Theodore. 1994. *Empires Beyond the Great Wall: the Heritage of Genghis Khan*. Los Angeles, Calif: Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County., p. 47

Figure 2.4 Detail of Gold Plaque in 2.3

Other ornaments from the costume of a wealthy member of the elite buried at Aluchaideng include individual animals such as ten hedgehog-shaped golden plaques, as well as one plaque depicting a fantastic, composite hybrid. The hedgehog, a rare zoomorphic representation in Ordos art, is depicted as if in the process of climbing onto something, and its snout is overly extended.[122] In addition, its spines are rendered in the shape of decorative, stylized swirl-like patterns, creating a palpable texture.(See Figure 2.5) In addition, several stylized tiger heads with open jaws showing the animals' teeth spruce into additional raptor heads. The body of the beast is decorated with turquoise inlay, as was the bird on top of the headdress arrangement. Two dragons hold their stylized prey in their beaks; the prey appears as a protrusion of the larger animal.

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[122] Kessler, Adam Theodore. 1994. *Empires beyond the Great Wall: the heritage of Genghis Khan*. Los Angeles, Calif: Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County., p. 55

Figure 2.5 Animal-style gold ornaments, Aluchaideng, Warring States (480-222 BCE)

Xigoupan (西沟畔), Inner Mongolia (内蒙古)

A closer look at another cemetery complex in the Ordos Loop, the site of Xigoupan, sheds some light on the extensive geographic scope and enduring impact of the Ordos style. A total of twelve tombs were excavated at this site located in the Jungar Banner in Inner Mongolia. Xigoupan was occupied by nomadic groups for an extended period of time, from the middle of the Warring States Period to the middle of Western Han Dynasty (300 BCE-118 BCE). Tombs 1, 2 and 3 date to the Warring States period, while tombs 4, 9, 10 and

11 are from the early Western Han.[123]

The majority of the tombs with a Warring States date convey a sense of social hierarchy. For instance, one of the tombs yielded numerous golden and silver ornaments with elaborate designs, while the other two had only a few iron tools and bronze trappings. Some of the golden and silver plaques with animal style scenes had Chinese-character inscriptions on the back. Based on the epigraphic analysis, Tian dates the findings to the Warring States Period.[124] Among the numerous golden plaques, a scene of interaction between a tiger and a boar stands out. (See Fig.2.6) The tiger appears to be biting the torso of the boar which, in turn, is attempting to suffocate the enemy. The bodies, depicted in relief, are contorted and highly stylized, making the composition appear crowded and conceptual.

Figure 2.6 Golden plaque, Xigoupan, 5th -4th c BCE

The frame of the plaque is embellished with the familiar "braided rope" design

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[123] There originally had been nine tombs dated to the Warring States period, however, out of these nine, only four remain intact.

[124] Yikezhaomeng Wenwu Gongzuozhan and Neimenggu Wenwu Gongzuodui. "Xigoupan Xiongnu mu" (A Xiongnu Tomb at Xigoupan). *Wenwu* (1980) 7: 1-10

already seen on the Aluchaideng headband. While the scene here is undoubtedly meant to convey the psychological impact of the encounter between two beasts, in reality, the impact of the image does not stem from a realistically depicted scene of combat. If the viewer searches for specific details indicating the predation, he or she would become lost in the busy composition; rather than conveying or emulating a scene which would normally occur in nature, the artisan has opted for an abstracted, decorative and highly conceptual representation of exaggerated, unrecognizable animal-like forms in a flowing transition rather than clear combat. This mode of depiction echoes the stylistic choices made by the artisan behind the Aluchaideng pieces.

Another parallel with Aluchaideng appears in the discovered "mirror image" plaques, which are strongly reminisced of the tiger-ox scenes from the four plaques excavated at Aluchaideng. (See Fig. 2.7) Several plaques excavated from Tomb 2 depict crouching horses facing each other, reflected images of deer with extremely exaggerated antlers, as well as fantastic beats on the opposite sides of an axis.
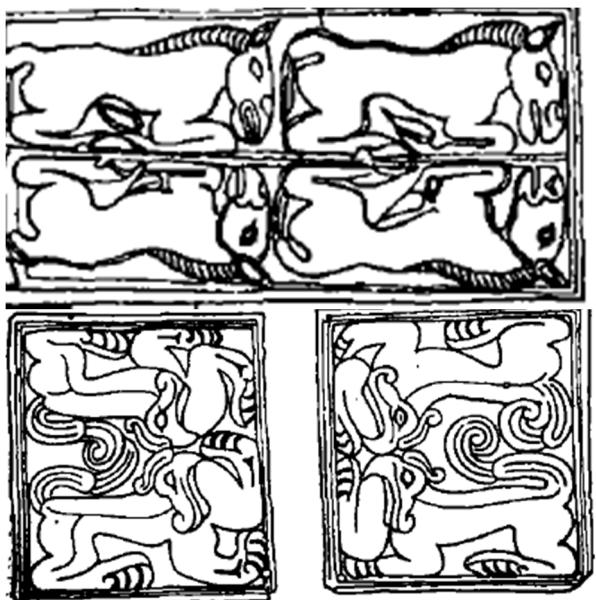
Figure 2.7 Various ungulates depicted as "reflected" images, Xigoupan Tomb 2

Figure 2.8 Headdress ensemble, Xigoupan cemetery, Early Western Han dynasty

In Tomb 4, archeologists uncovered a golden headdress and earrings which were part of a larger headdress ensemble, dated to the 2nd -1st c BCE.[125] (See Fig. 2.8). The headgear was found on the interred woman's head. According to the excavators, the headdress ensemble in this grave was produced in the early Western Han dynasty, which dates later than both Aluchaideng and Shenmu pieces. The earrings feature openwork pendants of jade carved into patterns of a rampant tiger and a dragon amid cloud-like scrolls, attached to gold plaques decorated with stags.[126] The stags are produced in relief, and once served as mountings for green jade inlay, of which a fragment remains intact.[127] The headdress is also constructed of gold, hammered, shaped and inlayed with mother-of-pearl, quartz, agate, amber and glass beads.[128] The ensemble of headdress and earrings was attached to the head of the deceased, evidently a woman of high status.[129]

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[125] Linduff, Katheryn M., and Karen Sydney Rubinson. 2008. *Are all warriors male?: gender roles on the ancient Eurasian Steppe*. Lanham: AltaMira Press., p. 58
[126] Ibid
[127] Ibid
[128] Kessler, Adam Theodore. 1994. *Empires beyond the Great Wall: the heritage of Genghis Khan*. Los Angeles, Calif: Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County.
[129] Ibid

Scholars continue to suggest that since the design of the earrings' jade pendants and those of the stone plaques are similar to the ones found on contemporaneous Han ornamental objects, items such as these must be of Chinese manufacture, created specifically for trade with the northern nomads at the various frontier markets.[130] On the other hand, cloisonné was introduced into China from Western Asia as new metallurgical techniques found their way to Chinese-based workshops in the late second century CE.[131] The introduction of granulation from Mesopotamia into China was already made clear at the beginning of our discussion with the technical treatment of the bird on top of the Aluchaideng crown. At the end of the second century BCE, numerous belt buckles and other personal adornments made with the cloisonné and granulation techniques were being produced in China.[132] Insisting on a specific place of production, especially in the absence of an inscription identifying the workshop, is a futile; yet, one can confidently conclude that artisans in China, its northern frontier and further west were aware of each other's work.

Nalin'gaotu Village (纳林高兔村), Shenmu County (神木县), Shaanxi province (陕西省)

In 1976, a Warring States burial mound was excavated at the site of Narin-guutu (Chinese: Nalin'gaotu) in Shenmu County, Shaanxi province.[133] In terms of its material culture and dating, the site offers parallels with the Aluchaideng hoard. One of the golden objects found here is a fantastic zoomorph with hybrid features which stands 11 cm tall.

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[130] Ibid
[131] Bunker 1995, p. 74
[132] A number of such examples can be found in the collections of the Freer and Sackler Galleries in Washington DC, as well as the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
[133] Dai Yingxin and Sun Jiaxiang, "Shaanxi Shenmu xian chutu Xiongnu wenwu," (Xiongnu artefacts excavated from Shenmu County, Shaanxi Province). *Wenwu 1983.12*: 23-30

(See Fig. 2.9). The hoofed animal has a griffin head in place of its tail, dramatically curved raptor's beak, and exaggerated and stylized deer antlers which evolve into four additional griffin heads. Given the execution of the cast zoomorph, it is likely that the object was originally part of a headdress ensemble similar to the Aluchaideng piece; the raptor was probably attached on top of a larger head ornament.[134] It has been suggested that the raptor-related imagery and the complex arrangement of highly stylized animals speak of the high status of the deceased as such intricate items must have been produced by workshops in different Zhou dynasty states to satisfy the economic demand of a new clientele, that is, the growing elite of pastoral nomads along China's northern periphery in the Ordos Desert.[135] The few pieces of evidence often used to support this claim come from the tomb of a bronze caster in the region of present-day Xi'an, not far from the site of Shenmu, where archaeologists uncovered ceramic models for casting Zhou bronze vessels which exhibit some of the features of metalwork discovered in the Ordos Cultural Zone.[136] The main concern in previous literature on this important piece of funerary art has been finding a resolution to the ultimate issue of whether one should talk about a purely "steppe" style or a Chinese style fitted to the demands of the steppe elite.[137] Do objects such as the head

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[134] Other noteworthy objects from the site include five recumbent silver deer ornaments, as well as three silver and two gold crouching tigers; none of the animals seem to be depicted in a scene with another zoomorphic or human figure.

[135] So, Jenny F., and Emma C. Bunker. 1995. *Traders and raiders on China's northern frontier*. Seattle: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, in association with University of Washington Press., p.96

[136] Shaanxisheng Kaogu Yanjiusuo. "Xi'an beijiao Zhanguo zhutong gongjiang mu fajue jianbo", *Wenwu* 2003 (9): 4-14; Wu, Xialong. 2017. *Material Culture, Power and Identity in Ancient China.*, p. 126

[137] Linduff, Katheryn. "Production of Signature Artifacts for the Nomad Market in the State of Qin during the Late Warring States Period in China", Paper Presented at *Metallurgy and Civilization: Eurasia and Beyond: The 6th International Conference on the Beginnings of the Use of Metals and Alloys.* 2009

ornaments from Aluchaideng and Shenmu prove that we encounter, time after time, an intrinsically Chinese concept in a steppe funerary narrative, or vice-versa?

Figure 2.9 Head ornament, 4th -2nd c BCE, Shenmu County, Shaanxi Province

It is worth briefly considering the idea that it was Chinese, rather than local production that gave rise to the so-called "Ordos" steppe style. The region of Shenmu county in Shaanxi province has been significant for the study of the cultural transfer between sedentary and nomadic populations not only during the Zhou dynasty but also after the disappearance of the Ordos elite of the 4th century BCE and the incursion of the so-called Xiongnu. Thus, for instance, the inventory from an Eastern Han dynasty (25 CE-220 CE) tomb located in Dabaodang in Shenmu county offers examples of exuberant wall paintings of composite, hybrid animals often abstracted to the level of unrecognizability, not unlike the animals incorporated into the headdresses.[138] One of the door beams at

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[138] Under the constant attacks of the Eastern Han dynasty forces in the 2nd c CE, the Northern Xiongnu was forced to move westward while the Southern Xiongnu moved towards the region of present-day Shaanxi province; such a migration route presupposes the intensive interaction between sedentary Chinese populations and nomadic groups as evidenced by eclectic tomb plans and burial inventories such as Dabaodang Tomb 23 and 24 in Shenmu, as well as the Sunjiazhai cemetery in Datong. Southern Xiongnu burials bear the following features, all of which are

Dabaodang Tomb 18 depicts in profile a fantastic creature with an ox-like head, exaggerated snout and eyes, and wings instead of arms. These zoomorphic motifs terminate in a human-like torso. The creature appears to be seated on a stool of some sort. The scene also features a wild bear with human arms, abstracted meandering curves likely meant to replicate landscape elements, and more traditional Han dynasty symbols like the "bird in the sun" and "toad in the moon". (See Fig. 2.10) Another relief from a rafter in Tomb 24 at Dabaodeng shows a man hunting an elephant-like hybrid with exaggerated curvilinear antlers on its head. (See Fig. 2.11) These protrusions echo the decorative motives of the natural landscape at the bottom of the image, right under the animals' feet.

Figure 2.10 Mural with fantastic creatures, Dabaodang Tomb 28, Eastern Han dynasty, Shenmu County

present at Dabaodang: a Han-style brick chamber, animal sacrifices, pottery and metalwork typical of the material culture of Ordos nomads.
See: Song, Yanru. "E'erduosi Zhoubian ji Zhongyuan Diqu de Han Dai Xiongnu Wenhua Fenxi" (Analysis of the Han dynasty Xiongnu culture in regions neighboring Ordos and the Central Plains). Kaogu yu wenwu (2001) 6: 75
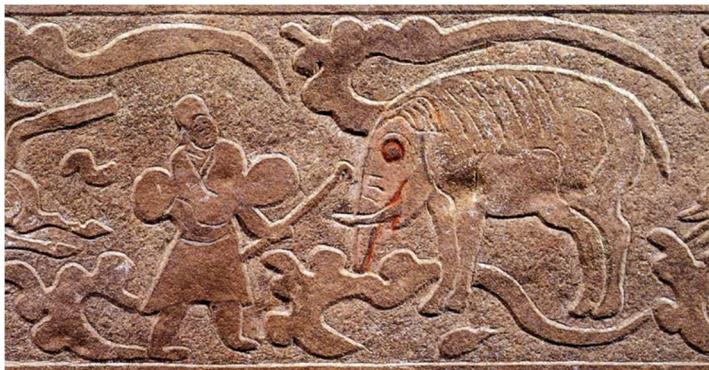
Figure 2.11 Mural with a human and an animal hybrid, Dabaodang Tomb 24, Eastern Han dynasty, Shenmu County, Shaanxi Province

This brief digression into the mural program of nomadic tombs with a Han layout located beyond the immediate area of the Ordos Cultural Zone, is warranted by the insights it offers with regard to the two crown ornaments. Both in the Eastern Han murals and the earlier in date headdresses, one encounters the incorporation of the anatomy of different animals into one main body as well as the strong exaggeration and distortion of parts of the head such as antlers and horns. Hybridity as a key element in the depiction of animal scenes seems to have served a continuously essential role in the aesthetic choices which dominated the visual environment of the northern Chinese frontier zone and also the regions slightly further south into the Chinese heartland.

Ordos burials dated to the same period as the ones at Aluchaideng and Shenmu have yielded multiple animal style plaques and a pair of earrings, which may have been originally attached to a larger headpiece. Tracing a particular prototype or pinpointing the provenance of production is thus a futile endeavor in light of the exuberance of eclectic imagery offered by these objects.[139] The more productive question which needs to be asked

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[139] Occasionally the object unearthed from some sites have inscriptions which identify the workshop and date of their production. Such is the case with a golden plaque with a tiger-boar predation scene from Xigoupan cemetery in Inner Mongolia; See: CPAM. 1980. "Xigoupan

with regard to animal imagery recurring in Ordos head ornaments relates to the function, material presence of the object itself, and its particular role in the life of the tomb occupant both under and above ground. The imagery of the headdress at Xigoupan provides valuable information regarding the perception of the animal form in the burial ceremony. While the presence of zoomorphic depictions in the Xigoupan example is not particularly accentuated, the arrangement of the imagery seems to be a visual metaphor: the deer with stylized antlers and accentuated snout is placed on top of a more abstracted, highly sculptural and three-dimensional composition of a tiger and a dragon. There seems thus to exist a clearly defined sense of a "hierarchy" as one animal is being placed above a scene of two others which are engaged in an intense interaction, a pattern with which we are already familiar from Aluchaideng. The two animals, however, as was the case with previously examined pieces, are rendered in such an abstracted way that there is hardly any real sense of natural combat. In fact, it is almost impossible to distinguish the two animals in the crowded composition. Complex meandering movements take precedence over the literal representation of violence and ferociousness.

Neither the eagle-like bird, placed on top of the Aluchaideng headdress, nor the raptor-like, fantastic beast from the cemetery at Nalin'gaotu are motifs unique to the Chinese northern border, or even the Eastern steppe zone. The collection of Tsar Peter the Great, now held in the Hermitage Museum of St. Petersburg offers some informative parallels. Peter the Great was allegedly fascinated by nomadic artefacts and his interest in the art of the so-called Scythians was triggered by an encounter with the scholar and mayor of Amsterdam N. Witsen (1641-1717). The later was familiar with trade of precious objects

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Xiongnu Mu" (The Xiongnu tombs at Xigoupan) Wenwu 1980(7): 1-10

as he had spent a considerable amount of time in Moscow, where he came across the trading of golden regalia from plundered "Tatar" graves.[140] Thus, Tsar Peter first became aware of the existence and demand for such objects. In 1715, a son was born to Peter the Great, and the lords all hurried to offer their congratulations by presenting Empress Catherine with luxurious gifts. Surprisingly, it was Nikita Demidov, a son of a serf, who had worked his way up to become the richest mine-owner in the Ural mountains, that lay before the royal court the most impressive and unforgettable gift of all.[141] He presented one thousand rubles in coins and a collection of golden objects with zoomorphic motifs. The only known fact about the mysterious origins of those pieces was that they were excavated from the tombs in Siberia, which had been plundered by Russians for a number of years, despite the resentment of the natives.[142] The tsar's early interest in the minor arts of the early nomads developed into a lifelong passion for collecting objects from the Siberian steppe. He ordered the systematic documentation of all objects. Currently, there are 240 golden items from his collection, many of which are part of the permanent exhibition of Scythian material in the Hermitage Museum. Alas, none of the objects which entered Peter the Great's collection came as a result of archaeological expeditions, and they lacked any scientific documentation or record. As they were most likely the product of plunder and illegal trade in Russia, the majority of art historians have approached these objects with caution and have expressed reluctance to use them as evidence in scholarly arguments. Be

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[140] After Witsen's death, the Tsar attempted to get hold of his large collection of nomadic gold, yet he was unsuccessful. The collection was allegedly sold at auction in 1728. No clear record exists to indicate what happened to these objects after that. That said, Witsen's book *Noord en Oost Tartarije* provides an account of the items.

[141] Jettmar, Karl. 1967. *Art of the Steppes*. New York: Crown Publishers., p.13

[142] Ibid

that as it may, the objects from the collection bear a striking resemblance to all of the scientifically authenticated artefacts excavated from tombs not only in the region of Siberia but also further west towards the Pontic steppes and eastward towards China, some of them being identical in size, design, execution technique and iconography to the authenticated examples. It is thus worth putting the connoisseurship question aside to explore possible insights the collection of Peter I can shed onto the Ordos material.

There are two bird-like objects in Peter the Great's collection that are similar to the birds depicted on Ordos headdresses. The first example was originally inlaid with turquoise and its body features highly textured patterns in the place of feathers, thus bringing immediate associations with Aluchaideng.[143] (See Fig.2.12) The talons hold the highly stylized figure of a smaller bird, probably a swan. This animal, like in Aluchaideng's case, has a mobile, detachable head so that it can move with the head of the person wearing the headpiece. The Hermitage Collection has a second bird-shaped object. The semi-fantastic bird, perhaps a griffin, holds a smaller caprid in its talons. (See Fig. 2.13) The piece has loopholes and hooks at the bottom, a fact which suggests that the item was meant to be attached to a larger, heavier headpiece, as it would have been too bulky to be attached to a textile. Furthermore, both of the animals are highly stylized and almost unrecognizable unless the viewer is already intimately familiar with the iconography of animal representations in the art of the steppes. Catalogs from the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg state that this is an act of devouring a prey and thus, a typical animal combat scene encountered frequently in Scythian art.[144] However, a closer look at the specific details of this ornament would refute such a rushed conclusion and support a different

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[143] Artamonov. 1973, pl. 270
[144] Artamonov, 1973, Introduction

interpretation. First, there is no sense of combat, for the roles of the predator and prey are made clear to the viewer through the vertical axis that places the caprid in an inferior position that would not allow any movement had that scene happened in real life. The predation that ultimately leads to a transformation along the axis of downward movement becomes possible through the high level of abstraction in the animal imagery. The craftsman never intended to faithfully represent an actual animal combat scene that he observed on the steppes; instead, they chose to make both the prey and predator almost unrecognizable and create an inexplicable amalgam of zoomorphic forms. This is also the case with the Aluchaideng headdress: while the bird placed on top appears somewhat realistic, its role was only to govern the hybrid world that unravels vertically as a spiral.

Figure 2.12 Bird ornament of a headdress, Collection of Peter the Great

Figure 2.13 Bird with prey in its claws, State Hermitage Museum, Collection of Peter the Great, 5th-4th c BC

The Majiayuan 马家塬 cemetery in Gansu Province 甘肃省

A large tomb complex was discovered west of the Longshan mountains, at the site of Majiayuan, Zhangjiachuan 张家川 Hui Autonomous County, Gansu province.[145] The burial complex is situated in the vicinity of Tianshui 天水, the originating place of the Qin clan. Pastoral nomads, collectively known in Chinese chronicles by the name Xirong, were active in this area during the Zhou and early Qin dynasties. The cemetery complex contains fifty-nine individual graves and sacrificial pits dispersed in a crescent-shaped arrangement around a center tomb (M 6). The largest central tomb contained several lacquered chariots embellished with gold, silver and glass-beaded ornaments and sacrificial horses interred in the tunnel of the earthen pit. The bodies of members of the local elite during the Warring States period were placed in the largest-sized tombs.[146] In 2008-2009, archaeologists

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[145] There were four consecutive excavations at Majiayuan from 2007 until 2011.

[146] Wang Hui. 2014. "Majiayuan zhanguo mudi zongshu" (Introduction to the Majiayuan cemetery of the Warring States Period). In Gansu Sheng wen wu kao gu yan jiu suo. 2014. *Xi rong yi zhen: Majiayuan Zhan guo mu di chu tu wen wu.* , pp. 11-31

systematically excavated Tomb no. 16. The excavation uncovered an exuberant head ornament made of numerous delicate gold, turquoise and carnelian beads (See Fig.2.14)
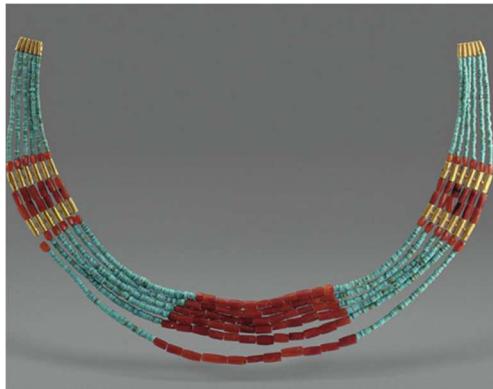
Figure 2.14 Head Ornament, Majiayun Cemetery, Warring States Period

The decorative objects resemble a necklace rather than a headdress, yet it was discovered right at the head of the tomb occupant. Its placement could indicate that it was once used as a head ornament hanging over the forehead of the wearer. This type of headgear is not commonly found almost anywhere else in Warring States China, but its appearance in the northwestern frontier is hardly surprising, considering that the region was a hotbed for cultural exchange with the peoples living even further west of the Central Plains. The usage and manipulation of these particular materials in the making of this luxury item coupled with the complete absence of animal or human imagery is redolent of the Achaemenid ornamental style, and indicates that the man buried at Majiayuan consciously opted for a regalia of foreign provenance or at least one exhibiting foreign stylistic elements. The group of people who occupied this site certainly had a penchant for beaded jewelry made of glass and semi-precious stones, as indicated by the discovery of a beaded agate necklace excavated in M 3. Furthermore, similar necklaces made of gold, amber, carnelian and

colored stone or glass beads were also excavated from Arzhan-2 in Tuva and adated to the seventh century BCE.[147]

While zoomorphic motifs are not the prevalent aesthetic choice for the tombs' decorative program, animal art is not entirely absent from the burial inventory. A number of intricate, openwork plaques depict a singe ungulate in a slightly exaggerated pose, with heavily accentuated antlers or horns. (See Fig.2.15) Most of these objects are not part of the deceased's attire. The silver and gold items are almost all exclusively chariot or horse embellishments, such as horse trappings, bridle ornaments and chariot decorative plaques. Several of the tombs contained plaques in the shape of mountain goats with unnaturally elongated horns. Others yielded deer with abstracted antlers or highly stylized tigers and wolves. Most of these items indicate the adept employment of the granulation technique, as indicated by the raised circular details placed in registers on the animals' bodies. Several golden plaques with animal scenes were also excavated at Majiayuan. (See Fig. 2.16) However, abstraction has completely taken over the imagery depicted in the golden plaques. Animals have become so stylized that it appears as a visual metonymy; in other words, only parts of the animals such as their tails and beaks are depicted in the crowded pictorial plane and these abbreviated depictions of zoomorpphs signify the animal as a whole.[148] As far as individual animal imagery is concerned, the horse-like creature below still shows the trend of putting a visual emphasis on the signifier of hybridity, in this case, the antlers; yet, the horse-shaped body of the animal remains rather naturalistic. The idea

[147] Zaitseva, GI, Chugunov, KV, Dergachev, VA, Nagler, A, Parzinger, G, Scott, EM, Sementsov, AA, et al. 2004. *Chronological studies of the Arzhan-2 Scythian monument in Tuva (Russia)*.
[148] See Fig. 18

of metamorphosis is still present in Majiayuan's artefacts while the sense of violent, dynamic predation is completely absent.

Figure 2.15 Golden goat with elongated horns and deer with extended antlers, Majiayuan M 26

Figure 2.16. Gold plaque with inlay, Majiayuan, Warring States Period

The Story Antlers Tell: Headgear from the Pazyryk Valley and Beyond

The Iron Age Pazyryk Culture which flourished in the Siberian permafrost of the Central Altai Mountains is mostly known to the world from the rich inventory of a cluster of tombs situated in the high alpine region of the Ulagan plateau, between the north-flowing

Bashkaus and Chulyshman rivers. To the south, the cemetery complex looks out to the Kurai ridge. The barrow-like funerary structures constitute of wooden chambers covered by large stacks of boulders. All of the five major kurgans accompanied by a great number of smaller auxiliary kurgans were severely plundered prior to the first systematic excavation in this part of the Altai led by S. I. Rudenko in 1927.[149] The objects uncovered from Barrow 2 where the disruption caused by the plunderers was the least noticeable, offer the most in-depth glimpse into the burial structure and inventory at Pazyryk. The tomb housed the bodies of a man and a woman of high status as indicated by the rich fabrics, textures and intricate designs of their clothing and accessories: both tomb residents were wearing lavish attire made of leather, fur and felt complemented by accessories made of gold-foil covered plaques and cut leather.[150] Rudenko has successfully reconstructed the female headdress: the hood-shaped covering was embellished with leather lozenge shapes and painted fur, with a diadem of standing leather birds placed on the top of the arrangement.[151] (See Fig. 2.17)

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[149] Rudenko's first expedition focused on the excavation of Pazyryk Barrow 1. Subsequent Soviet expeditions in the 1940s focused on the remaining four burials and were led by Rudenko and Gryaznov. The chambers had all been broken into and left in a rather chaotic state by the robbers who, in a frenzy to seize the most valuable objects, had clearly focused on retrieving the golden objects and removing the gold foil coverings of the tomb furnishings. They had left behind virtually no luxury metalwork, yet Pazyryk Barrow 2 contained a variety of well-preserved clothing accessories and tomb interior decorations.
[150] Jacobson 2015, p. 286
[151] Rudenko 1970, pl. 65
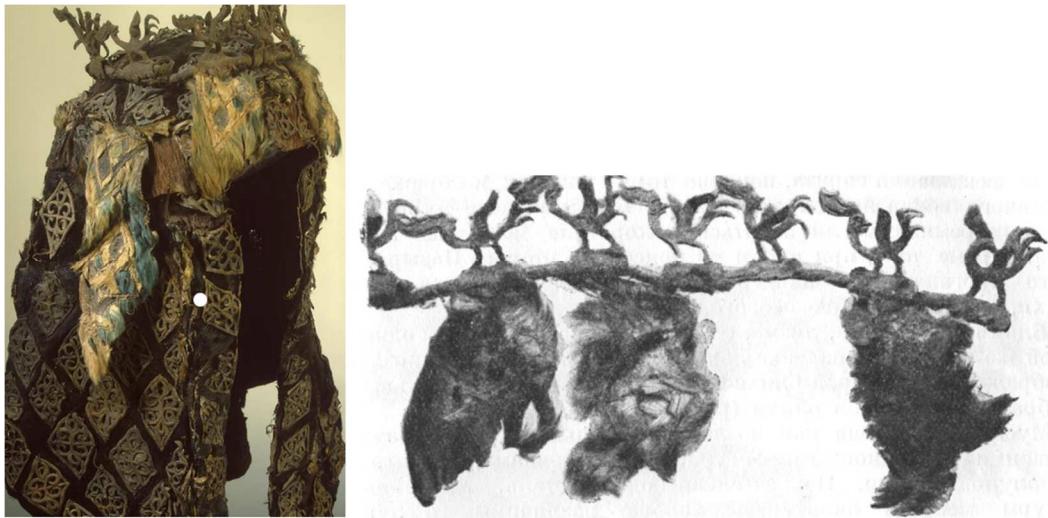
Figure 2.17 Headdress, Pazyryk no.2, 4th -3rd c BCE

Barrow 2 also yielded an important discovery of a finial in the shape of a griffin holding in its widely open jaw a stag with dramatically exaggerated antlers, which in turn evolve into scores of hybrid animals with raptor beaks and small antlers. (See Fig. 2.18) A different finial from the same burial was likely meant to be attached to the top of a larger headpiece and also features a griffin holding a stag's head with stylized antlers in its menacing jaw. (See Fig. 2.19) All the decorative elements were covered in gold leaf and also painted red. The large finial was likely attached to a red hood, parts of which were found scattered in the burial chamber. The hood was made of felt and additionally covered with red-madder dyed plant-based cloth.[152] Carved into its bottom part are the images of two geese with unnaturally long bodies which gradually disappear into the upper part of the object. Full length fantastic figures protruding out of the flat surface are depicted as if carrying the geese represented in relief. The depiction of a wooden animal and the incorporation of a crest-shaped finial in a headdress is not unique to Payzyrk barrow 2, as

[152] Simpson et.al, 2017, p. 112

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indicated by the findings from another early 3rd century kurgan of Olon Kurin Gol located at the Sailyugem ridge of the Mongolian Altai. The object is comprised of several wooden deer scattered throughout the surface which is topped by a bird head with a short beak. The man's appearance was complemented by a torque made of copper tube with terminals in the shape of six horned and winged lions.[153] The torque was also discovered at the side of the man's head in the coffin. The ends of the ring-shaped item were made of horn and wood and afterwards covered with gold foil. The heads of the winged lions with curved horns are turned towards the viewer. The composition results in a fantastic, griffin-lion zoomorphic juncture. The animals are depicted in a strictly symmetrical arrangement of pairs of three on each side of a vertical axis.

Figure 2.18 Griffin holding a stag's head in his beak, Pazyryk 2, late 4th –early 3rd c BCE

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[153] Simpson et al, p. 110

Figure 2.19 Finial: Griffin Holding a Stag in its Jaw

Two main features stand out in the Pazyryk ornaments. First, the repeated occurrence of abstracted, highly stylized antlers placed on a hybrid animal echo the sentiment behind the execution of the Shenmu piece. In addition, the strategic placement of the carved imagery on the second Payzyryk finial directly under a heavily decorated animal head also finds its parallel in the arrangement of the Aluchaideng headdress which features the four repeated scenes of predation carved on the cap right under the detachable bird ornament. Thus, the viewer is faced with a "frame narrative" as one transformation develops within a larger transformation. Indeed, if one takes an even closer look at the pieces discussed so far, one would notice that the process of transfiguration almost always occurs along more than one axes and happens both within a two-dimensional pictorial plane (for example, the Aluchaideng cap with carved imagery) and a three-dimensional one. It is no coincidence that the artist has chosen to emphasize the three-dimensianality of these head ornaments; the accentuated sculptural quality of the items is one of the key features

without which the pre-calculated dramatic psychological impact of mystic animal transfiguration would not have had its visual realization.

Human headdresses are not the only head ornaments discovered inside the five kurgans. None of the horse burials were disturbed and thus, the headgear and other embellishments were found intact. All of the sacrificed horses were wearing exuberant regalia which, in terms of the quality of materials and intricacy of design, are on a par with the ornaments of the human occupants. Several horses were wearing masks and headdresses, as well as a chest strap and a bridle. One of the horses in Pazyryk 1 had a fitted mask with elongated antlers; the zoomorph depicted in the mask takes the abstract form of a feline predator attacking a stag. (See Fig. 2.20)

Figure 2.20 Headdress and mask ensemble for a sacrificial horse, Pazyryk 2, Altai Republic, Russia

The sculptural, theatrical arrangement of animal motifs would have been placed directly on the horse's face thus creating a double vision of transformation: while metamorphosis occurs within the mask itself, the very placement of a zoomorphic mask with eclectic

anatomy on the horse's head makes the horse appear as if he is also in the process of transfiguration. Another horse from Barrow 2 was interred wearing a headdress consisting of a mountain goat with a bird seated on top of it. Again, the craftsman conveys the notion of "double metamorphosis", that is, the transformative process within the object itself coupled with the three-dimensional effect of the whole arrangement after the object's placement on the head. The harnesses and bridle ornaments which embellish the horses' bodies also follow the same visual formula exhibiting a high level of hybridity: for instance, a reconstructed bridle from Pazyryk 5 combines feline heads facing carved recumbent stags on the bridle straps, wolf heads on the cheek pieces, and psalia tipped with a raptor head on one end and a talon on the other.[154] There is a sense of hierarchy in the arrangement of the predatory beasts and prey. A similar bridle was also found in Pazyryk Barrow 1: there, several highly stylized ram heads distributed throughout the straps and cheek pieces are paired with similar non-animal shapes, while two half-ram, half-horse recumbent hybrids are hanging from the edges of the reins. (See Fig. 2.21)

Figure 2.21 Bridle with animal motifs, Pazyryk Barrow no. 2

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[154] Jacobson 2015, p. 295

The findings of horse regalia at the five Pazyryk kurgans, albeit rich in variety, texture and number, have direct parallels in earlier Altai burials which have also been attributed to the Pazyryk Cultural Zone. The site of Tuekta (6th -5th c BCE), located along the River Ursul in the Altai, also includes five kurgans which yielded a significant number of animal style objects, among which were four antlered ornaments which would have originally been attached to a horse crest. The crest itself is in the shape of an ibex horn which sprouts into multiple tiny felines. There are remains of gold foil on the wooden horse which attests to the original splendor of the overall ensemble as it would have been placed on the animal. The body of the deceased was originally decorated with leather appliques depicting a tiger with deer antlers. (See Fig. 2.22) As such, the horse and human headgear from the Pazyryk kurgans in the Ulagan Plateau point towards the performative, theatrical aspect of zoomorphic arrangements within the funerary space; the emphasis is not placed on the natural process of animal hunt or combat, but on creating and enacting agents of movement and transformation.

Figure 2.22. Leather Applique of a Tiger with Deer Antlers, Tuekta Kurgan 1, Altai, 6th - 5th c BCE

This idea is further attested by the burials of Pazyyryk type located at the pasture-rich site of Berel in the Kazakh Altai. The waters of Bukhtarma, Ak-Berel and Bulanty rivers flow through this pristine valley where the burials were found. The main funerary chamber contained two human bodies and to the north side of the chamber, there were thirteen saddled horse bodies, embellished with extraordinarily lavish textiles and golden ornaments. The manner in which the horses were placed in the tomb seems to have been of strategic importance to the tomb builder and the person who commissioned the space. The animal bodies were decorated with eclectic animal imagery such as deer, abstracted felines, griffin heads, mountain sheep, all plated with gold or tin.[155] The horses were placed in almost identical positions laying on their undersides with one of their limbs extended.[156] The presence of round-shaped marks and traces of perforation on the animals' forehead indicates that the horses must have been sacrificed as part of the burial ceremony. A harnesses, saddles and bridle ornaments were positioned on the horses meticulously, revealing that perhaps the placement of the embellishments were instrumental to designing the space in the afterlife. A reconstruction of the Berel tomb site[157] shows the presence of several feline masks of various shapes placed at the back of the horse's head. (See Fig. 2.23)

In addition, some of the horses also had forehead plaques in the form of a feline predator's head combined with the figure of two polymorphous creatures. The dramatic impact of the placement of a horned mask of the Pazyryk type on the horse's face is

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[155] Henri-Paul Francfort, Gulia S. Zhumabekova, Galia A. Bazarbaeva, and Zainullah Samashev. 2000. *Le kourgane de Berel' dans l'Altaï kazakhstanais*. Arts Asiatiques. PERSEE.
[156] Ibid
[157] There are currently two reconstructions of the Berel site and the horse burial. The first is in the National Museum of Archeology in Almaty, and the second one can be found in the newly constructed National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Astana.

augmented by the intricate incorporation of the mask-like plaques into the decoration of the rest of the head. Overall, the viewer is confronted with the theatrical look of an active performer in the ritual space of the afterlife, the horse.[158]

Figure 2.23 Horse ornaments from the tomb of Berel, Kazakhstan (Paryzyk-type culture), 5th -4th c BCE

The "Other" Altai: Kurgans of the Chuya Steppes

The traditional narrative considers the five barrows discussed above to be the nucleus of a larger entity called Pazyryk Culture. However, the Southeastern Altai Mountains are a home to some of the most lavish tombs associated with the nomads of the Iron Age and these burials most likely predate the five Pazyryk kurgans. Of particular relevance to this

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[158] Interestingly, an almost identical type of mask with deer antlers was being used in Himalayan art as late as the nineteenth century. The Tantric Buddhist performance known as "chod dances" was performed by Buddhist followers who wore dramatic masks with deer antlers. Several such masks were on view at the Metropolitan Museum of art in 2014 as part of the exhibition "Sacred Treasures of the Himalayas".

study are the burial mounds of Ulandryk and Tashanta, located in the Chuya steppe in Southwestern Siberia. At the highest point of the Chuya steppe region, Soviet archaeologists uncovered several burial complexes with multiple kurgans spread throughout each cemetery. The tomb occupants were men, women and in one case, a child, occasionally but not always interred with a horse. Both the male and female tomb occupants had once been wearing hair ornaments, which were consequently found lying on the ground of the chamber, most likely because the the majority of the mounds had been disturbed. In the second kurgan of Ulandryk Tomb Number 4, excavators uncovered four separate hairpins, all of which once belonged to a woman. On top of the rather sharp pins, the craftsman had placed horses and goats. The horses all had elongated snouts while the goats had overly extended legs and horse-like hoofs. They were all wearing masks terminating in long, overly curved horns reminiscent of the masks seen at the Pazyryk burials.

A headdress ensemble discovered at Ulandryk expands our understanding of the way wealthy nomads of the Chuya steppe part of the Southern Altai region decorated the heads of the male corpse during the burial process. A wooden comb-like headpiece was found next to the head of a male body placed in one of the kurgans at Ulandryk Barrow Number 4, dated to 300 BCE.[159] The wooden plates had once been covered with gold leaf. The top of the headpiece had a detachable ornament in the shape of a recumbent horse. This echoes the design of the several deer finials found in Payzyk 2. (See Fig. 2.24)

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[159] Kubarev, V. D., and V. E. Medvedev. 1987. *Kurgany Ulandryka*. Novosibirsk: Izd-vo "Nauka" Sibirskoe otd-nie (*The Ulandryk Kurgan*).

Figure 2.24 Diadem from Tashanta, Pazyryk, 5th -4th c BCE

In another kurgan in the Chuya complex, the undisturbed body of the male occupant was discovered. He had once worn a carved wooden diadem with scenes of multiple hybrid zoomorphs: two confronting, seated stags are visually separated by feline heads and also attacked by two horned feline creatures which in turn sprout raptors' heads.[160] There exist several different physical and figurative axes along which the narrative develops. This is not a traditional narrative of predatory hunt, or a violent combat scene. The only implied element of predation appears at the two ends of the headpiece as the rapacious yet anatomically inaccurate, fantastic felines open their jaws to bite the stags. The burial from the site of Tashanta 2 Kurgan 4, dated to 5th- 4th century BCE and located in close proximity to Ulandryk, has yielded a similar diadem, with two recumbent hybrid zoomorphs facing one another without engaging in conflict. (See Fig.2.25) A third example akin to the discoveries here come from the nomadic cemetery at Olon Kurin Gol, excavated by a Russian-German-Mongolian expedition.[161] The site is located at the southern periphery of

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[160] Ibid

[161] Molodin V.I., Parzinger H., Ceveendorz D., Garkusa J.N., Grisin A.E., Mylnikov V., Nagler A., Piezonka H., Sljusarenko I. "Das Skythenzeitliche Kriegergrab aus Olon-Kurin-Gol. Neue Entdeckungen in der Permafrostzone des mongolischen Altai. Vorbericht der russisch-deutsch-mongolischen Expedition im Sommer 2006". Eurasia Antiqua. Zeitschrift für Archaologie Eurasiens. 2008. (14): 241–265.

the Pazyryl cultural realm. A wooden torque consisting of two beats facing each other with semi-opne jaws had once been placed on the neck of the deceased. (See Fig. 2.26) His head was adorned with an elongated head ornament: three figurines of wooden hoofed ungulates are placed throughout the felt base which terminates into a bird's beak made of wood. (See Fig. 2.27) The headdress and the torque from Olon Kurin Gol and the diadems from the Chuta steppes are in line with the stylistic formula consistently observed at the sites located in the Ulagan plateau, which was likely the center of the Pazyryk culture.

Figure 2.25 Diadem from Ulandryk, Pazyryk, 4ᵗʰ -3ʳᵈ c. BCE

Figure 2.26. Wooden torque, Olon Kun Gol no.10. Mongolian Altai, late 4th c –early 3rd c.

Figure 2.27 Felt Head ornament, Olon Kurun Gol no.10

Stylistically similar to the stag-like creatures depicted on the Ulandryk and Tashanta diadems are the discoveries from a royal cemetery dated to the early Iron Age (8th-7th c BCE), the Arzhan complex in the northern Tuva basin at the foothills of the Western Sayan Mountains, not far from the Pazyryk and Ulandryk burial complexes. The burial at Arzhan-1 was once entirely looted, but the structure of the site remains visible. The wooden structure at the center is shaped like the sun with radiating beams. Hundreds of horses were interred in specially designated chambers around the central chamber. Several burial mounds were found at Azrhan-2, a late Bronze Age site east of Arzhan-1, which was resued as a burial site in the early Iron Age.[162] On the eastern side of the mound, one can see a series of stone slabs with rock art with depictions of elks, horses and a chariot. A stag with similarly exaggerated antlers standing on a plaque of reversed beak-heads was

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[162] Chugunov, Konstantin V. 2010. *Der skythenzeitliche Fürstenkurgan Arzhan 2 in Tuva*. Mainz: Philipp von Zabern. ; See also Chugunov, K. V., Hermann Parzinger, A. Nagler, and Vladimir Terebenin. 2004. *Zolotye zveri iz doliny tsarei: otkrytiia rossiĭsko-germanskoĭ arkheologicheskoĭ ekspeditsii v Tuve*. Sankt-Peterburg: [Gosudarstvennyĭ Ėrmitazh]. p.74

discovered in the main tomb chamber at Arzhan-2.[163] Around the object, there were four

other plates with recumbent horses reminiscent of those incorporated in the Ulandryk

hairpins; all of these items must have originally been part of a headdress ensemble. (See

Fig. 2.28)

Figure 2.28 Golden Deer Figure from the Headdress of the Prince of Arzhan 2, Tuva, Southern Russia. Iron Age, 7th C. BCE

The early dates of the Arzhan complex suggest the emergence of this approach to headdress

ornamentation as early as the seventh century BCE in the Tuva basin.

Revisiting the Princess of Ukok

The Pazyryk cultural remains encompass a large geographic region, which extends

well beyond the Ulagan plateau. The area stretches into the region of the Mongolian Altai,

south of the Ukok plateau of the Kosh-Agach region.[164] Here, the main burial sites

associated with the Pazyryk Culture are Ak-Alakha, Kuturguntas and Verkh-Kal'dzhin.

They are all situated on a high arid area (2500 m above sea level) of summer pasture under

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[163] Chugunov, 2010, pl. 172
[164] Jacobson 2015, p. 296

the slopes of Tavan Bogd, near the modern border of China, Kazakhstan and Mongolia. The most widely studied burial is the Ak-Alakha in the Ukok Plateau. The site consists of six kurgans. Natalia Polosmak excavated several mounds at this cemetery complex in 1990 and 1995.[165] The bodies of a man and a woman accompanied by nine sacrificial horses were placed in mound no. 1. The bodies of all tomb occupants were embellished with lavish regalia, parallel in execution and imagery to the objects found at Pazyryk Tombs 1-5. The wooden harnesses carried by the buried horses depict griffin heads depicted either alone or rising above bird wings and tails.[166] Ak-Alakha Barrow 3 contained the body of a woman of elite status, which has since come to be known in popular culture as the "Siberian Ice Princess".[167] The woman interred here was once buried in a larch wooden coffin which consequently happened to fill with water and froze, hence the incredible level of preservation of the organic material. The team reconstructed her headdress, a complex ensemble built around a stiff wig with tiny wooden birds topped by an extension. (See Fig. 2.29)

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[165] Natalia Polosmak, and Henri-Paul Francfort. 1991. *Un nouveau kourgane à « tombe gelée » de l'Altaï (rapport préliminaire)*. Arts Asiatiques. PERSEE.
[166] Polosmak 2001
[167] Polosmak, Natalia. "A Mummy Unearthed from the Pastures of Heaven". *National Geographic* (1994): 80-103; The mummy has also appeared in media coverage in the New York Times and CNN.

Figure 2.29. Tall Female Headdress Buried in Kurgan 2, Ak-Alakha 3, approx. 240 BCE, Russian Altai.

A wooden torque decorated with the images of a griffin and snow leopards was placed around her neck. Wooden figurines of standing deer and seated ibexes with curved horns covered with gold leaf embellish her headdress; the deer was likely placed straight above the ibex on a vertical axis, thus offering a parallel not only with headpieces from the Altai region, but also from the Ordos Cultural Zone near the Chinese northern periphery, particularly the Aluchaideng headdress. The male burial form Ak-alakha has yielded a felt headdress covered with small figurines of birds and ungulates. Structurally, the piece recalls the headdress from Olon Kurin Gol in the Mongolian Altai.

The barrow at Kuturguntas, which is perhaps the least studied in Western scholarship, has not yielded a headpiece, yet much of its inventory can enrich our understanding of the zoomorphic decorative program of headdresses found at Pazyryk tombs.[168] The complex of Kuturguntas is located in the Bertek Hollow of the Altai Highlands. The burial structure includes an outer and inner wooden chambers, a coffin

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[168] Polosmak, Natalia. "Investigation of a Pazyryk Barrow at Kuturguntas". *Ancient Civilizations of Scythia and Siberia* (1996), Vol. 2(1): p. 92-111

made of a single large log and a storage room. Among the grave goods, excavators found several wooden ibex heads with sharply bent horns and a short mane below the neck.[169] The two animals are rather similar and could have embellished either a torque or a headdress as it was customary to have two animals on the opposite ends of a semi-circular precious object. The preference to depict individual animals rather than animals illustrated in a scene of interaction becomes clear when one looks further into the inventory of this tomb. Multiple fantastic beasts reminiscent of griffins decorate the bridle of one of the horses interred at Kuturguntas. (See Fig. 2.30) Some of the griffins located on the front are depicted only as animal heads. Several of the ornaments consist of griffin heads seamlessly attached to wooden plaques in the shape of lyre-shaped wings with lozenge-shaped palmettos in the middle.

Such a combination of abstracted, non-animal motifs and an animal on top are not unique to this burial, and can also be seen in some of the horse bridle ornaments at the 6th-century tomb of Tuekta in the Tuva Basin: a head of a fantastic feline creature evolves into a cloud-shaped, meandering stylized form in the shape of two raptor beaks which plays the role of the creature's torso. The beast bears a strong resemblance to the feline masks from Berel (See Fig. 2.31 and 2.32).

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[169] Ibid

Figure 2.30. Reconstruction of a horse bridle, Kuturguntas Tomb, Altai Region, 3rd c BCE

Figure 2.31 Bridle Ornament, 6th c BCE, Tuekta

Figure 2.32 Feline beast with protomas of two elks, Berel Kurgan, Altai region

Several distinct features appear consistently throughout the vast burial complexes of the Pazyryk Culture of the Altai mountains. First, the large ornaments placed on top feature a composite hybrid, made of two or more animals, often holding a stylized smaller zoomoprh in its jaw. In such cases, the wooden body of the main animal is additionally carved to depict a scene of animal interaction of some sort. Thus, the viewer faces two simultaneous narratives of transformation. Second, female burials show a newly developed preference for using a wig and placing separate elements of the headgear over it, instead of sewing them onto a textile. The larger predatory beast is always placed at the bottom of the wig and a series of birds or other small animals are placed vertically above it, thus creating a tree-like formation. The dramatically extended, lavish headdresses remind of props in a theatre performance. The vision of a theatre-like ritual ceremony is enhanced by the numerous feline mask ornaments excavated at different sites in the Altai.

The Golden Men and Women of the Kazakh Steppe: The Jewel of the Cosmic Suit

One of the most stunning early examples of a golden headdress from the nomadic realm comes from the Issyk burial mound excavated in 1969 by Akishev. The complex is located in the Zhetysu[170] ("Seven Rivers") region at the foot of the Tianshan mountains in present-day southeastern Kazakhstan. The kurgan has been dated to 4th century BCE based on the discovery of a bowl featuring an inscription, probably in the language of the Khotanese Saka also used by the Kushans.[171] The burial yielded around 4000 golden ornaments, a skeleton of what is now believed to be an 18-year old wealthy man or woman, possibly a high-ranking member of the aristocracy or a prominent military leader.[172] The tomb occupant was laid on his back, wearing a suit covered entirely with sewn-on golden plaques. The headdress, however, is arguably the most intriguing discovery from this kurgan, as it provides a context in which one can examine other golden headpieces. (See Fig. 2.33) Undisturbed parts of the headgear with a diadem at its base were found about 650 mm from the skull. The front of the hood was decorated with composite fantastic animals, combining horses with winged caprids and facing out of either side of a central axis. On top of these hybrids, one can find an arrangement of large gold feathers, arrows, wing-like motifs, along with vertical golden objects with a painted pattern.[173] Around the hood's sides and back, one would place plaques of coiled animals and winged felines, frontal feline heads, trees topped by birds depicted in profile among other images. Finally,

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[170] In this study, I stick to the Kazakh translation of this term. The Russian version, Semirechye, has been more widely used, but it refers to the same historical region. Its name is derived from the seven rivers which flow from the southeast into Lake Balkhash.

[171] Hall, Mark E. 1997. *Towards an absolute chronology for the Iron Age of Inner Asia*. Antiquity 71, pp. 863-874

[172] Akishev, Kemal′ Akishevich. 1978. *Kurgan Issyk: iskusstvo sakov Kazakhstana*. Moskva: Iskusstvo.

[173] Jacobson. 1993, p.76

the zenith of the headpiece would have been adorned with a standing mountain sheep, which would have been attached separately, according to Akishev's reconstruction.[174] The bottom of the front piece of the headdress ensemble has an inserted diadem in the shape of a zig-zag, river-like formation of mountain peaks, thus indicating the possibility that natural elements such as the river and mountain played an integral role in this convoluted cosmic arrangement. Snow leopards with open jaws revealing their sharp teeth and excessively curved torso are touching the mountain peaks with their front paws, as they are sewn onto the back of the headdress. (See Fig. 2.34)

Figure 2.33 The Golden Man at Issyk

The visual program of mystic, natural transformation does not end here. A spiral four-layer golden torque with abstracted feline heads at each end was placed at the neck of the tomb occupant. Belt buckles shaped as deer heads and plaques in the form of tiger heads were

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[174] Ibid

sewn onto the textile, with the later being placed on the bottom of the golden warrior tunic. Zoomorphic heads and hybrid beasts are present throughout the composition of the suit.

Figure 2.34 Plaque with an image of a snow leopard from the Issyk headdress

Whereas the assemblage differs considerably from pieces excavated in Ordos and the Altai, one essential similarity stands out: in both cases, the headdress recreates a vertical order that places a single realistically depicted animal on top and unravels further down, in a zig-zag, meandering fashion, to reveal scenes of dynamic change that would ultimately lead to a final stage of transformation from the earthly realm to the afterlife. Furthermore, both the Aluchaideng and Issyk headpieces feature a lifelike animal on top and highly stylized, abstracted images of animals on the bottom part of the objects.

Since the excavation at Issyk, four other golden suits have been uncovered and

reconstructed in Kazakhstan.[175] Interestingly, the kurgans associated with these finds are not all located in the Zhetysu region. In 2003, a kurgan with a man buried with golden treasures of the Issyk type was discovered in the Chilikty Valley, also known as the Valley of Kings.[176] The one furthest away from the group of six burials discussed so far is the 2012 excavation at the Taksai cemetery complex in the Terekty District in present-day Western Kazakhstan (6th c BCE); from the site, archaeologists unearthed the golden ornaments worn on the garment of the tomb occupant, a princess. First, it should be noted that the structure of the grave here is somewhat unusual and distinct from the kurgans further east: instead of covering a single vault with layers of earth, the tomb builders cut beams from clay and made bricks of different sizes which they consequently set on fire, possibly during a burial ceremony.[177]

Another unusual feature is the placement of a comb with a battle scene depicting human figures engaged in combat in a wooden box together with a knife, wolf fangs and fine pottery bottle. Both sides of the wooden comb are decorated with images depicting a chariot facing a single-footed warrior in full armor. (See Fig. 2.35)

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[175] The Golden Man has become the national emblem of present-day Kazakhstan. Nowadays, reconstructions of the original Issyk man, along with occasional reconstructions of the several less widely-known ones, decorate not only the façade of the Independence Monument in the Republic Square in Astana, and the permanent exhibitions in virtually every museum in Almaty and Astana, but also entertainment establishments such as theatres, restaurants, cafes, as well as travel agency advertisements. A replica of the Golden Man, commissioned in 2006, stands in front of the Embassy of Kazakhstan in Washington DC.

[176] Toleubaev, Abdeš T. 2009. "Gold of early saks period from Shilikty Valley Kazakhstan". *Folia Praehistorica Posnaniensia.* 175-183.

[177] Altynbekov, Krym. 2013. Vozrazhdeniya iz pepla: Rekonstruktsiya po materialam pogrebeniya zhritsy iz kompleksa Taksai

Figure 2.35 Reconstruction of the wooden comb, Taksai II (per Altynbekov)

The chariot is drawn by two ram-headed horses. The contrast in the headdress of the men depicted in the battle scene are telling: the two men riding in the chariot are wearing flat caps with coverings for the ears, whereas the enemy's headgear is pointed and tied under the chin. The realistic and epic quality of the scene could be the result of Western Asian borrowings, and may indicate that the comb was a gift from the lands of the Achaemenid Empire (550-330 BCE). The depictions of the men, particularly their headdress, echo the human figures represented at the Apādana Palace started by Darius and completed by Xerxes. The stairways of the magnificent audience hall were all decorated with large bas reliefs. A scene depicted on one of the reliefs on the southern side of the eastern suitcase shows a procession of men of nomadic origin as indicated by their pointed caps; these men are identified in most literature as "saka". (See Fig. 2.36) Altogether, a procession of members of twenty-three different polities, as evidenced by their attire, accessories and facial features, are paying tribute to the Persian rulers. Next to the relief panels with procession scenes, there is a relief of a large-scale animal style scene which mirrors the imagery seen on portable plaques on the Eurasian steppes. Other reliefs from

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the stairway and the interior of the hall also feature scenes of a predator attacking a smaller animal. While the animal style scenes at Persepolis will be the subject of further investigation in following chapters, here, they serve to elucidate the syncretism of motifs found in an Achaemenid decorative context. The Persians were clearly familiar with the personal appearance, customs and material culture of various nomadic groups, as evidenced by the depiction of people wearing different detailed outfits. In fact, the Achaemenids employed craftsmen from far-flung parts of the empire. This would account for the emergence of animal-style decorative elements, which the craftsman (likely from a nomadic background) would have reinterpreted to fit the already established visual culture of monumental, grandiose display of large-scale imagery on reliefs.

Figure 2.36 The "saka" Tribute Bearers, Apādana Palace of Darius I and Xerxes, Persepolis, 5th c BCE

Figure 2.36.1 Details from the reliefs, Apādana Palace of Darius I and Xerxes

In addition, multiple metal objects with Urartian inscriptions exhibit scenes with chariots and processions analogous to the Taksai example. A plaque fragment with chariot scenes inscribed with the Urartian royal name Argishti is now at the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The piece is divided into two parts depicting two identical royal processions with chariots and marching soldiers with pointed "phrygian" caps. The Persians and their nomadic neighbors were certainly aware of each other's products and thus, the Taksai comb may have been a gift, or manufactured locally in the wake of an actual historic event. The latter is more likely as the design and media actually follow the conventions for combs in the Altai burials; the openwork with a battle scene is the only foreign element.

The center of the comb from Taksai is depicted in a realistic manner and the rare presence of human form rendered in profile is not an image characteristic of the minor arts of the Eastern steppes.[178] A comparative yet later example comes from the 5th-century Solokha kurgan in the Dnepr region of the Northern Black Sea grassland which

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[178] Wooden combs of similar design yet with no decoration were found in the elite Arzhan-2 burial in Tuva, as well as the Tarim Basin site of Alagou located at the southern slopes of the Tianshan range near Ordos. They date to the seventh century BCE.

corresponds to present-day Zaporizhna Oblast in Southern Ukraine. (See Fig. 2.37) The intricately engraved golden comb was discovered right next to the tomb occupant's skull.[179] The comb was made of cast details based on wax models. The warriors' armor, hairstyle, accessories, and body proportions are all rendered in a remarkably realistic manner, reminiscent of Greko-Roman depictions of battle scenes. The portrayal of the horse leaping in battle is also realistic, and so are the six recumbent lions placed under the upper part of the comb.

Figure 2.37 A Comb depicting a battle scene, Solokha Kurgan, 5th -4th c BCE

The woman at Taksai was buried with two female guardians. She was covered by a blanket embroidered with hundreds of golden plaques. Next to the body, archaeologists found a great number of golden plaques, cosmetic boxes, and fragments of what had once been a lavishly decorated headdress. The placement of syncretic animals which combine the forms of a wild sheep and griffin on the headdress and the garment with a single animal on the very top of the assemblage is similar to the visual arrangements already seen at

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[179] Alexeyev, Andrey. 2012. *The Gold of the Scythian Kings In the Hermitage Collection.* St. Petersburg: The State Hermitage Publishers, p.130

previously examined headpieces from the region further East along the Chinese northern periphery and the neighboring Altai mountains. Along a vertical axis, one would have placed flying birds and a highly stylized tree surrounded by several horned ungulates. (See Fig. 2.38) As was the case with multiple Altai headdresses from the Pazyryk culture, the idea of a tree is central to the composition; here, the artisan takes this symbol a step further by incorporating a more literal representation of a stylized tree with a bird perched on the top onto the side of the felt textile. The tree's stylized foliage reminds of the flowing deer antlers of animal hybrids. Mountain goats with dramatically curved horns are walking directions toward and away from the tree. This ensemble crowded with motifs from the natural world is complented by the woman's lavish golden earrings which extend vertically and are divided into several segments of leaf-like ornaments.

Figure 2.38 Reconstruction of the Taksai headdress, Taksai, Kazakhstan, 5th -4th c BCE

West of The Caspian Sea: Revisiting the Treasures of the Pontic Steppe Warriors

Those who insist on the notion of nomadic unity, and particularly on interpreting the recurrent appearance of decorative motifs as a definite sign of a uniform, homogenous nomadic material culture have often used the objects excavated from kurgans both east and west of the Caspian Sea as evidence to substantiate this hypothesis. However, it is naïve to believe that in this extremely vast area of varying geographic conditions which was also inhabited by several sedentary powers, there existed a single, monotonous nomadic culture.

The zone west of the Caspian Sea was inhabited by the Pontic Scythians mentioned by Herodotus. The Pontic-Caspian steppe zone should be divided into several sub-groups in terms of the cultural entities which historical archaeology has shown to be in existence. The first group of funerary complexes are located in the Trans-Kuban Region (Zakubaniye) in the Northwestern Caucasus. (See Fig. 2.39)

Figure 2.39 Map of the Pontic-Caspian steppe sites in the Scythian Period

One of largest burial complexes associated with the Trans-Kuban nomadic culture of the late Bronze and the early Iron Age is the Kelermes cemetery. The early date of this burial (7th c BCE) has often prompted the scholarly designation of Kelermes as the nucleus, or

prototype of Western Scythian material culture.[180] In Barrow 1, archaeologists discovered an elaborate golden diadem with few parallels in the Eastern steppes.[181] (See Fig. 2.40) The diadem is embellished with the repeated image of a bird with a dramatically curved beak, along with flowers and rosettes.[182] The various shapes are incorporated into the surface through a mixture of techniques such as embossing, granulation, stamping and incrustation. At the very center of the headdress, a precious stone is embedded in inlay; the birds, on the other hand, are rendered by granulation. The style of the bird is not unique to this piece; a contemporaneous object dated to the 7th c BCE from the Melgunov Barrow situated in the Dnepr region of the Northern Black Sea steppe provides a useful parallel.[183]

Figure 2.40 Diadem from Kelermes Barrow 2, 7th c BCE, Trans-Kuban region

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[180] Galanina, Ljudmila K. 2006. *Skifskie drevnosti Severnogo Kavkaza v sobranii Ėrmitaža: Kelermesskie kurgany*. Sankt-Peterburg: Izdat. Gosudarstvennogo Ėrmitaža., p. 7-12
[181] Ibid, p.21
[182] Galanina 1997, Cat. 15
[183] Simpson 2017, p.120

Figure 2.41 Bird plaque from the Melgunov Kurgan, 7th c BCE, Dnepr Region, Northern Black Sea

A plaque in the form of an eagle with outstretched wings and curved beak was found there. The depiction of the bird in profile, the prominent, elongated wings and the broad geometric areas of the breast and wings are features also found in the Kelermes head ornaments. It is not clear which part of the body the seventeen bird-shaped plaques from the Melgunov kurgan would have decorated, but it is likely that they were not part of a headdress. (See Fig. 2.41) Regardless of their placement, the similar treatment of the bird decoration on the two headdresses found in the Kelermes and Melgunov burials is indicative of continuous traditions in the depictions of zoomorphs in the steppes west of the Caspian Sea.

The idea of continuity becomes even more plausible when we consider the other diadem excavated from the site of Kelermes, Barrow 3. (See Fig. 2.42) The headdress has a protoma of a griffin head extending outwards. Its neck has been rendered with meticulous attention to detail as indicated by the individual circular shapes, slightly reminiscent of the circular elements in the textured head of the Shenmu and Aluchaideng birds. The rosettes placed horizontally along the body of the diadem are identical to the ones seen in the

diadem from Barrow 1, thus suggesting that they were probably made by the same workshop. Unlike the headpiece from Barrow 1, however, this diadem extends further vertically through the strategic placement of small and large chains with elliptical shapes. Such design can again be found at the Melgunov kurgan where a similar headdress was unearthed. (See Fig. 2.43)

Figure 2.42 Diadem with Griffin at Kelermes Barrow 3.

Figure 2.42 Detail from the diadem at Kelermes Barrow 3

This headdress was once constructed through the same combination of techniques as was the Kelermes examples. The Melgunov diadem does not feature animal motifs. Indeed, all headdresses excavated from tombs in the Eastern steppes as well as the Northern Caucasus have animals or zoomorphic shapes embedded into their visual formula; by contrast, here, the diadem is embellished with nine rosettes and star-shaped plaques.[184] Moon-shaped pendants are attached to chains hanging from the cords of the diadem. The rosettes and flowers appear identical to the motifs in both of the Kelermes headpieces and the overall structure of the headdress mirrors that of the diadem from the third Kelermes kurgan.

The head ornaments from the Kelermes and Melgunov barrow show traces of the Urartian artistic tradition. The rendering of the bird with a curved beak and open jaw showing its tooth invites immediate associations with some of the arts of the Kingdom of Urartu (860 BCE- 590 BCE).[185] Multiple 8th-century objects of various media excavated at the site of Toprakkale in Anatolia, several miles west of the Nur Mountains, exhibit the incorporation of similar animal heads into the object's surface. Most prominent is the repetitive occurrence of a half-human, half-animal creature with a griffin head, a pronounced beak, widely open jaw and large emotive eyes in elements of the tomb furnishings. (See Fig. 2.44) Thus, we have several ivories depicting a standing griffin-headed beast with a raised human arm as well as animal heads protruding from the edges of bronze vessels. However, simultaneously one needs to take into consideration the repeated occurrence of wooden griffin heads with open jaws, rendered in an almost

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[184] Kisel, V. A. 2003. Shedevry Yuvelirov Drevnego Vostoka iz Skifskix Kurganov. (Jewelry masterpices from Scythian Kurgans of the Ancient East). St. Petersburg, p. 128
[185] The Kingdom flourished in the Armenian Highlands, a large plateau situated between the Iranian Plateau, Anatolia, Mesopotamia and the Caucasus.

identical way as the one depicted on the Kelermes headdress in the slightly later, 6th-century Tuekta and Beshadar kurgans in the Altai, discussed in the previous section. There were several harness ornaments in the shape of griffin heads which exhibit features remarkably similar to those of the Kelermes animal head. (See Fig. 2.45)

Figure 2.44 Ivory, 8th c BCE, Toprakkale, Anatolia, 8th -7th c BCE

Figure 2.45 Wooden predatory bird, Tuekta- Bashadar Complex, 5th c BCE

It must be noted that both in the Kelermes and Melgunov headdresses, one notices an absence of the familiar pattern of metamorphosis. There is lesser emphasis on the verticality of the arrangement, a prominent characteristic of animal art and particularly of headdresses east of the Caspian Sea. Such absence makes sense if one takes into consideration the possible borrowings from Urartian aesthetics: in Urartian art, form

supersedes meaning. The Urartian tradition has for a reason been referred to as largely "decorative"; as such, that the depiction of floral, animal and human shapes is largely contingent upon the decorative purpose; the motifs are usually arranged in rows of single, repeated patterns.[186] The bronze shield of King Argishti I (r.786-764 BCE) uncovered from the Kamir Blur fortress (near modern-day Yerevan, Armenia) is a truly representative example of the Urartian perception of order: openwork with scores of identical animals with horns and open jaws embellish concentric circles. (See Fig. 2.46)
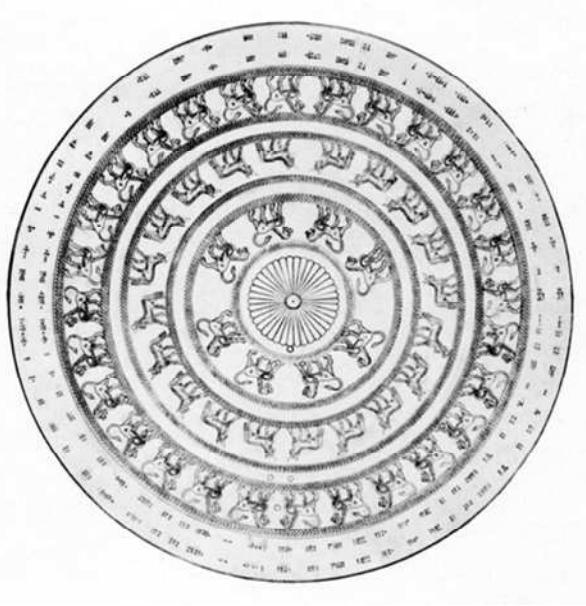
Figure 2.46 Shield of Argishti I, Kamir Blur (Teishebaini), 7th c BCE

The order of animal imagery in Urartian decorative art follows a generic formula which develops through the repetition of a singular motif either horizontally or in concentric circular shapes. This approach to decoration is indirectly referenced in various objects from the Kelermes kurgans. A 7th-century cast silver mirror excavated from barrow no.4 at

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[186] Piotrovskiĭ, B. B. 1967. *Urartu: the Kingdom of Van and its Art*. New York: F.A. Praeger., p. 17

Kelermes is faced with electrum plaques decorated with various depictions of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic beings. (See Figure 2.47) The mirror is divided into eight registers but unlike in the Urartian shield, there is no repetition of imagery. One of the pictorial segments contains the image of a winged female personage, likely the goddess Cybele, who is depicted in profile holding in both hands two pairs of animals in combat: on each side of the female deity, a twisted figure of a feline is biting onto the body of a second beast (or its own hindquarter).[187] The rest of the imagery consists of fantastic and real animals with intertwined bodies: lions, griffins, a standing panther at the feet of two sphinx-like anthropomorphic figures facing each other. In one of the segments, a lion with detailed body texture, is walking above a ram, supposedly its prey.

Figure 2.47 Silver mirror, Kelermes Barrow, 7th c BCE

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[187] Alexeyev 2012, p. 93

The overlay for a gorytos found at Kelermes, to be discussed further in the following chapters, shed further light on the repetition of animal imagery in adjacent units. (See Fig. 2.48) The overlay was nailed to the visible surface of a gorytos; the center is decorated with 24 recumbent deer and the edges are embellished with 32 panthers in a bent position.[188] Similar panthers, in the form of plaques, were found in several of the Kelermes barrows, as well as in Kurgan 1 of the Uilski Aul site in the Kuban region.[189] As for the deer, this particular depiction of the animal in a recumbent position, with its stylized antlers extending over the unnaturally long torso and its snout extending upwards, mirrors the image of a deer as seen in a plaque from the Cossak Village of Kostromskaya in the Trans-Kuban region.[190](See Fig. 2.49) The posture of the deer and panthers is slightly reminiscent of the more abstracted yet similar representations of these animals at the contemporaneous (7th century) burial of Arzhan I the the Tuva Basin. The tiny gold plaques with slightly coiled panthers from Arzhan were made using punches so that identical sets could be replicated rather quickly. They came as a large set which would have been sewn onto the clothing of the chiefman or royal buried at the tomb in Arzhan, thus indicating that it was perhaps feasible that this approach to animal decoration was common

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[188] Alexeyev 2012, p. 106
[189] Artamonov, pl. 59
[190] The Kostromskaya complex in the northern Pontic region was comprised of a relatively large earthen mound covering a four-post wooden superstructure; the burial contained twenty sacrificial horses.

Figure 2.48 Gorytos with registers, Kelermes Kurgan, 7th c BCE

Figure 2.49 Plaque of a recumbent stag, Kostromskaya Kurgan

The Karagodeuashkh Headdress (late 4th c BCE): A Return to a Vertical Cosmos

A number of headdresses and related regalia excavated from the Pontic-Caspian steppe are in fact contemporaneous with the majority of the findings in the eastern steppe (particularly, Ordos and Pazyryk). The kurgan at Karagodeuashkh is situated near the Cossak village of Krymskaya Stanitsa in present-day Krasnodar Krai in the Trans-Kuban region of the Northern Caucasus. Excavated as early as 1888 by E. D. Filitsin, the burial had two chambers made of stone rather than wood. Passageways of the Greek dromos type

led into the chambers. The main chamber contained the body of the main tomb occupant, a male wearing a torque around his neck, his head surrounded by several plaques which originally adorned his headdress. The other chamber was found empty, yet in the corridor, archaeologists found the bodies of sacrificial horses, a woman whose body was embellished with numerous golden and silver decorations.[191]

One of the plaques decorating the female headdress was placed at the center of the headgear ensemble, most likely of the conical type. The object is of triangular shape and its height reaches 21 cm. (See Fig. 2.50) The composition is based on a strongly delineated vertical axis. On the top register, the viewer sees the image of a female dressed in a Greek chiton[192], most likely a goddess from the Greek pantheon.[193] The middle segment shows a frontally depicted man riding in a chariot drawn by two horses. This central register has a lower, narrower band with images of two reflected, symmetrical griffins placed on the opposite sides of a vertical axis. The bottom register depicts a female personage seated on a throne, perhaps a goddess or a priestess, being served by her attendants: on the left, another female figure is handing her a circular-shaped vessel, resembling an amphora, and on the right, a man appears to be taking a rhython-shaped vessel from the woman's hand.

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[191] Lappo-Danilevskīĭ, A. 1893. *Drevnosti Kurgana "Karagodeuashkh" kak materīal dl͡ia bytovoĭ istorīi prikubanskago kraia v IV-III vv. do r.kh*. Sanktpeterburg: Tip. imp. akad. nauk.
[192] Chiton was worn by both sexes in ancient Greece.
[193] Alexeyev, p. 234

Figure 2.50 Plaque from a female headdress, Late 4th c BCE, Karagodeuashkh

The plaque offers two important insights into the possible spiritual system which guided the visual formula of this headpiece. First, again, we encounter the distribution of motifs along a vertical axis. Moreover, there seems to exist a sort of hierarchy in the arrangement of motifs, not unlike the hierarchical fantastic world created by the Aluchaideng and Issyk headdresses further East. Here, however, the eye is first drawn to the bottom register instead of the top due to the triangular shape of the piece; it is clear that the goddess is the main actor in this narrative. However, the simultaneous narrative formula embedded into the creation of the object is of paramount importance. The placement of a mirror image of beasts, seen throughout the steppe region and as far east as Aluchaideng,

is just above the goddess' throne, implying a human-animal hierarchy or perhaps, representing the animals as guardians.

A gold plaque excavated from the village of Merdzhany, situated in the Krasnodar region where the tomb of Karagodeuashkh is located offers some additional insights. A seated female figure is again depicted frontally here, seated on a throne next to a tree, being approached by a male horse rider holding a vessel. (See Figure 2.51) In addition, similar elements are to be found in several plaques excavated from the contemporaneous Chertomlyk barrow located in the Dniepr Basin. On one of the plaques, a woman holding a mirror is being approached by a man drinking from a goblet.[194] Another plaque from the same tomb features a woman, depicted frontally, holding a drinking vessel with both hands and flanked by an altar-like construction topped by a flame.

Figure 2.51 Fragment of a gold rhython from Merdzhany Kurgan, Trans-Kuban region, 3ʳᵈ c BCE

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[194] Jacobson 2015, p. 164

The repeated portrayal of a goddess points to the idea that this could be the Greek goddess Tabiti who has been referred to by Herodotus as Hestia, the main focus of Scythian cult.[195] The presence of a pantheon of human imagery and the increasingly diminishing presence of zoomorphic motifs in tombs in the Northern Caucasus and the Kuban region after the 5th century could be indicative of a shift in aesthetic choices, a product of the emphasis on the human figure in Greek art. That being said, although one would be tempted to conclude that animal style became a marginal concern among the craftsmen of the Pontic steppe region west of the Caspian Sea, in reality, that was not the case. For instance, while it is true that the Chertomlyk plaques do not depict any animal figures, the headdress excavated from the same barrow points towards the significance of animal depictions.

The headdress is in the form of a kalathos[196], an object used by the Greeks in the worship of the female deities Persephone and Demeter.[197] It has three smaller horizontal registers and one larger horizontal register at the bottom. The first three rows are crowded with animal imagery. The depictions are repeated throughout the registers. Each band depicts several pairs of ungulates facing each other. (See Fig, 2.52)

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[195] Rudenko 1970, p. 289
[196] This is a Greek word which means "wicked basket" and typically refers to a basket with a narrow base and flared top.
[197] Alexeyev 2012, p. 224

Figure 2.52 Kalathos (Basket-shaped headgear), Chertomlyk, Late 4th century BCE

Stylistically, each pair of "twin" animals is reminiscent of the reflected imagery common in burials both east and west of the Caspian Sea. Although the overall shape and function of the object bears strong ties with the Hellenistic tradition, the core of the iconography lies at the repeated incorporation of symmetry. It is worth noting that the animals do not appear to be engaged in combat; rather, they are depicted at the verge of encroaching on each other's territory, yet remaining on opposite sides of a shared space. The bottom register enhances the composition with the insertion of highly abstracted flower-shaped motifs and circular foliage designs.[198] This decorative program is repeated in the diadem excavated from the Three Brothers Kurgan (Trekh Bratev) in the Crimean peninsula, near Kerch. Although not in the shape of a kalathos, the diadem also adopts the idea of

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[198] Another female headdress was excavated from the Deyev Barrow in present-day Kherson Oblast in Southern Ukraine, just north on the Crimean peninsula in the Dneipr basin. The object was found in a bad condition and has been reconstructed; its current reconstruction includes a circular head band with floral motifs and hanging oval pendants identical to the ones depicted on the Chertomlyk headdress. There is an immediately noticeable absence of animal motifs, which are replaced by separate plaques of human figures holding thyrsi and swords.

incorporating reflective, symmetrical images of animals. (See Fig. 2.53)

Figure 2.53 Diadem with relief figures of lions and panthers, Three Brothers Kurgan, 4th c BCE

The headdress consists of three bands of decorative elements: the middle section, which is also the largest, depicts several identical pairs of panthers and lions facing each other. They are represented frozen in the act of leaping towards each other yet no violent confrontation takes place. The fringe of oval pendants attached to the main part of the diadem is similar to the one seen on head ornaments throughout the Kuban region and the Dniepr Basin beginning 7th century BCE.

Looking back to the headdresses in the Trans-Kuban region and further west along the Dnepr river area of the Northern Black Sea Coast, one is struck by the unequivocal syncretism of motifs which are likely derived from several places of origin and reworked in the local nomadic tradition. Assyrian records indicate that the Urartians were attacked by the Scythians and the Cimmerians[199] in the late 7th century, a date which overlaps with

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[199] It is not clear if the texts refer to two distinct groups of people or these are loose terms employed to refer to horse-riding nomadic groups of unknown origin.

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the dating of these sites.[200] The Assyrian royal archive discovered in the capital at Nineveh

offers some accounts written by Assyrian emissaries who were dispatched to neighboring

states.[201] One of the envoys sent out by Prince Sennacherib reports that Cimmerian nomads

had attacked and defeated Urartu, and offers a list of all Urartian generals who were taken

by the nomads in 714 BCE.[202] Indubitably, transfer between the nomadic groups inhabiting

the Northern Caucasus and the Pontic Steppes of the Northern Black Sea (mostly Dniepr

region) could have affected the aesthetic choices of the artisans working on these pieces.

The Multicolored Beasts of Later Animal-Style: Towards a Polychrome Animal Art

At the beginning of the present chapter, we marginally noted the presence of

polychrome inlay in the animal-style plaques and headdress excavated at Aluchaideng.

Earlier precedents of inlay come from the seventh-century kurgan of Chilikty in

Kazakhstan and the contemporaneous gold panther at Kelermes which had small stones

inserted in its ears. The incorporation of precious and semi-precious stones in gold objects

did not however become a prominent feature of animal-style decoration until around the

dawn of the first millennium BCE. Christoph Baumer has proposed that the development

of well-defined 'polychrome" animal art was associated with the Sarmato-Alanian cultural

unity which gradually came to replace the Scythians as the major military power in the

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[200] Frye, Richard N. 1984. *The history of ancient Iran*. München: C.H. Beck., p. 73

[201] Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.), and Los Angeles County Museum of Art. 1975. *From the land of the Scythians: ancient treasures from the museums of the U.S.S.R. 3000 B.C.-100 B.C. : [exhibition held at] the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art. , p. 15;

[202] Ibid

Western steppes.[203] While I reckon that one needs to approach such radical generalization with caution, I agree with Baumer that in the early stages of animal style (7th -3rd c BCE) artisans across the Eurasian steppes (that is, both east and west of the Caspian Sea) only occasionally chose to accentuate small body parts with semi-precious stones and glass paste; in earlier contexts, polychrome inlay seems to have been considered an optional decorative enhancement rather than a consistently utilized approach to decoration. Around the end of the first millennium BCE, large portions of the zoomorphic bodies were covered with multi-colored stones in inlay, thus creating a truly *horror vacui* composition. Since technique and subject matter often mutually influence each other: as craftsmen saw the potential of color, polychrome inlay gradually brought about changes in the content of animal-style art, particularly with regard to the variety of animals being depicted. Around the first century, it was common to see Bactrian camels and dragons as part of the visual vocabulary. It would be inaccurate to state, as Baumer does, that this is a purely "Sarmatian" interpretation of animal-style art, as animal art with polychrome inlay appears sporadically across the Eurasian steppe belt, although its main concentration seems to be in the Rostov region of modern-day Russia (in the northwestern shores of the Black Sea coastal area) and Crimea. The following finds shed light on the abandonment, reinterpretation and continuation of older themes to fit this newly developed form of animal art.

The Khokhlach Treasure

In 1864, a kurgan was found by chance in Novocherkassk, a city located on the Northeastern edge of the Black Sea Coast near the confluence of the Tuzlov and Aksay

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[203] Baumer 2012, p. 267

rivers. The barrow had been previously disturbed, but most of the precious objects were found intact. The highlight of this discovery is a golden headdress consisting of three main parts. (See Fig. 2.54) Separate plates are connected with hinges and inlaid with garnets, turquoise, pearls and colored glass. At the center of the diadem, the craftsman has placed a head of a female deity wearing a braided headdress with a large precious stone at the center. The female head is made of amethyst. She is flanked on both sides by golden birds in relief decorated in inlay. Directly above the female head, there is a tree with stylized, detailed leaves; the tree itself is flanked by two golden stags perched on the edge of the diadem. Behind the stags, on one side, there is a pair of a stag and a half-stag, half-goat hybrid, placed on opposite sides of a tree. On the other side of the crown, two small birds are perched on top of their nests. Originally, the diadem had an equal number of identical animals on both sides of the central tree (the one above the female bust), yet only the right side of the diadem has been preserved in its entirety.[204] The bottom of the headdress is decorated with rings holding hanging rosettes, which in turn are attached to amphora-shaped pendants. This mode of decoration is already familiar to us from the numerous earlier examples excavated from kurgans in the Northern Caucasus and Crimean Peninsula such as the Kelermes and Melgunov mounds. The appearance of the second tree with heart-shaped pendants in the place of its leaves, however, is not a motif which we have encountered in the funerary art of earlier steppe nomads or their sedentary neighbors. This motif appears to have developed later on, perhaps at the beginning of the first millennium BCE. The tree in the Novocherkassk crown is an early precedent for the headdresses of extraordinary similarity to the tombs of the Xianbei people who succeeded the Xiongnu

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[204] Zasetskaya 2011, p. 26

along the Chinese northern frontier beginning from the late 1st century CE.[205]

Figure 2.54 Diadem form Khokhlach kurgan, Novocherkassk, Russia, 1st c CE

Moreover, one of the crowns excavated at the Bactrian necropolis of Tillya tepe in present-day Afghanistan, dated to the first half of the 1st century CE, is technically and visually reminiscent of the Khokhlach tree. The diadem from Tomb VI features a band with several trees with laves made of circular pendants with a heart-shaped center. (See Fig. 2.55.1, 2,3) Similarities with the toreutics of the Tiliya-tepe craftsmen in northern Afghanistan are further substantiated by the discovery of an extraordinary ceremonial dagger in another cemetery in the Rostov region, close to Khokhlach. The Datchi kurgans also date to the end of the first century CE and were discovered in 1986. In barrow no.1 archaeologists uncovered a ceremonial sheathed dagger crafted in the new polychrome style. The golden dagger is embellished with cornelian and turquoise. One of the knobs is decorated with the image of a camel; there are two different scenes of animal predation:

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[205] Laursen, Sarah. 2011. *Leaves that sway: Gold Xianbei cap ornaments from northeast China*. ScholarlyCommons.

one depicts a griffin confronting a standing camel and another (repeated four times) shows

a vulture attacking a kneeling camel. (See Fig. 2.55.4)

Figure 2.55.1 Tree from the Khokhlach Kurgan, 1st c CE

Figure 2.55.2 Tree segment from the Crown of Tiliya-tepe IV, around 1st c CE

Figure 2.55.3 Golden Buyaoguan Headdress from Lamadong Cemetery, Liaoning Province

Figure 2.55.4 Sheathed dagger from Datchi, Sea of Azov, Rostov region, 1st c CE

Due to the syncretism of motifs and the unusually complex techniques, scholars have not reached consensus on the place of provenance of the Khokhlach diadem. Rostovtseff has proposed that the diadem was not made locally but instead, it was one of the masterpieces produced by workshops in the Bosporan kingdom's urban center of Panticapaeum.[206] Zasetskaya insists on an eastern nomadic origin of this piece based on

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[206] Rostovtseff 1925, p. 485 The Bosporan Kingdom and the Greek port city of Olbia were important trading partners of the so-called Pontic Scythians.

the presence of a darker resinous undertone in some segments of the headdress.[207] While the provenance is still encased in mystery, the later explanation is more likely: in terms of its visual impact, the diadem is much closer to headdresses discovered in the Pontic steppes and perhaps even further east. The placement of zoomorphs along a vertical axis is in tune with traditions we observed as far east as the Chinese northern frontier.

One gains a further insight into the polychrome animal style of the Khokhlach headdress when considering it in the context of other precious items excavated from the same kurgan. The Khokhlach finds included a torque and a pair of bracelets, both of which were decorated with various real and fantastic zoomorphic images inlaid with semi-precious, colorful stones. The torque consists of two parallel bands of fantastic beasts. (See Fig. 2.56) The animals are, for the most part, highly abstracted and difficult to identify. On the upper segment, a wolf with an extended snout is biting onto the back of a griffin with an exaggerated beak, dramatically turned backward, and an unnaturally twisted torso. The beasts' body parts terminate into the other animal, thus inviting immediate recollections of the art of Ordos with its high abstraction and geometricization. In this case, the strategic inlay of semi-precious stones accentuates specific parts of the zoomorph: the animals' ribs are inlaid with turquoise, the ears – with coral, and the eyes- with transparent glass. The usage of polychrome inlay is also seen in the execution of the elaborate bracelets. The spiral objects consist of several wires with wide ends which are embellished with friezes of animals. The limbs of the beasts are inlaid with turquoise. (See Fig. 2.58) The syncretic monsters are depicted as abstracted amalgams of intertwining geometric shapes; the composition is so crowded that it is impossible to distinguish the predator from the prey, if

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[207] Zasetskaya 2011, p. 82

such roles were to exist among the animals depicted in the composition. Rostovtseff describes the fantastic beasts as "dragons with long noses".[208] Kondakov, on the other hand, emphasizes the disproportionately large heads and open jaws which, according to him, are redolent of the Siberian animal style.[209] In reality, the whole downward, spiral arrangement coupled with the engraving of beasts at the ends of the spiral invites associations with the Aluchaideng headdress, examined at the onset of the present discussion.

Figure 2.56 Torque from Khokhlach Barrow

Figure 2.57 Bracelet from Khokhlach barrow

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[208] Rostovtseff 1929, p. 43
[209] Kondakov 1890, p. 136

In both cases, the notion of dynamic, downward movement which triggers metamorphosis is at the center of the visual program; each piece starts with a scene of transformation and ends with another scene of animal transfiguration. Turquoise inlay was also used in the Aluchaideng crown, albeit on the eagle rather than the animals at the ends of the spiral.

Spiral torques were among the most common artefacts which embellished the bodies of the tomb occupants both east and west of the Caspian Sea. It is worth noting that a great number of spiral-shaped torques with zoomorphic terminals of feline heads, often inlaid with semi-precious stones, entered the Collection of Peter the Great as gifts from the Governer of Siberia, M. P. Gagarin.[210] In terms of size, shape and design, these are almost identical to the spiral torque found at the Golden Man Issyk Burial. The torques were usually meant to be worn together with a headdress, perhaps as part of a ritual ceremony. The repeated ring shapes coupled with the gradual meandering movement along a vertical axis is perhaps the most long-lasting aspect of head ornaments along the Central Eurasian steppes. All of these torques precede the later discoveries in the Sea of Azov region by more than a century. However, few if any of the earlier finds feature polychrome inlay.

Indeed, head and body ornaments of this shape and design are found in some of the westernmost parts of the Eurasia, such as Ancient Thrace as far back as the late fourth century BCE. Recent sets of evidence have come from a tomb complex at the town of Sveshtari in the historical region of Dobrudja, a plateau situated between the lower reaches of the Danube and the Black Sea. The area roughly corresponds to present-day

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[210] Simpson et. al 2017, p. 63-67

Northeastern Bulgaria and Southern Romania. Herodotus refers to the territory as "the land of the Getae" and "Scythian Minor".[211]   The Getae, not unlike the terms "Scythians", "Saka" and "Sarmatians" is a loose term which refers to several Thracian groups, which were first identified by Strabo's "Geographica" as living in the eastern part of Dacia, near the Black Sea.[212] Ancient sources differ on the exact relationship, or even discrepancy between the Datians and Getae, who were allegedly ethnically related sub-groups of the Thracians. The Sveshtari tomb, excavated in 2012, has a layout which differs from that of a Central Eurasian kurgan. The southern end of the tomb features a monumental stone chamber , semi-cylindrical arch and architectural decoration in Dorian style.[213] Golden objects consistent with some of the trends identified in other parts of the steppes were found in the chamber. A spiral diadem found at the tomb is decorated with a crowd of lions and felines with rosettes freely hanging from their tails. (See Fig. 2.58)

Figure 2.58 Spiral headdress, Tomb of Sveshtari, late 4th – 3rd c BCE

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[211] Herodotus, *Histories Book IV*, 6
[212] Chichikova, Mariĭa, Daniela Stoĭanova, and Totko Stoĭanov. 2012. *Tsarskata Grobnitsa s Kariatidite Kraĭ Selo Sveshtari: 30 godini otkrivaneto (*The caryatids royal tomb near the village of Sveshtari) Isperikh: Istoricheski muzeĭ Isperikh.
[213] Ibid

The stylized animals are perched on the thin spirals and are depicted in the process of movement, yet, none of them are facing each other. This appears to be an animal procession of some sort. The ends of the diadem are decorated with sculptural fantastic creatures, identified by the excavator as female satyrs, deities in Greek mythology.[214] An ibex and a mountain goat are biting onto the hind legs of the alleged satyrs. The headdress was found next to four spiral bracelets with lion heads on each end. Another curious find includes two rounded appliques with the head of a female goddess, likely from the Greek pantheon. The gently and realistically rendered facial features of the goddess remind of the female bust at the center of the Khokhlach crown. The headdress was found in a wooden box, together with cosmetic boxes, other golden plaques and an elaborate golden torque with animal terminals, familiar from numerous steppe tombs and the Collection of Peter the Great. The execution and style of the torque is stylistically akin to that of the one discovered at the Issyk Golden Man kurgan, thus suggesting a continuity over an extraordinarily large geographic domain

The Kargaly Diadem (2ⁿᵈ c BCE-1ˢᵗ c CE): Fantastic Beasts and Humans

In 1939, archaeologists uncovered a remarkable diadem at a pit in Kargaly in the region of present-day Almaty, Southeastern Kazakhstan. (See Fig. 2.59) This area overlaps with the historical region of Zhetysu and includes the steppes south of Lake Balkhash, at the northern foothill of the Tianshan range. The find is placed in the time period between the second century BCE and the first century CE, thus overlapping with the rule of the Chinese Han dynasty (207 BCE-220 CE). The diadem features gold latticework inlaid with

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[214] Ibid

turquoise, carnelian and coral[215]; it stands only 5 cm high.[216] The object might have originally had a centerpiece which is now missing. The crowded composition features elaborately interwoven scenes of humanoid figures, zoomorphic shapes and cloud designs. The swirl-like patterns resemble foliage and at first glance, they are redolent of the cloud decorative pattern which appears repeatedly in the mural program and interior furnishings of Han dynasty tombs.[217] Overall, there are four identifiable fantastic animals embedded into the imagery of the Kargaly diadem. The first and most reminiscent of the Chinese artistic tradition is a dragon of the feline type with a short beard-like protrusion coming out of his head, a horn and wings. The beast has opened their jaw and its body is curved forward as if leaping ahead into the distance. The humanoid figure portrayed in profile rides the beast holding onto its horn. It has both a human body, and zoomorphic features including small wings and horns. These human-like creatures appear at ease with the beasts, which resemble early Han dynasty Chinese dragons of the feline type.[218]

Figure 2.59 The Kargaly Diadem, 1st c BCE- 1st c CE

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[215] Along wit the diadem, there were a ring made of gold with inlay in the shape of a camel as well as golden earrings also with inlay. The findings at Kagraly thus indicate the development of a polychrome animal style and the introduction of inlay

[216] Akishev, Kemalʹ Akishevich, A. Akishev, and O. Belyayeva. 1983. *Drevnee Zoloto Kazakhstana* (The Ancient Gold of Kazakhstan). Alma-Ata, Kazakhskoĭ S.S.R.: Oner., p. 41-42

[217] A painted lacquer coffin from the Mawangdui tomb in Changsha is only one among myriad examples of the swirl-like, cloud pattern depicted on Han funerary art.

[218] Boardman, John. "Central Asia West and East", in Cribb, Joe., and Georgina Herrmann. 2007. *After Alexander: Central Asia before Islam.* Oxford: Published for The British Academy by Oxford University Press, p. 18

The rest of the imagery includes highly abstracted ungulates making their way through the foliage. The horse in the center and the deer at the edge of the composition are both seated on a raised platform and the foliage in their surroundings gradually disappears into their bodies. The animal and human actors in this scene are portrayed in rapport with their natural surroundings, so much so that visually, there is no stark contrast between the foliage and the figures. Overall, the most striking and unusual feature of this piece is its ethereal quality. The Kargaly diadem brings associations with a piece from Tsar Peter The Great's collection which probably dates to around the same time period as the diadem.[219]A pair of golden plaques with colorful inlay of cornelian and glass form a belt clasp. The fantastic beasts depicted in the crowded composition are extremely similar to the dragons depicted in the Kargaly diadem. The major difference between the two pieces is the presence of a central axis in the form of the so-called "tree of life" in the plaque. The high level of abstraction in rendering the foliage patterns and the lack of discrepancy between the imagery is a prominent feature of both pieces.

The Kargaly diadem has been associated with the material culture of the Wusun 烏 孫, a semi-nomadic Indo-European group which has been mentioned by Chinese historical sources on numerous occasions. The *Shiji, Hanshu* and *Hou Hanshu* locate them in the region between the Qilian mountains and Dunhuang; afterwards, they were driven away from their original territory by the Xiongnu invasion and then settled further west just like the Yuezhi. Their exact origin of remains unclear, although Beckwith has recently proposed that the original pronunciation of their name is Aśvin, thus indicating an Indo-

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[219] The plaques were sent as a gift to Peter the Great by the governer of Siberia in Tobolsk, M. Gagarin in 1716. See Simpson, St. John, and Svetlana Pankova. 2017. *Scythians: warriors of ancient Siberia*. London: Thames & Hudson. , p.66

Iranian connection.[220] A Chinese connection is certainly at play here: the humanoid figures resemble immortals commonly depicted in Han dynasty murals and on the surface of funerary objects. The openwork and inlay techniques were already widely used in China and its frontiers at this point (as indicated by the appearance of inlay and the usage of turqoise on the Aluchaideng piece). The vegetation itself is reminiscent of cloud-like motif seen in Han dynasty painting.[221]

The Optics and Theatrics of Nomadic Headdresses: The Politics of Receptivity

The lavish headdresses discussed so far vary in size, weight, shape and decoration. They all, however, have one thing in common: the premeditated creation of an optical construction with a strong physical and psychological impact, achieved through the visual manifestations of a gradual transformation, a mystic metamorphosis of sorts, rather than animal combat. In reality, very few of the decorative headpieces utilize in their visual program depictions of ferocious animal predation. Instead, in almost every cultural zone identified so far, the artisan has consciously placed emphasis on the optics of transformation. In some regions, notably the Aluchaideng, Pazyryk and Issyk culture, that was achieved through an emphasis on the vertical composition of an elaborate costume worthy of a theatre performance. Every culture had different interpretations of the visuality of animal hierarchy and how hybrid and real animals and other natural elements such as vegetal patterns fit within the burial complex and the respective spiritual system of the deceased. The headdress is thus only a single component of carefully planned ritual attire.

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[220] Beckwith, Christopher I. 2009. *Empires of the Silk Road: a History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. p. 56
[221] The Mawangdui coffin painting is one among many examples of the cloud design.

It is ultimately the peak of the visual presentation of the deceased in the afterlife.

The presence of circular, spiral-shaped objects terminating into fantastic zoomorphs is prominent in almost all of the burials discussed in this study, from the Ordos Loop to Dobrudja. In most cases, the tomb occupant was interred wearing both a headdress and a torque encircling the neck. Sometimes the animals on the ends are different (Aluchaideng) thus indicating metamorphosis along the surface of the object, and sometimes they are the same (Sveshtari). The repetition of dynamic circular shapes around the head of the deceased is also a conscious choice perhaps meant to recreate a cycle of life and death.

There is little doubt that the headdresses in funerary complexes along the Eurasian steppes were meant to create an unparalleled visual impact and their potential for enacting a ritual space is undeniable. But who was the audience? In seeking an answer, it is worthwhile to turn to the theory of the medieval Arab thinker Alhazen (965-1038 CE). In his *Book of Optics*, he proposes that the center of optical activity in the perception of an object was the object itself, which, when illuminated, produces rays of light in every direction.[222] This idea challenges one's traditional understanding of the concept of "seeing" which identifies the viewer as the primary agent and the object as a passive receiver. Thus, Alhazen's proposals have been useful guides in the study of Islamic art where the visual impact on the viewer and the relationship between the audience and the monument have been at the center of interpretive frameworks regarding works of secular and non-secular meaning. It is not far-fetched to employ this theory, albeit conservatively, in the context of

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[222] Lindberg, D.C. "Alhazen's Theory of Vision and Its Reception in the West". *Isis* 58 (1967): 321-341

steppe funerary art, specifically when deciphering the reception and use of headdresses found in burial mounds. The strategic placement of animals enhanced by two distinct directions of movement, a spiral and a vertical one, conditions the eye to a very specific visual experience. I propose that there was an intended viewer for these headdresses. Two possibilities exist in how the presence of an audience could have shaped the funerary practice. The headdresses could have been worn by the deceased as part of a ritual ceremony in their life on earth. Hoping to reenact the ceremony in the afterlife would be a way to normalize the transition into another realm. The second possibility entails the usage of the headdress as part of an actual burial ritual which may have accompanied the interment of the deceased. Thus, it is feasible that the headdresses had a function only within a funerary context. In the cases where animal motifs govern a world which unravels within the object, the second scenario appears more plausible. In both scenarios, however, the headdress was worn in front of an audience who witnessed the ceremonial practice. The viewer's experience is not only a result, it is a cause: the person who commissioned these pieces must have planned or desired to create a specific experience among its viewers, likely other members of the elite. This is where status, politics and ritual intersect. The incorporation of foreign motifs, such as rosettes which clearly have a Near Eastern origin, also played an important role in creating this experience.

First, the presence of decorative elements derived from foreign traditions (often those of sedentary empires) was meant to convey status, power and political clout for two reasons: it ensured the continuation of the "good life" after death and more importantly, it fulfilled the expectations of the audience. Let us consider the Chinese scenario. It is possible that, during the Warring States period, hybrid forms of social practice and visual

expression were purposefully adopted by members of the social elite on China's northern frontier to convey their high social status through cultural connections with distant centers of power such as Ordos and the Eurasian Steppes. A desire to possess products of the "exotic" steppes might have triggered interchange but also redefined the production of golden objects at local workshops. It is feasible that in the very same manner 19th century Orientalism, as defined through the Western perception of a homogenous "East" was the driving force behind the work of European artists such as Ingres and Delacroix, a similar fascination with the "exotic" nomads of the steppe might have been a primary factor in the production and circulation of luxurious metalwork as early as the Zhou dynasty. Naturally, the local artisans would have adopted only those visual elements which fit within the already established aesthetic systems of the culture: the inlay on the Aluchaideng bird and the wires enabling its movement were elements of foreign provenance but the very idea of placing a large animal on top of a funerary object is well familiar from both Shang and Zhou bronzes. The incorporation of foreign motifs most likely had little to do with spirituality; instead, they were one of the many elements in the planning of the visual impact of the object on an audience of elite individuals both on earth and in the afterlife.

That being said, one needs to also recognize the difference between the two intended audiences in question. An audience which consisted of the deceased's peers would have witnessed the placement of the body in the tumulus, perhaps even the deposition of the precious objects together with the body. That is not the same audience which accompanied the tomb occupant in his journey to eternity. An imagined audience would greet the deceased once he was hidden from the scrutiny of the world and once he had severed his physical ties with the earthly realm. The headdresses arranged like mountain

peaks, coupled with the presence of a centrally-depicted tree with flourishing branches along with animals with exaggerated antlers and horns needed to mean and communicate something to the envisioned spectators. Based on the overwhelming number of images derived from the flora and fauna of the nomads' surroundings, one could assume that the people buried in the kurgans, regardless of their exact ethnic affiliation or geographic surrounds, had a worldview derived from natural phenomena.

Such ruminations about images derived from the natural world bring us to the concept of collective totemism. Durkheim understands the cosmology of totemism through its relationship with social stratification and bonds of kinship.[223] He argues that one cannot reduce totemism to the superficial notion of animal and plant worship, and states: "But the totem is not merely a name; it is an emblem, a veritable coat-of-arms whose analogies with the arms of heraldry have often been remarked…"[224] Durkheim sees the attachment to particular symbols derived from the natural world as a manifestation of a collective mindset, and thus a conceptual reflection of an inherent sense of belonging to a clan (or any social group, for that matter). Other thinkers such as Goldenweiser reject the concept of distance between the totem (deitified animal or plant) and the human actor. Indeed, Durkheim's theory does presuppose the belief in the existence a guardian, primordial being derived from the objectified symbol toward which a collective exhibits attachment and veneration. At the beginning of the twentieth century, anthropologist Andrew Lang built upon Durkheim's hypothesis in his discussion of the psychological and economically derived need of clans to be differentiated through a specific system of symbols derived

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[223] Durkheim, Émile. 1947. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life: A Study In Religious Sociology.* Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, p. 87-88
[224] Ibid, p. 114

from nature.[225] McLennan takes a different path as he suggests that primitive peoples naturally worshipped fetishes derived from nature; according to this theory, people from primordial societies perceived themselves as descendants (in the female line) of a zoomorphic ancestor. As Adam Kuper has observed, anthropologists have more or less come to equate the general term totemism and Australian totemism: even competing schools of thought (notably Frazer and Durkhheim) chose ethnographic materials from the aboriginal peoples of Australia.[226]

In the context of the number of recurrent patterns in the zoomorphic images identified in this chapter, both Durkheim's and Lang's theories can be pertinent. It is unlikely, however, that zoomorphic junctures or transforming hybrids placed along a vertical axis, or headdresses which emulated mountain peaks and trees, were totems which all the nomadic groups discussed in this study would have used to form a symbol of identity: there are simply too many similar objects deposited across an incredibly large geographic domain for this to be true. In the early years of animal art studies, Kondakov expressed the opinion that Scythian art included totemic animals (reindeer), symbols of military prowess (lions), and embodiments of the soul (raptors).[227] As this chapter has demonstrated, it is far-fetched to assume that an organic cultural sphere associated with a single Scythian ethnicity ever existed, let alone postulate the possibility of a common totem or totemic belief system shared by and integrated into all the local cultures discussed above.

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[225] Lang, Andrew. 1911. *Method in the Study of Totemism.* Glasgow: R. Maclehose & co.
[226] Kuper, Adam. 2005. *The Reinvention of Primitive Society: Transformations of a Myth.* 2nd ed. London: Routledge, p. 91
[227] Kondakov, N. P. 1929. *Ocherki i Zamietki po Istorīi Sredneviekovago Isskustva i Kul'tury.* Praga: Izd. Cheshskoĭ akademīi nauk i iskusstv., p. 16-31

Other than the lack of a settled lifestyle, the sensory experience of an elite member of the Aluchaideng culture in Ordos in the fourth century BCE would have been substantially different from that of a wealthy nomadic chieftan from the Transkuban Culture of the North Caucasus. There is no reason to assume that all these heterogeneous groups were equally likely to establish a spiritual (and thus visual) system of totemic worship: perhaps some did and some did not. What can be said with certainty, however, is that in nomadic societies, communicating social status and the desire to form opportune (and often uneasy) aliances could have necessitated the refinement and objectification of loose spiritual concepts. Animal-style regalia was meant to encode a visual message which could have been easily decoded by members of one's social group. If the elite also envisioned an idealized life beyond death where they would be surrounded by other refined individuals of equal social stature, then these visual codes were meant to also be deciphered by the social circle of the deceased in the afterlife. This is not to say that recognition outside the immediate circle of the deceased was not important; however, the presence of set visual tropes through zoomorphic arrangement such as jucntures formed a visual language which would have been intelligible to an elite accustomed to such ceremonial practices.

Does the placement of animals along a vertical axis or a spiral in virtually all headdresses excavated east and west of the Caspian Sea indicate a continuous perception that animal metamorphosis and hybridity were key aspects in more than one culture along the Central Eurasian steppes? Perhaps. One could even go as far as speculating that the pointed headdresses of the Altai region and the Kazakh steppes served as links to a higher entity and thus, various peoples of the steppe shared a common conception of the netherworld. The more important and less speculative conclusion, however, is that the

headdress ensembles placed on the deceased's head were intended to be perceived by a viewer, and it is the viewer's preconceived experience, status, and expectations that played a major role in the craftsman's decisions.

Chapter 3: The Tomb Inside Out: The Political Dimensions of Mortuary Space

Finding a satisfactory definition for the word "materiality" is not an easy task. There is little doubt, however, that the strategic placement of objects in our surroundings shapes our understanding and reaction to that setting. Objects are both the content and frame of our reality; they formulate and often pre-determine our psychological experiences and thus convince us that these experiences are a tangible reaction to an entirely material reality. In fact, the accumulated visual presence of material things in our environs usually escapes our awareness as we gradually become accustomed to their materiality. All too often, it is only in contexts which seek the "immaterial" and repudiate the material as earthly and therefore inherently of lower status that we become aware of the extent to which our presence in this world is being constantly framed by the psychological impact of material objects. Moreover, the affect of these objects is also shaped by frames in which the objects themselves are placed. In his work "The Sense of Order", E.H. Gombrich offers an in-depth analysis of the frames within which "things" are viewed and argues that it it is only when the frame is removed that we become aware of its crucial role in the objects' social life.[228] When the frame is appropriate, it melts seamlessly into the objects' physical presence and we simply do not see it; when the frame is incongruous with the object it frames, we are suddenly aware of its existence.[229] A man wearing Joseon-period traditional Korean attire in a historical play about Korea is considered an expected element of the normative process of "enacting" a bygone era. If today we see the same man wearing his

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[228] Gombrich, E. H. 1979. *The Sense of Order: A Study In the Psychology of Decorative Art.* Oxford [England]: Phaidon

[229] Miller. Daniel. 2005. *Materiality.* Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press., p. 5

Joseon attire while travelling on a bus to work, we would suddenly become acutely aware of his presence in our surroundings due to the removal of the frame of a theatrical setting. Only by taking away the frame can one sense the multi-dimensionality of an object. Museums, art galleries and other cultural institutions, for instance, exist as frames which accentuate the importance of exhibited artworks and prompt our minds to perceive them as special, unique, valuable; this argument has been taken as far as the bold notion that art exists only because the "framing" entity (such as museums) ensures that we pay special respect (and money) to the object.[230] In light of this, one question comes to light: are buried objects also perceived by those who discover them within certain frames and are these frames created consciously by the people who buried them?

By definition, tombs are spaces where we place the dead. There is an underlying concept of life, death, and life beyond death associated with burial spaces; regardless of the deceased's religious or cultural background, placing the body into an underground space always changes and shapes that space to fit into the newly manufactured context of burial. This brings us back to the notion of frames and content. The relationship between the framing entity and the content which is being framed, and thus defined, is of vital importance to any developing theory of burial practices. What turns a kurgan from a pile of heaped earth and boulders into a sacred space? Any additional manipulation of the special parameters such as interior decoration further shapes the space to fit into the pre-determined plot of a burial ritual. To responsibly and thoroughly examine burial space, a study needs to focus on the materiality of the objects occupying the space as well as the spatial frame which enacts the objects and gives them meaning. At times, it would be useful

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[230] Ibid

to remove that frame and consider how and whether these objects would have been meaningful in a different way should have they been placed in a different frame (for example, used at banquets in the abodes of the elite rather than placed in their tombs). It is worth noting that in many of the case studies presented in this chapter, the textiles or furnishings in tombs were likely not produced exclusively for the burial and may have originally functioned in a different context in the life of the buried individuals before their death. These contexts mark an important change in the social existence of that object: a textile embellished with fantastic animals may have functioned as a wall hanging in a yurt and thus, may have continued to have the same function after being placed in a tomb, but this change in contexts should not be overlooked, as it alters the ultimate meaning of the object's social life. It is with these theoretical musings in mind that we delve into the fascinating world of tomb interior design.

Lastly, the items chosen for placement in the tomb along with the body of the deceased tend to have various provenances. Some were likely produced locally and carried by the nomadic warriors in ox-carts or camel back through the steppe. Other objects were imported luxury goods designed and manufactured in sedentary empires and kingdoms such as Persia, Greece, China, Parthia and Greco-Bactria. These could have been acquired in trade, protection payments from traders passing through a region controlled by nomadic groups, looting in raids and expansion campaigns, voluntary exchange (tribute trade), and peace agreements. A third group of items placed in the tombs are the works of local artisans who likely copied or offered local interpretations of the originals which they had either previously seen or acquired. In so doing, the nomads did not mindlessly emulate masterpieces without any regard for the local aesthetics; rather, they were transforming the

appearance, function and social meaning of borrowed motifs often altering them to a state of unrecognizability. As we will show, zoomorphic imagery, and animal hybridity in particular, is the most frequently reinterpreted visual element which even when derived from China and Persia, took its own shape and meaning.

Between Felt and Silk: The Zoomorphic Cosmos of Textiles

Textiles rarely survive in burials due to their fragility. The climate of Siberia and the Mongolian steppes has, however, contributed to the remarkable preservation of textiles in tombs of Eurasian nomads, hence the term "the frozen tombs of Siberia" coined by Sergey Rudenko.[231] In the case of Pazyryk, for instance, after the robbers had broken into the barrows, water started to seep in and thus formed an ice layer which aided the preservation of the organic materials from the tombs. Textiles found in the region along the Chinese northern periphery in the Tarim Basin date as early as the first half of the first millennium BCE; for the most part, these were simple pieces of cloth occasionally embellished with geometric designs. During the latter half of the Western and the beginning of Eastern Han dynasty, some of the communities established in the Tarim Basin periphery buried their locals after dressing them in colorful attire embellished with intricate embroideries consisting of various patterns dispersed across the surface in a *horror vacui* fashion. Textile fragments with scenes of animal images and vegetation patterns were also found on the reaches of the Selenga river in northern Mongolia, at the Noin Ula (Noyon Uul) burial site (dated to the 1st c BCE -1st c CE). The earliest textiles covered with exuberant decorative patterns, including complex amalgams of human and zoomorphic imagery, appear in the

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[231] Rudenko, S. I. *Frozen Tombs of Siberia: The Pazyryk Burials of Iron Age Horsemen.* [1st English ed., with author's revisions]. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970.

Altai region and are associated with the Pazyryk culture. For a long time, scholars have favored the underlying notion that the Pazyryk textiles, having been earlier in date and likely derived from Achaemenid or other West Asian sources known to the people of the Altai, are the ultimate prototype for the decorative scheme in textiles buried in tombs along the Chinese northern periphery. By examining each of these distinct cultures who were active from the 4th c BCE to the dawn of the first millennium BCE, we can pinpoint unique as well as continuous features in the making of tomb space starting with the Pazyryk culture, which appears to have preceded the rest.

Zoomorphic images at Pazyryk: An "Imported" Visuality

The burials associated with the Pazyryk Culture which were already discussed in the previous chapter have yielded some of the earliest and most remarkably well-preserved textile fragments in human history. As such, the finds from the five Pazyryk type barrows along with other neighboring cemeteries belonging or akin to the Pazyryk Culture such as Berel and Bashadar predate the majority of the discoveries at sites from the Mongolian steppes and the Tarim Basin. The climate conditions at the frozen kurgans of the Altai mountains have contributed to the preservation of numerous organic materials including textile fibers and dyes. Thus, scientific work on the Pazyryk textiles have enabled researches to reach tentative conclusions regarding the origin of production of these dyes and materials: for instance, the wool used for the clothes of the Pazyryk tomb occupants was consistent with the wool of Altai sheep.[232] The most commonly used weave patterns were the plain, looped and twilled weaves. A number of dyes were derived from specific plants which have now been identified as madder, indigo and tannins. Other dyes were of

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[232] Simpson, p. 119

animal origins. Liquid chromatography and mass spectrometry as well as scanning electron microscopy offer unprecedented glimpses into the origin and making process of the textiles.[233] We shall, however, keep in mind that the provenance of many fragments is still encased in uncertainty in spite of the advances brought about by the introduction of new analytical technologies.

Pazyryk tomb no.5, located in the valley of the Bolshoy Ulagan River is the largest Pazyryk kurgan. Inside the mound, which had been severely looted, archaeologists uncovered the oldest surviving knotted-pile carpet known to date. The rug had originally been spread around the chamber floor. The walls had been draped with felt hangings which, due to the plundering, were found on top of the carpet.[234] The carpet's palette is dominated by red, yellow and blue. The piece was tied using the technique of the the symmetrical double Turkish knot (3600 to the square decimeter) and as such, the pile is very dense.[235] The rug's ornamentation is exuberant in color and diverse in motifs. (See Figure 3.1) It has five borders divided into narrow bands of squares. The central segment is decorated with two dozen cross shapes, each of which consists of four stylized lotus buds. The central area is outlined by a band depicting a procession of stylized griffins threaded in alternating red-and-white color patterns. This border is encircled by another one, consisting of two dozen deer. The widest border contains twenty-eight horse riders, each seated on a colorful, intricately decorated saddle cloth. The men's postures alternate as they are depicted both walking and mounted on horses. Their poses mark a departure from the Achaemenid approach to depicting riders: as evidenced by reliefs at the Apadāna Palace in Persepolis,

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[233] Ibid
[234] Rudenko, p. 64
[235] Ibid

riders are usually represented walking alongside their horses. The Pazyryk artisan has borrowed pictorial motifs from the Achaemenids while simultaneously adding local interpretations of the foreign artistic vocabulary. The spotted fallow deer illustrated on the inner frieze of the carpet is an animal characteristic of the fauna of South Siberia and Transcaucasia.[236]

Figure 3.1 Woolen knotted-pile carpet, Pazyryk no.5, 5th -4th c BCE

The framing technique and the presence of multiple animal processions in the clearly delineated borders is reminiscent of the animal friezes on the tapestry bands in Persian art and also on textiles discovered in the Tarim Basin site of Shanpula, which will be systematically studied in the next section. These stylistic approaches to textile decoration, likely drawing from an Achaemenid source, occur in other textile finds from kurgan no.5.

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[236] Rubinson, K. S. 1990. "The Textiles from Pazyryk". *Expedition, 32*(1): p. 49.

Figure 3.2 Detail of carpet, Pazyryk kurgan no.5

A piece of woolen saddlecloth with similar distribution of decorative elements was discovered in the same kurgan. The center of the carpet was decorated with square-shaped motifs while the borders were covered with a recurring pattern depicting a pair of women in a procession towards an altar. (See Figure 3.2) The woman at the front is larger in size, which likely indicates her higher status; she wears a headdress with a long cloth falling over the shoulder. The women carry pieces of cloths in their hands, raised in veneration, a gesture which would be appropriate in a supplication ceremony. Rudenko suggests an Assyrian source for this image as evidenced by similar depictions of women in worship processions on bas-reliefs from the palace at Nineveh in Kuyunjik as well as on golden plaques from the Oxus treasure.[237] The decoration of this cloth is entirely devoid of animal forms; instead, the focus is placed exclusively on the female figures. The same saddlecloth, however, also contains a chest strap showing a procession of lions. The strap had a felt base onto which the artisan would have sewn a tapestry band. The band is framed by geometric shapes. The lions are illustrated with their jaws wide open and their limbs

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[237] Rudenko, p. 296

extended to imply movement. Most of them are facing right while the first two lions face left (See Figure 3.3). The shoulders and muscles of the animals are marked by multi-colored stylized motifs. These stylizations are strongly reminiscent of the "dot and comma" pictorial motifs in the art of the Achaemenids and are perhaps a local interpretation of this imported motif. (See Figure 3.4)
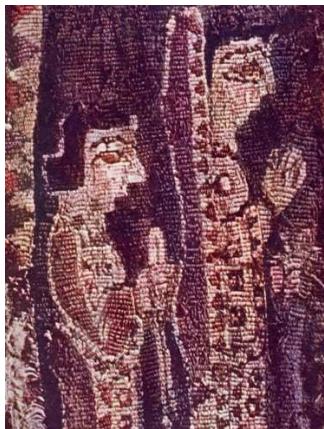
Figure 3.3 Designs on Woolens from Pazyryk Kurgan no. 5: detail

Figure 3.4. Horse chest strap with a procession of lions, Pazyryk tomb no.5

Scenes with processions toward an altarpiece albeit recalling Achamenid and neo-Assyrian masterpieces are occasionally seen in Altai and other Central Asian burials dated to the second half of the first millennium BCE. Another textile discovered in kurgan no.5 is a wall hanging depicting a rider with a billowing cape approaching a seated female

personage (See Figure 3.5). Rudenko identifies the woman as the goddess Tabiti who was also the most important deity in the Scythian pantheon.[238] Judging from the prominence of the seated figure's stature, the individual is either a deity or a ruler; thus, the rider might be approaching the throne to pay homage. The figure holds a branch with elaborate foliage which is redolent of the exaggerated depictions of deer antlers found on Pazyryk carpets as well as stag ornaments excavated from the Sarmatian burials in Filippovka in the Ural mountains.[239] The motif of a seated female personage approached by a male mounted on a horse is not unique to Pazyryk, and may believe to have its provenance west of the Caspian Sea on the Northern Black Sea grassland. Similar scenes embellish golden plaques associated with the arts of the Pontic Scythians, now part of Tsar Peter the Great's Collection in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. [240] Multiple golden plaques excavated from the kurgans at Chertomlyk, Kul'oba, Merdzhana, and Karagodeuashkh are embellished with representations of seated women, addressed by male figures carrying rhyton-shaped vessels or cups.[241] The Crimean Peninsula abounds in kurgans which have yielded objects decorated with imagery carrying this theme, as evidenced also by the presence of female figures in headdresses from the Sea of Azov region examined in Chapter Two.

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[238] Rudenko, S. I. 1970. *Frozen tombs of Siberia; the Pazyryk burials of Iron Age horsemen*. Berkeley: University of California Press., p. 289; See also: Andreeva, P. and Atwood, C.

[239] Aruz, Joan. 2007. *The Golden Deer of Eurasia: Perspectives on the Steppe Nomads of the Ancient World*. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press., p. 50

[240] Artamonov, M. I., and Werner Forman. 1969. *The splendor of Scythian art; treasures from Scythian tombs*. New York: F.A. Praeger.

[241] Jacobson, Esther. 1993. *The Deer Goddess of Ancient Siberia: a study in the ecology of belief*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

Figure 3.5 Appliqued Felt Wall Hanging Decorated with Goddess (Tabiti) and Rider from Pazyryk no. 5

The recurrent images of processions and divine worship ceremonies recall some of the imagery from the Noin Ula kurgans situated in Batsümber Sum (Central Province), north of modern-day Ulaanbaatar.[242] On the ground floor of the burial pit in barrow no. 31 at Noin Ula, archaeologists uncovered an embroidered piece of dark-red wool. The fabric depicts a procession of warriors, likely of Zoroastrian origin, toward a stepped altar with a flame emanating from the top. (See Figure 3.6)[243] A male figure waits at the altar with his hand raised above the flame.

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[242] The inventories of separate kurgans from Noin ula will be discussed in detail in the following section; there, the analysis of a recently excavated textile serves to shed additional light on the pictorial formula in kurgan no.5 at Pazyryk.

[243] Polosʹmak, N. V., and E. S Bogdanov. *Noin-Ulinskaia Kollektsiia: Rezul'taty Raboty Rossiĭsko-Mongol'skoĭ Ėkspeditsii, 2006-2012 Gg..* Novosibirsk: INFOLIO,, 2016.

Figure 3.6. Procession of warriors. Noin Ula no.31

A man wearing a belted tunic stands on the opposite side of the altarpiece holding a mushroom in his left hand. Considering the ritual formality of this scene and the presence of a fire, the mushroom could have been used in the making of a divine substance. Polosmak identifies it as the ceremonial preparation of the mystic *soma* (*haoma*)[244], a potion with psychoactive properties which had been used by ancient Iranians and Indians.[245] The borders of the carpet are akin to those of the Pazyryk felt hanging: a horizontal sequence of stylized floral motifs frames the worship scenes on both textiles. It becomes clear that processions of people, some depicted as mounted warriors, are a common thread in these two seemingly distant burial sites. It is not clear whether there was a direct link between the Pazyryk culture of the Altai and the Noin Ula Culture of the Mongolian steppe; one possibility is that they both retained these motifs from Western

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[244] The word "soma" is the Sanskrit term and "haoma" is its Avestan cognate. They are both likely derived from the Proto-Indo-Iranian word "sauma"; in Vedic Sanskirt the word means "extract".
[245] Polosʹmak, N. V., E. S Bogdanov, and V. I Molodin. *Kurgany Suṭszuktė (Noin Ula, Mongoliĭa) (The Suzukteh Mounds (Noin Ula, Mongolia)*. Novosibirsk: Infolio

Central Asia or eastern Iran because the images fit well within the local funerary traditions, particularly the rites which followed the burying of the dead. However, judging from the rest of the inventory of Inner Asian burials of the Altai, the prevalent visual material contains animals rather than humans. It is unlikely that these human images fit particularly well due to their familiarity or resemblance to already established local visual traditions. Rather, the incorporation of a foreign-derived visual formula would have been favored precisely due to its exotic, unfamiliar nature, thus pointing toward the deceased's expansive network and access to foreign goods. That being said, the people who chose to place the Pazyryk felt hanging and the Noin ula woolen fabric in the burial chambers were familiar with the foreign iconography and the ways in which it was relevant to local notions of life and death: the preparation of the divine mixture at a flaming altar was a scene readily incorporated into the burial because of its relevance to transcendence and transformation of form, ideas which are also associated with the journey into the afterlife.

Substances which stimulate the nervous system were in fact very common among people not only in the Mongolian steppes but also in the Western Regions. The earliest such evidence comes from the Yanghai and Subexi Cultures of the Jushi (Gushi) 車師 Kingdom in the Turpan Basin in the first millennium BCE prior to the flourishing of the Noin Ula culture. The earliest accounts describe the Gushi people as cattle owners equipped with a significant amount of knowledge regarding agriculture, living in portable dwellings.[246] A recently excavated cemetery of Jiayi is located in the desert region of the Turpan Basin in modern-day Xinjiang. Overall, 240 tombs were identified in the cemetery. In tomb no.231, thirteen whole female plants were diagonally placed throughout the body

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[246] Mallory and Mair, 2000, p. 143

of the tomb occupant like a shroud. The interred individual was a man with Caucasoid features who was placed on a coffin bed, his head rested on a pillow made of reed.[247] The cannabis had been grown for psychoactive stimulation purposes and was evidently an important element of the funerary rites of the locals as they appear to have been grown locally.[248] A similar discovery was recently made in yet another cemetery in the neighboring Yanghai complex. The 45-year old male tomb occupant (a disarticulated skeleton rather than a mummified body) was laid on his back with a basket of cannabis placed at his feet and head.[249] Remains of such plants also appear at several burials of the Pazyryk Culture. Thus, the textile with foreign motifs depicting the preparation of the soma substance would have likely been consciously used in the burial ceremony and was believed to play an active role in the journey of the soul.

This argument becomes even more convincing when one considers the subtle incorporation of animal imagery into the Noin Ula piece. While human figures are undoubtedly the central actors in this composition, the scene is not devoid of animal imagery. Depictions of insects and butterflies are dispersed throughout the carpet between the figures marching in procession. The greatest number is concentrated around the altar near the flame. In Greek and Roman thought, the butterfly was a personification of the soul, as evidenced by discussions of the butterfly in Aristotle's *Historia Animalium* and Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*.[250] The description given by both thinkers is one in which the butterfly is not derived from an animal like itself but flies out of a cocoon through the

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[247] Jiang, H. et.al. "Ancient Cannabis Burial Shroud in a Central Eurasian Cemetery". *Economic Botany* 70. 3 (2016), p. 213-221
[248] Ibid
[249] Russo, Ethan, et. al. "Phytochemical and Genetic Analyses of Ancient Cannabis from Central Asia". *Journal of Experimental Botany*, Volume 59, Issue 15 (1) November 2008, pp. 4171–4182
[250] Pliny, and H. Rackham. 1938. *Natural History*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

process of metamorphosis. Psykhe, the female personification of the soul, was depicted as a butterfly in ancient Greek and Roman art.[251] The Greeks believed that the psyche, or soul, instantaneously left the body at the time of death like a puff of air, a butterfly leaving its cocoon. Images on vases and wall paintings from the Hellenistic world in the first millennium BCE depict the soul leaving the body in the form of a butterfly. The dead were occasionally buried wearing exquisite jewelry with butterfly pendants, as was the case with a burial from the Hellenistic port of Olbia on the Black Sea where under the leadership of King Skilurus, sedentary Scythian colonies were already flourishing in the second century BCE.[252] The gold necklace contains amethyst, emerald, pearls, and colored glass in inlay and was placed on the neck of the aristocrat buried in the tomb. The presence of bees in the carpet is also linked to the departure in the afterlife in ancient Minoan and Mycenaean thought and visual culture. A hoard of golden objects comes from the necropolis of the 17th-century BCE Minoan palace of Malia; among the precious objects, a cast golden pendant comprising of two symmetrically placed honeybees with curved bodies was found. (See Figure 3.7) Numerous Eastern Greek rectangular golden plaques from the 7th century have come to light; one such golden plaque said to have been manufactured in the Rhodes islands is now at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Many of the ancient elite tombs in late Bronze Mycenaean Civilization and the majority of early Iron Age Thracian tombs in present-day Bulgaria and Romania are shaped as beehives, hence the archaeological term "beehive tombs", or "tholoi" (literally, domed tombs). One can confidently state that in

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[251] Polosʹmak, N. V., E. S Bogdanov, and V. I Molodin. *Kurgany Sutszuktė (Noin Ula, Mongoliia) (The Suzukteh Mounds (Noin Ula, Mongolia)).*
[252] *Braund, David; Kryzhitskiy, S. D., eds. (2007). Classical Olbia and the Scythian World: From the Sixth Century BC to the Second Century AD. Proceedings of the British Academy. 142. Oxford: Oxford University Press.*

more than one part of the ancient word in the first millennium BCE, bees and butterflies were linked with notions of life and death as they pertain to ideas of flight, metamorphosis, transcendence. In light of all this, the images of insects (most likely honeybees) and butterflies on the Noin Ula fragment are indicative of the notion of metamorphosis of form and a transition into a new realm. This transformative process would have been enhanced by the divine properties of the soma potion being prepared at the ceremonial altar.

Figure 3.7. A Golden pendant in the shape of a honeybee. Minoan, 17th -16th century BCE, Malia, Crete

Similarly, the significance of the rider and goddess depicted on the Pazyryk wall hanging extends beyond the conventions of an ordinary supplication ceremony. The presence of the stylized blossoming tree which appears to emanate from the seated personage is a key component of this carefully ordained scene. Scholars have compared the stylized branches of the tree to deer antlers thus indicating that the seated individual is in fact a hybrid exhibiting zoomorphic features. Esther Jacobson-Tepfer has likened the deity to the deer mother deity incorporating this image in the vast corpus of visual material which utilizes depictions of deer motifs with apparent symbolic or ritual connotations.[253] This interpretation appears entirely plausible, but could be further complicated if one

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[253] Jacobson, Esther. *The Deer Goddess of Ancient Siberia: A Study In the Ecology of Belief.* Leiden: Brill, 1993.

probes the possible iconography of the tree in a multicultural context. The tree depicted on the Pazyryk textile recalls the Persian Gaokerena (literally, ox-horn), or Tree of Life, which, in Zoroastrian myths was identified as the *haoma* plant, the source of immortal elixir depicted at Noin ula. According to the Avesta, the haoma plant has roots, stems, and many branches, and it is tall and fragrant.[254] Moreover, the Younger Avesta contains accounts of the personification of the Haoma as a divine deity (its gender remains encased in uncertainty as is the case with the Pazyryk deity) called Duraosa. The link between the Pazyryk felt hanging and the carpet from Noun ula exists in the idea of imminent transition to a different realm and transmogrification into a new, ethereal form through the divine presence of the *haoma* plant. This notion brings us back to the notion of metamorphosis which, as observed in the previous chapter, was a key component of the burial practices of groups who inhabited the Central Eurasian zone in the first millennium BCE. This underlying notion of transmogrification through an intricate interweaving of animal and/or human imagery unravels in the rest of Pazyryk material where one observes a return to the hybrid animals depicted in vigorous movement.

At Pazyryk's barrow no. 5, a second motif from the felt hanging with a worship scene has received little attention. The said pattern depicts a syncretic creature which consists of the body of a winged feline, deer antlers and a human head with moustache. (See Figure 3.8) The curvilinear body is embellished with cross shapes inserted inside larger circular forms. The tail of this fantastic being is exaggerated and terminates into a highly stylized shape which echoes the antler motif. Composite beings with zoomorphic

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[254] Kazim Abdullaev. "Sacred Plants and the Cultic Beverage Haoma". *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 1 December 2010; 30 (3): 329–340

and anthropomorphic features are not commonly depicted in metalwork of the Altai region, the Mongolian grassland or the Northern Black sea region. They do, however, bring us back to the goat-man from Shanpula and its antecedents in the arts of Luristan (1000 BCE -650 BCE). Luristan (present-day western Iran), is an area comprised of fertile valleys in the Zagros mountain chain. In the middle, Luristan is traversed by the Kabirkuh range. The so-called Luristan bronzes (mostly known to us through chance finds) comprise a body of high-end metalwork produced in the first half of the first millennium BCE (1000 BCE-650 BCE) and characterized by the high level of stylization of human and zoomorphic imagery and the hybridization and mixture of the two. Indeed, Luristan bronzework abounds in fantastic beings made of human heads and human upper bodies with horns and the lower body of another animal. In a Western Asian context, however, these beings never appear with antlers and stylized tails resembling antlers. It is feasible that local craftsmen had come in touch with such depictions from Western Central Asia and copied these stylistic motifs onto the felt wall hanging adjusting them to fit the already locally established visual culture. The exaggerated antlers were one of the core artistic trademarks on Eurasian nomads and are also at the center of the "nomadic unity" hypothesis precisely due to their common occurrence in portable animal-art metalwork across a vast region, as evidenced by our discussion in the previous chapter.[255]

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[255] As was mentioned in the introduction, the idea of "nomadic unity" falls short of addressing important local variations on a micro-regional level, and will be questioned throughout this study, it is not without its occasional merits

Figure 3.8 Felt Wall Hanging Decorated with Fantastic Creatures from Pazyryk no. 5

Hybrid creatures made of zoomorphic forms appear in the rest of the five "type" kurgans at Pazyryk. A saddle cover from barrow no.2 was decorated front and back with images of a griffin. The creature's elongated body is decorated with appliqué pieces: a bright- blue neck, claws and a beak, reddish triangles on the claws, colored drop-shaped insets marking the ribs, pink dot motifs decorating the comb, etc. Each applied piece is encircled by the ornamental stitch in the form of a filigree border, while the wing, "collar" and the whole figure outline is emphasized with embroidery. Other saddle covers from tombs 1 and 2 feature images of singular hybrids such as flying winged elks[256], as well as scenes of two composite animals including struggles between a griffin and a carnivore. A representative example comes from kurgan no.1 (See Figure 3.9). Executed in the appliqué technique, the fragment is adorned with two identical compositions representing a dynamic scene of a griffin attacking an ibex. The bodies of the animals are intertwined and

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[256] Images of elks with implied hybrid features abound at Pazyryk. Thirteen appliques made of leather decorated the coffin in burial mound no. 2 at Pazyryk. They were attached to the wood with small iron nails. The animals have the bodies of an elk but the antlers of a deer. Similar examples also appear in the Tuekta and Bashadar tombs of the Altai.

seamlessly attached to each other; the raptor's beak of the griffin is juxtaposed on top of the goat. The maker adheres to the common visual idiom of a vertical axis along which symmetry is established.

Figure 3.9 Saddle cover, Kurgan no.1, Pazyryk

The individual body parts of the entangled animals are not easily distinguishable and this seamless interlocking is further enhanced by the rapidly alternating colors. The two pairs of animals are depicted as mirror images placed along a symmetrical axis thus recalling the vertical symmetry of the reflected animal scenes in metalwork such as the Aluchaideng plaques from Ordos discussed in the previous chapter. The tassels on both sides of the Pazyryk saddle cover exhibit abstracted shapes which echo the curved beaks of an unrecognizable animal, perhaps a raptor of some sort. The animal is thus represented by a small part of its head. This extended visual metonymy is echoed throughout the Pazyryk inventory.

The images of Pazyryk point toward the great ritual significance of animal heads. This brings us back to the multi-layered headdresses or horse masks with animal deer antlers from Pazyryk discussed in the previous chapter. Almost identical leather appliques representing deer heads are attached to a man's fur coat from Pazyryk kurgan no.2; the antlers are topped with the heads of fantastic eagles and the horns finished with gold-leaf circular shapes. (See Figure) Borrowings from West Asia are apparent in the depictions of lion heads on the border of a felt wall hanging in kurgan no.1. The upper and lower bands consist of alternating triangular shapes sewn with twisted sinew, and the middle section is embellished with thin felt cutouts of lion heads seen in profile.[257] The animals have unnaturally long ears and curly manes, both of which are pictorial elements characteristic of 6th-century Achaemenid depictions of lion heads. Here, the animal heads resemble lion-wolf hybrids, and thus, they markedly differ from Achaemenid depictions of lion heads: at Pazyryk, the snout is significantly elongated and the teeth are overlapping. (See Figure 3.10) The images invite parallels with a golden applique in the shape of a lion head from the Metropolitan Museum of Art as well as glazed painted bricks from the Apadāna Palace in Susa depicting almost identical lion heads.[258] (See Figure 3.11)

The Pazyryk craftsman had evidently seen such Achaemenid motifs but in the making of this textile, he chose to reinvent the lion head and accentuate the hybrid nature of the beast by making it appear somewhat "wolf-like". While keeping the basic outline and profile, they consciously altered certain parts of the animal demonstrating experimentation with foreign motifs to fit the indigenous aesthetics and show faithfulness

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[257] Similar lion heads were also depicted on a felt covering from Pazyryk no.1, and a birch-bark costume decoration from Ulandryk no.4.

[258] Simpson, p. 275, Fig. 158; See Fig. 2.11

to the local megafauna. The lion is not native to the Altai area and its depiction would have been considered "foreign" and thus, it would have added to the exotic nature of the depiction. What is more, the ferocious expression of the Achaemenid lion with its gaping jaw and sharp teeth recalls the wolves depicted in headdresses and plaques throughout the Altai mountains and Semirechye region.[259] Thus, the Persian decorative element would have particularly resonated with the local artisans and the elites who commissioned this piece.

Figure 3.10. Carpet with lion heads, 4th -3rd c, Pazyryk Barrow no.1

Figure 3.11 Golden applique of a lion head. Achaemenid dynasty, Metropolitan Museum of Art

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[259] The wolf motif was widely spread across a large geographic span and appeared on various media. One of the less studied examples includes a stone altar placed in female graves in the Kuraili area of the Aktyubinks region of northwestern Kazakhstan. More than sixty such sacrificial altars were discovered in the lower Volga region and the Ural Mountains; the pieces have three or four legs shaped like wolves' heads with gaping jaws showing the teeth and large eyes. See: Basilov, Nomads of Eurasia, p. 35

Decorative patterns which resemble but do not directly emulate animal heads serve as a medallion saddle decoration showing a spiral shape made of eagle heads. (See Figure) The piece was excavated from the horse burials at the site of Barrow no.2 in the Bashadar cemetery, designated to the Pazyryk group because of its material culture. The medallion pattern shown here consists of six eagle heads with ears. The complete original design has been reconstructed thanks to surviving seams on the felt base. Fantastic animal heads are images recurring throughout the Bashadar burials: griffin heads embellish several of the bridles found in Bashadar barrow no. 2. Such highly stylized shapes are also depicted on saddle chest straps from Pazyryk barrow no. 1 where a chest collar decorated with pendants in the shape of palmettos and fantastic eagle heads was discovered.

Overall, the examination of textiles excavated from the Pazyryk group of mounds leads us to the idea that the artisans were not afraid to experiment with a mixture of pictorial motifs and materials when furnishing the chambers with textiles. At times, the saddles and wall hangings were made by putting together multiple textile fragments from various provenances. Thus, it seems that the Pazyryk elites chose to depict both zoomorphic and human imagery but significantly altered the motifs to conform to already established local beliefs and visual traditions. The scenes of hybrid animals and humans envelop the space around the coffin and thus determine the spatial parameters of the tomb chamber's environs. The repeated emphasis on animal heads brings us back to our discourse on headdresses and masks incorporating one or multiple animals layered onto each other. It is no coincidence that the textiles which contained animal head imagery were usually positioned in close proximity to the head of the deceased. The animal heads and their extended parts such as horns and antlers represent a symbolic link with the afterlife similar

to Psykhe's personification of the Soul in the Greek and Roman tradition. This visual depiction of transition into a new realm is complimented by the recurrent accentuation of the animals' hybrid nature. Thus, in many ways, the images rendered on textiles at Pazyryk continue the narrative of transmogrification unraveled by the cosmic symbolism of the regalia placed on the body of the tomb occupant.

Noil Ula

A return to Noin Ula which was mentioned briefly in our discourse on Pazyryk, will shed further light on the role of textile in steppe burials. The whole necropolis contains more than 200 burial mounds. The kurgans date between the first century BCE and the first century CE overlapping with the Han dynasty in China. The graves were perched in the Sutszukte river valley at a height of 1500 m. A large number of kurgans were excavated by P. Kozlov in 1924-25 and more recently by Nataliya Polosmak who led the restoration project of textiles unearthed from Kurgan no. 20, 22 and 31.[260] There exists a homogenous layout for all the elite kurgans at Noin Ula: a relatively low earthen mound is encircled by arrays of stone; under the stone slabs, one would find a deep shaft with animal remains.[261] A sloping ramp is located on the southern side of the shaft and functions as the link to the burial chamber. The chamber itself is always oriented toward the north and has three layers of wooden boards. A prominent feature shared by almost all the Noin Ula barrows is the presence of textiles on top of, under and around the coffin as well as in other strategic locations inside the chamber and along the corridor (tumuli no. 1, 6, 12, 13, 20, 23, 25).

[260] Polosʹmak, N. V., E. S Bogdanov, and V. I Molodin. *Kurgany Sutszuktė (Noin Ula, Mongoliia) =: The Suzukteh Mounds (Noin Ula, Mongolia)*. Novosibirsk: Infolio

[261] Rudenko, S. I. 1969. *Die Kultur der Hsiung-nu und die Hügelgräber von Noin Ula*. Bonn: Habelt.

The ceilings and walls in the burial chambers were often found covered with woolen or felt tapestries with patterns of animals, lozenge motifs or human faces (no. 6 and 23).[262] Silk embroideries were occasionally wrapped around the coffin or attached the interior walls of the chamber.

In Kurgan 6, a well-preserved carpet (2.60 m x 1.95 m) with various animal images distributed around the edges was spread over the corridor leading to the main burial chamber. The carpet was lined with felt and the middle part was quilted with red woolen thread which formed various meandering, cloud-like shapes; an intricate band of applique of quilted wool appears on the borders, coupled with bands of twilled silk (See Figure).

Figure 3.12 Fragments from carpet, Noin Ula, 1st c BCE

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[262] The Noin Ula kurgans were severely looted in the past, hence some of the textiles were torn into pieces and had been removed from their original location making it hard to determine the precise original placement of the objects. That said, most of the textiles were found in extremely close proximity to the coffin and some were still on the floor of the corridors or attached to the beams of the external ceilings, spots which must have been difficult to access for the robbers.

The woolen rim contains images of animal predation: a flying elk is illustrated biting the body of a horse-like animal galloping away from the beast. A small stylized tree which remains the only representation of landscape is depicted next to the vigorous scene. A slightly different version of this scene is repeated in intervals along the edges of the carpet; a flying elk is attacking a half-deer, half- yak hybrid with exaggerated antlers. A third fragment from the edges of the carpet shows the image of an unrecognizable fantastic animal with a long, full tail flanked by a tree.

The imagery on the silk fragment appears somewhat incongruous with the otherwise seamless mixture of pictorial motifs on the felt and woolen part of the carpet. The designs include variations of abstracted lozenge shapes, zig-zag arrangements of triangles and other z-shaped patterns. The decorative formula of the silk at the rim of the carpet does not indicate any particular interest in animal imagery; the increased abstraction and reduction of pictorial motifs to pure geometric forms is the prevalent mode of decoration in these fragments. This marks a contrast with the strong presence of animal images in the scenes of predation and other related zoomorphic designs dispersed along the edges of the carpet right above the silk segment. Perhaps the juxtaposition of animal predation and purely geometric forms is the ultimate effect desired by the artisan. The conscious incorporation of such clashing decorative approaches is in line with the contrasting pictorial schemes observed in the rest of the material from the kurgans. A fragment of tulle, placed under the coffin in Barrow 6, a woolen fragment from the lower beam of the external corridor in Barrow 23, and multiple fragments of twilled silk with red woven patterns found near the coffin in Barrow 12 all share similar features: a clean-cut, simple arrangements of rhomboid figural decorations is punctuated with alternating images

of clouds (See Figure). These compositions rely on purely geometric, non-animal shapes for their decorative schemes. However, this is not the case with the textiles covering the largest areas of the kurgans such as the felt carpet with animal predation imagery.

Figure 3.13 Fragment of Cloth, Noin Ula, Barrow No. 12, 1st c BCE

A second large carpet (4.4 m x 3.32 m) used as a hanging spread under a piece of felt was placed on the external ceiling in kurgan no. 6. The rug consists of several intricate embroideries. The whole piece is woven in the satin-stitch and chain-stitch techniques using shades of brown and white wool.[263] The largest fragment of the carpet resembles flattened tiger skin, as the wool is embroidered with black and white threads. On the opposite ends of the stripped surface, two pairs of horned beast heads, resembling masks of hybrid animals with paws, are placed opposite each other along a vertical axis.(See Figure 3.14) While these motifs have been labeled by Rudenko as "tiger heads", assuming

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[263] Trevor, p. 34

they are meant to complement the visual narrative of the tiger skin[264], in reality, these are highly abstracted images of fantastic beasts which are not meant to faithfully depict any specific, anatomically accurate animal. Rather, the artisan has placed emphasis on the ferocious, fearsome nature of the beasts accentuating hybrid, ambiguous appearance. Thus, the tiger motifs serve to enhance the notion of animal hybridity in the creation of this hodge-podge of zoomorphic motifs. While Rudenko observes similarities between these mask-like images and the *taotie* motif frequently depicted in early Chinese bronzes, depictions of masks are common in the arts of nomadic cultures inhabiting the Altai and eastern Kazakh steppes. A seventh-century golden snow leopard mask excavated at the Baigetobe kurgans in Shilikty Valley, Zaisan region in eastern Kazakhstan, consists of two facing ibex heads and a flying bird; it bears a striking resemblance to the horned beast mask embroidered on the tiger-skin carpet. Similar mask-like metal decorative plaques were also unearthed from the site of Berel which yielded a large portion of the golden treasures discussed in Chapter Two. Another section of this ceiling is embellished with a complex repertoire of zoomorphic and floral motifs which mark a stark departure from the tiger-skin decoration.

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[264] Rudenko, S. I. 1962. *Kul'tura Khunnov i Noinulinskie Kurgany*. Leningrad: Izd-vo Akademii nauk SSSR [Leningradskoe otd-nie].

Figure 3.14 Tiger-skin carpet, Noin Ula

The second embroidery fragment of the large carpet is embellished with turtles, fish, palmettos, twirls and cloud motifs (See Figure 3.15). It is worth noting that the fish motif also appears next to a pair of birds on a separate carpet used as a wall hanging in barrow no. 6 (See Figure 3.16). In both embroideries, the animals are rendered in a similar color scheme with brown and green thread and are surrounded by foliage and cloud-shaped decorative elements. The silks found at barrow no. 6 at Noin Ula had been produced in China and acquired by the local populations either through trade, diplomatic exchanges or looting. The presence of the turtle imagery is particularly telling in this regard. The turtle is present in the Chinese artistic tradition as early as the Neolithic period. Stone tortoise-shaped objects were excavated from Hutougou, Liaoning Province. The pair of turtle-shaped items likely belongs to the Hongshan culture which flourished in Northeastern China from 4700 BCE to 2900 BCE. Turtles abound in the artistic traditions of the Zhou and Han dynasty. They are often depicted, along with other representatives of Chinese cosmology, as an integral component of early Chinese tomb architecture. Numerous tombs

dating to the Han dynasty feature depictions of turtles surrounded by other directional animals or fantastic hybrids; at times the turtle is also represented as a hybrid. For instance, an image of a turtle appears on the door lintel on the south wall in the front chamber of a tomb in Haining, Zhejiang while the leaves of the door itself depict phoenixes.[265] A turtle with a feline head is part of the decorative program of the door posts at the Mamaozhuang tomb in Lishi, Shanxi Province.[266] Interestingly, the combination of a fish and turtle as a zoomorphic motif is also common in early Chinese art: the Palace Museum in Beijing has multiple examples of *pan* decoration, which includes turtle, fish, and interlacing dragon images similar to the decorative elements in the Noin Ula silk fragments (See Figure 3.17). In these fine examples of Chinese mortuary art, the main animal being represented is generally placed in the center of a pictorial unit and it is surrounded by meandering cloud or floral patterns or other stylized animals The turtle image rarely appears in nomadic decoration, and it is most certainly derived from Chinese visual culture.

Figure 3.15 Fragment of a carpet with turtle motifs

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[265] Psarras, Sophia-Karin. 2015. *Han Material Culture: An Archaeological Analysis and Vessel Typology.* Cambridge University Press, p. 50
[266] Ibid

Figure 3.16 Fragment of wall hanging with images of fish and birds

Figure 3.17 Pan with images of fish and turtles, Eastern Zhou dynasty, Palace Museum in Beijing

The similarities with visual content from Chinese tomb art do not stop there. Yet another silk fragment, embroidered in chain-stitch, was found in tomb no. 6; the piece's rich decorative scheme depicts a heart-shaped figure continued by curved lines terminating in scroll shapes and bird heads.[267] (See Figure 3.18)

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[267] Loubo-Lesnitchenko, E. "Chinese Silk Embroidery from Noin Ula". *Artibus Asiae Vol. 26, 3/ 4,* p. 181-190

Figure 3.18 Silk fragment with heart shaped motifs and an animal combat scene, Noin Ula no.6

Within the red shape which resembles a bird, there is a vivid scene of a confronting tiger and a dragon, and below these animals, a smaller heart shape with symmetrically depicted bird heads in the center. The tiger's back is adorned with stripes, inviting associations with the tiger-skin carpet; its snout is rounded, and one hind leg projects to the rear. The winged dragon has scales, its horned head with open jaws and protruding tongue is up-raised, and one leg projects backward. The artisan has consciously accentuated the textures of the animals engaged in the dynamic scene through additional threading. The emphasis on such minuscular details of the bodies indicates that the scene is of vital importance to the already crowded pictorial narrative. There is no sense of violent combat occurring in this scene but the animals face each other in the same confrontational manner that is characteristic of animal style imagery seen on belt buckles and headdresses. This traditional animal art scene is inscribed into the body of the red bird, thus bringing associations with the "frame narrative" artistic approach from the Pazyryk bridles and horse masks discussed in the previous chapter. The two confronting animals are reduced in size and inscribed into a

larger abstracted, bird-like shape. This multi-layered symbolism is combined with a plethora of figural, abstract and vegetative patterns. Various equally-spaced dots and curves are placed in-between the larger shapes. The artisan has left almost no space unfilled; this *horror vacui* design with rich, diverse motifs alternating in semi-regular patterns is characteristic of the embroideries found throughout the barrows at Noin Ula. The same rich, varied visual formula reappears in the several silk fragments found scattered across the floor of the burial chamber of kurgan no.6 in no particular arrangement (most likely due to looting). (See Figure).

Figure 3.19 Silk fragment with heart-shaped motifs, Noin Ula no.6

Among these silks, one piece stands out as particularly analogous to the rest of the textiles placed in tomb no.6. The piece features a repeated heart-shaped patterns attached to various meandering floral shapes which flow seamlessly and resemble some sort of an abstract foliage. No apparent zoomorphic motifs are present in the composition. This repetition of abstracted shapes recalls the exuberant textile fragments excavated from the Han dynasty tomb in Mawangdui, Changsha, contemporaneous to the Noin Ula burial complex. While most scholarship has placed emphasis on Lady Dai's painted coffin with cloud designs and flying figures, the remarkable silk fragments excavated from Mawangdui deserve further

study. Two fragments from Mawangdui Tomb No.3 are very similar to the Noin Ula discoveries: an embroidery with dogwood design on thin silk and a piece of gauze with painted and printed heart-shaped and floral decorative elements offer close parallels to the silks from Noin Ula.[268] (See Figure 3.20) The gauze is embellished with the same red heart-shaped motifs surrounded by foliage patterns and other small meanders and dots.[269] The design of the Mawangdui textile is almost identical to that of one of silk with heart-shaped decorations from Noin Ula no.6.

Figure 3.20 Silk from Mawangdui M3, Changsha, Hunan province, China, Han dynasty (before 140 BCE)

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[268] Such decorative motifs are found in numerous tombs in several regions of China. For example, painted designs from the Chu kingdom, now kept at the Hunan provincial museum, are embellished with the same horro vacui scheme which includes lozenges, floral meanders, cloud shapes.

[269] Hunan Sheng Bowuguan, and Jianming Chen. 2008. *Mawangdui Han mu: gu Changsha guo de yi shu yu sheng huo*. Changsha Shi: Yue lu shu she.

One more group of likely imported textiles implemented in the burial program of the Noin Ula cemetery complex could shed more light on the role of the textiles discussed into the burial ceremony and the associated vision of the afterlife. Several inscribed fragments of silk were found across the Noin Ula complex, with the biggest number discovered in barrows no. 6 and 1. These fragments all share a common feature which differentiates them from the rest of the textile inventory: they are embellished with Chinese characters which, in turn, are enclosed in the same *horror vacui* manner with the already familiar circular forms, clouds and animals.

Figure 3.21 Fragment of cloth, Barrow no.6, Noin Ula

Figure 3.22 Fragment of cloth, Barrow no.6

The scene depicted on the later fragment contains a human-like hybrid figure with horns and wings, seated on the back of a vigorously galloping horse. The figure seems to be holding a flaming object which extends and meanders throughout the surface of the silk; several other flying ethereal beings are depicted around the horse, bringing strong associations with the flying creatures on the Kargaly diadem discussed in the previous chapter. This composition, particularly with regard to the inscribed Chinese characters, is not unique to Noin Ula: such inscriptions accompanied by the rest of the decorative motifs appear in a group of inscribed textiles found at the cemetery of Niya situated on the southern edge of the Tarim Basin (present-day Minfeng county, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region). The site is mentioned in the *Hanshu* (Book of Han) by the name Jingjue 精絕.[270] By the third century CE, Niya was absorbed by the Kingdom of Loulan 樓蘭.

At both Niya and Loulan, tombs have yielded numerous silk embroideries, brocade covers and woolen fragments which are decorated with crowded and abstracted figural designs, as well as geometric, stylized Chinese characters inserted between the rows of animal and floral motifs. A small piece of silk fabric found in tomb no.8 at the Niya complex was cut to make an armguard for the man buried in the tomb, who, judging from the presence of a quiver, a bow and arrows by his side, was likely a warrior. (See Figure) The silk has the following inscription: "五星出東方利中國" ("wuxing chu dongfang li Zhonggguo") which translates to: "The alignment of the five planets in the East would be

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[270] Hulsewé, A. F. P. (1979). *China in Central Asia: The Early Stage 125 BC – AD 23: an annotated translation of chapters 61 and 96 of the History of the Former Han Dynasty.* E. Brill, Leiden. pp. 93–94

auspicious for the Central States".[271] The piece is stylistically similar to some of the clothing and other silk fragments found at Niya[272] and could have been cut from the same bolt of silk: all these are warp-faced composite tabbies (Chinese: *jin* 錦), exhibiting the same color palette and the same threading technique. It is worth noting that the characters were not embroidered; instead, the craftsman had employed the much more complex technique of weaving them in with colored weft.[273] This particular textile, often translated as "Chinese brocade" (yet not to be confused with the brocades of later periods) features patterns accomplished through the alternation of several warps; at times, up to six different colors of warps could be used.[274] Jin silk textiles were produced on large looms and thus, they required superb craftsmanship and sufficient technical resources at one's disposal. The best-quality silks were dyed before the process of weaving had even begun; multicolored, patterned silks were among the most expensive ones.[275] During the Han dynasty, the silk weaving flourished as silks were being produced at three official worshops which supplied the imperial court: the Weaving Chamber (Zhi shi 織室)in the capital Chang'an, Office for Dresses of the Three Seasons (San Fu Guan 三服官) in the coastal region of Shandong, and The Office for Jin Weaving (Jin Guan 錦官) in Sichuan

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[271] Tseng, Lillian. "Decoration, Astrology and Empire: Inscribed Silk from Niya in the Taklamakan Desert" in Hildebrandt, Berit, and Carole Gillis. 2017. *Silk: trade and exchange along the silk roads between Rome and China in antiquity.*, p. 263-64

[272] The Tarim Basin complexes will be discussed in detail in the next section of this chapter; here, they serve to strengthen our understanding of these motifs.

[273] For a complete explanation of the technical steps of the embroidery, tapestry and weaving techniques in the making of the Tarim Basin textiles, see E. Barber. "More Light on the Xinjiang Textiles" in Hickman, Jane, and Victor H. Mair. 2014. *Reconfiguring the Silk Road: New Research On East-West Exchange in Antiquity.*

[274] Kuhn, Dieter. 1995. "Silk weaving in Ancient China: from Geometric Figures to Patterns of Pictorial Likeness*". Chinese Science* No. 12 (1995): 84-86

[275] Zuchowska, Marta. 2014. "Grape Picking Silk from Palmyra: A Han Dynasty Textile with a Hellenistic Decorative Motif". Światowit 12(53)/A, p. 143-162

Province.[276] In the Han dynasty, export of the jin silks produced in thse workshops to the periphery of the so-called Western Regions (Chinese: Xiyu 西域), a loose term which designates the area west of the Yumen Pass, and often refers specifically to the cultures which inhabited the Tarim Basin.[277] According to this textual account in the official dynastic history, "from the time the Han arose to power until the reign of Filial Emperor Wu, he (the emperor) attacked the barbarians in the four directions thus expanding his majestic potency, and Zhang Qian commenced the opening of the Western Regions". (漢興至于孝武，事征四夷，廣威德，而張騫始開西域之迹).[278] The passage goes on to describe the establishment of three separate commandaries in the Western Regions: Wuwei, Zhangyi, and Dunhuang (分置武威、張掖、敦煌).

Numerous pieces found in the Tarim Basin exhibit a combination of winged zoomorphs, directional animals, swirling clouds, floral motifs and writing. As we will observe later in the chapter, the incorporation of inscribed silks into the Niya burial was not an isolated case in the Tarim Basin burials during the Eastern Han and early Jin dynasty; on the contrary, the Gutai cemetery at Loulan near Lop Nur offers myriad examples of silk fragments which are stylistically similar to the ones excavated at Niya and Noin Ula.(See

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[276] Zhao, Feng. 2006. *Zhongguo Sichou Tongshi* 中国丝绸通史 *(The General History of Chinese Silk)*. Suzhou: Suzhou Daxue.

[277] The dynamic relationship between the Han and the Western Regions is described in detail in the Treatise on the Western Regions (*Xiyu zhuan* 西域傳), a chapter in the *Hou Hanshu.*;

[278] Han Shu: 96A: 3872-73; See also *Hou Hanshu 88: 2909-2934;* For an annotated translation of Chapter 96 of the Hanshu, see Hulsewé, A. F. P. 1979. *China in Central Asia: the early stage: 125 B.C. - A.D. 23: an annotated translation of chapters 61 and 69 of the history of the former Han Dynasty*. Leiden: E.J. Brill. For a complete annotated translation of the chapter in the *Hou Hanshu* , see Fan, Ye, and John E. Hill. 2009. *Through the jade gate to Rome: a study of the silk routes during the Later Han Dynasty 1st to 2nd centuries CE : an annotated translation of the chronicle on the 'Western Regions' in the Hou Hanshu*. Charleston, South Carolina: BookSurge Publishing.

Figure) A red-ground silk embellished with intertwined clouds and winged animals has an inscription which reads " May you have extended years…".[279] The majority of the silks from Loulan contain inscriptions which carry similar messages of longevity and extended prosperity.[280]

Figure 3.23 Brocade armguard with inscribed characters, Tomb no.8, Graveyard no.1, Niya, Eastern Han or Jin dynasty

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[279] Zhao Feng and Yu Zhiyong (eds). 2000. *Shamo wangzi yibao: Sichou zhi lu Niya yizhi chutu wenwu* 沙漠王子遺寶 丝绸之路尼雅遗址出土文物 (The Legacy of the Desert King: Textiles and Treasures Excavated on the Silk Road), Hong Kong

[280] A number of similar silks with identical patterns and inscriptions were also excavated from the slightly later in date cemetery of Yingpan (2nd -4th c CE). The intricate decorative patterns on these later finds will be analyzed in the next section of this chapter. Currently, the Metropolitan Museum of Art has acquired a piece of warp-faced compound silk embellished with clouds and animals as well as an inscription referring to the Ming Guang Palace.

Figure 3.24. Brocade with Chinese characters, Loulan, Tarim Basin, Eastern Han dynasty

Overall, the majority of silk textiles found in barrow no.6 and several other elite barrows of the Noin Ula cemetery are redolent of the pictorial traditions of the Han dynasty and the Western regions in the Tarim Basin. Zoomorphic motifs such as tiger heads, confronting beasts, and alternating directional animals are also incorporated seamlessly into the abstracted landscape designs thus creating a microcosm of animal and non-animal entities. The repetition of the cloud designs is strongly redolent of bas-reliefs, bronze mirrors, painted lacquer and wall paintings from the Han dynasty. Similarly, a large number of the animals depicted in these silks are derived from the Chinese Han dynasty visual vocabulary and cosmology, as well as the Altai pictorial traditions. The larger textiles covering sizable areas of the tomb such as the ceiling, walls and areas under the coffin tend to feature an amalgam of animal motifs derived from multiple sources of artistic conventions; as was the case with Pazyryk, here it is also not uncommon to see several dissimilar in style and color palette embroideries combined to form one larger piece of carpet. The non-animal, abstracted vegetal images are more commonly distributed on

smaller pieces of fabric wrapped around the coffin or the body of the deceased. The art of the Tarim Basin helps to further one's understanding of animal art. The site of Shanpula in particular offers new insights into the borrowings and innovations of the locals in the Western Regions and their own approach to zoomorphic depictions in tomb art.

Fantastic Beasts of the Western Regions: Geometric Curiosities in the Mortuary Arts of the Tarim Basin

The cemetery complex of Shanpula (also known as Sampul in the Uyghur language) perched at the southwestern edge of the Taklamakan Desert, thirty kilometers south of the strategic merchant oasis of Khotan[281], has been dated to the period between the 3rd c BCE and the 4th century CE. The area of Sampul is bordered by the Kunlun mountain to the south and the Yulongkashi River to the west. This large cemetery complex was first mentioned as a source of intricate Central Asian artefacts by Sir Aurel Stein at the beginning of the twentieth century after his expedition to the Tarim Basin in 1913. (See Figure 3.25) During his stay in the town of Khotan, Stein purchased a pair of textiles, said to have come from the nearby cemetery of Sampul. Stein himself never visited or studied the site; most of the objects which he acquired became part of the Central Asian collection at the National Museum of New Delhi in India. It was not until 1982 that the site of Sampul was excavated by a team from the Xinjiang Institute of Cultural and Historical Relics. The sixty-nine tombs altogether occupy roughly six square kilometers. Social stratification is

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[281] Known in modern-day China as Hetian, this strategic town was located on the Southern Silk Route which ran from Kashgar to Dunhuang. During the first millennium BCE until its downfall during the seventh century CE, Hetian was the main trade town where caravans could stop and thus, it became a major watering spot for merchants and monks travelling between the Mediterranean world and China. The proximity of Shanpula to Hetian thus likely played an integral role in people's access to foreign goods and their familiarity with a variety of foreign traditions.

evident in the variations in grave structure: the site contains collective burials in upright earthen pits, rectangular upright pits with joint burials as well as one single collective burial in a polygonal upright pit.[282] Unlike the sites discussed above, however, Sampul is not an elite burial complex but rather a local cemetery with much simpler remains which, however, inform our understanding of the cultural hybridity of the agropastoral local communities in the Tarim Basin.
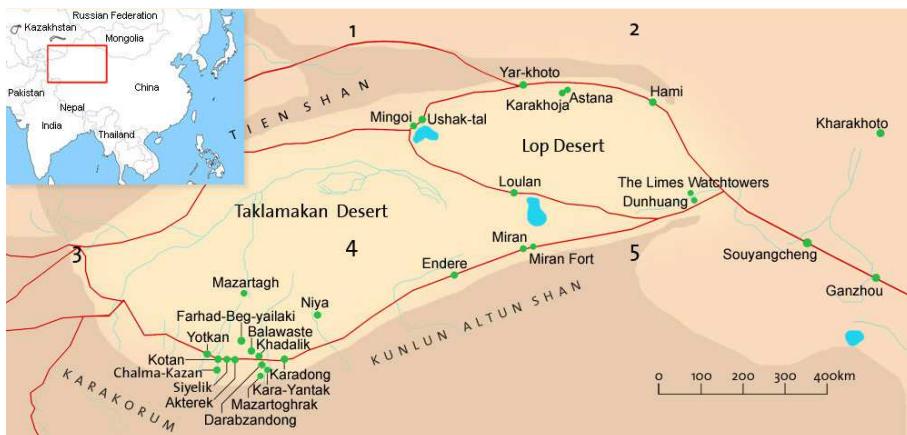
Figure 3.25 A Map showing a general overview of the areas explored by Sir Aurel Stein (Courtesy of V&A)

The tomb furniture generally consists of a deathbed on which the corpse was placed, sometimes together with other bodies, and mats made of reeds bundled together and laid flat.[283] The few metal objects discovered at the site include several small mirrors of the Western Han type and rusty iron tools. Archaeologists have not uncovered any evidence of high-end metalwork. All of the burials contained a variety of textiles used both

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[282] Keller, Dominik, and Regula Schorta.2001. *Fabulous Creatures from the Desert Sands: Central Asian Woolen Textiles from the Second Century BC to the second century AD*. Riggisberg: Abegg-Stiftung., p. 20; See also: Xiaoyang, Xiao & Zheng, Boqiu. Xinjiang Luoupu xian Shanpula gu mudi de xin fajie (New Excavations at the Ancient Shanpula Cemetery of Luopu County, Xinjiang), in: Xiyu Yanjiu (Studies of the Western Regions), Vol. 1, 2000. Pp. 42-46

[283] Keller 2001, p. 59

for the attire of the tomb occupants and the decoration of the burial interior. The textiles were made of wool (tabby, twill, gauze and pile weaves with felt), cotton (plain tabbies), or silk (tabby or warp-patterned weave) and feature several different weaving techniques.[284] The woolen textiles have the most varied and intricate designs of all the fabrics. They are embellished with a number of decorative patterns, including geometric shapes, polychrome stripes, vegetation, human figures and animals. In several cases, the animal and human figures appear surrounded by floral motifs and mountains. Animal patterns are mostly stylized and many are hybrid zoomorphs comprised of the anatomical parts of two or more animals.

Among the Sampul textile discoveries, the most highly ornamented are multiple ankle-length woolen skirts decorated with tapestry bands placed on the hems. These skirts were part of the attire of the women interred in the collective graves.[285] The tapestries are embellished with a variety of motifs: colorful fantastic animals, square fitted patterns of animal heads, antlers and horns, punctuated with images of stylized mountains, trees and other vegetation. Several human images also appear on the textiles found at Sampul. Like the *horror vacui* designs at Noin Ula, the composition of the Sampul textiles is crowded and busy; no space is noticeably empty. Among the various decorative elements, one arrangement stands out as it appears in slightly different versions in the Urumqi and Abegg-Stiftung collection. A procession of distorted, highly abstract reindeer with exaggerated

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[284] Wang, Bo & Xiao, Xiaoyang, "A General Introduction to the Ancient Tombs at Shanpula" in: Keller, 2001. p. 47

[285] Skirts of similar designs were also excavated from other burial sites in the Tarim Basin such as Subeshi and Chärchän, but they do not display such exuberant colors and a variety of pictorial motifs. See: Mallory, J. P., and Victor H. Mair. 2008. *The Tarim Mummies: Ancient China and the mystery of the earliest peoples from the West*. London: Thames & Hudson., p. 220

tails and "flaming" antlers is positioned in front of the deer's head. (See Figure 3.26)[286] The reindeer are often depicted with wings which at times terminate into a raptor's head or another pair of highly stylized antlers, a feature already observed on multiple occasions during our analysis of animal-style metalwork. The bird head protruding from the back of the deer in this specific example from the Abbegg-Stiftung Collection is a visual metonymy indicating the presence of another body riding on the back of the deer. Instead of depicting the raptor as a rider seated on the deer with its whole torso visible, the artisan has opted to illustrate only parts of the bird's body as seamlessly extending from the hybrid deer.

Several of the skirts made of silk ribbon exhibit designs which consist solely of deer heads with meandering, elongated antlers woven in the chain-stitch embroidery technique. (See Figure 3.27) A variant of this decorative pattern exists in the Abegg-Stiftung collection; the tapestry band is covered entirely with antler motifs, identical in size and shape, illustrated in three alternating colors. The antler and deer head patterns consistently display a tremendous variation in color against a relatively plain red and off-white background. Another embroidered cloth is decorated with a hybrid made of a bird's head and a snake's body covered with small stylized antler-like shapes. (See Figure 3.28) In addition, a larger antler-shaped pattern emerges and extends out of the snake's body. The edges of the band are decorated with stylized meandering shapes, perhaps a variation of the antler motifs depicted individually in other fragments.

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[286] Most of the excavated examples known to date are now housed at the Xinjiang Provincial Museum in Urumqi; a few collected fabrics with identical designs said to have come from Shanpula are housed at the Abegg-Stiftung Collection in Switzerland.

Figure 3.26 Woolen skirt, Shanpula, Eastern Han or Jin dynasty

Figure 3.27 Skirt of Silk Ribbon with Deer Head Design from Sampula Cemetery, Sampul cemetery I, Lop, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, 3rd c BCE- 3rd c CE

Figure 3.28 Embroidered cloth with a half-snake, half-bird hybrid with extending stylized antlers, Sampul, 2nd c BCE- 2nd c CE

Perhaps the most unique repertoire of motifs appears on a fabric now kept in the Urumqi collection. The tapestry band is decorated with three pairs of symmetrically positioned animal faces in profile. These images resemble feline masks with large eyes, small protrusions on the head and raptor beaks. The depiction of such mask motifs is stylistically reminiscent of the Noin- Ula tiger-skin carpet with symmetrically placed beast heads.

Another parallel with Noin Ula as well as other nomadic burials in the Altai can be observed in the depiction of a hunting scene at Sampul. (See Fig 3.29) This piece of silk, with a C-14 date of 8 BCE-234 CE, is decorated with the image of a mounted rider drawing his bow in a pursuit of a half-man, half-goat hybrid. Another identical human-headed goat appears behind the man. A raptor with an exaggerated tail flies above the man's head. The scene lacks the vitality and dynamic movement of a traditional hunting scene; the heaviness of the patterns and textures coupled with the numerous exuberant colors seem to add to the

stillness of the actors in the visual narrative; furthermore, the figures all appear somewhat disconnected from each other. The scene resembles an orderly procession, similar to the processions of hybrid reindeer depicted on other Sampul textiles, rather than a violent, vigorous hunt. The artisan has prioritized the emphasis on individual details on each figure, specifically the signifiers of hybridity, over the interaction between the figures. For instance, the "man-goat"'s antlers are woven with threads of several alternating colors and some additional stylized shapes are inserted under the hybrid's neck. There are several possible sources for these images.

The hybrid, goat-man creature can be traced back to the arts of Luristan (1000 BCE -650 BCE). Numerous examples of human-headed winged goats are found among the Luristan bronzes which could be a possible antecedent for the Sampul image. The goat motifs reappear in a later piece (145 CE-407 CE) from the Abegg Collection. The mountains are highly stylized, made of polychrome rectangular blocks and flanked by equally stylized trees and plants resembling flames. Mountain shapes embellish at least seven different fragments from Sampul, each exhibiting its own individual character: some have rounded tops, some are elongated, some are made of lozenge shapes and appear alone, while others are part of procession imagery. The abstraction of the mountain and vegetation around it is stylistically redolent of several images of mountains on a silk panel from Noin Ula tomb no.12. (See Figure 3.30) In both burial complexes, the mountains are reduced to simple geometric shapes and the trees inserted between the peaks appear to be as large as the mountains. In the Noin Ula example, the Western Han visual tradition prevails in the depiction of a "money tree" perched at the foot of the mountains and flanked by two symmetrically- positioned birds flying in opposite directions.

Figure 3.29. Silk with hunting scene, Sampul, 1st c BCE-3rd c CE

Figure 3.30 Silk with mountain shapes from Noin Ula no.12, 1st c CE

Two other tapestry fragments from tomb no.6 at Sampul depict a row of camels with colorful marks on their bodies. The craftsman has accentuated the shaggy chest area with colored stripes.[287] (See Figure 3.31) A third fragment from the same tomb illustrates a man leading two Bactrian camels towards a blossoming tree. The frequent presence of the camel in the Sampul textiles is linked to the strategic importance of the Khotan region as a merchant outpost on the Silk Road. On the other hand, men leading camels were already part and parcel of the artistic traditions of Western Central Asia and China around the time the Sampul men and women were interred. A mural painting from the north wall

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[287] Bunker, p. 32

of the front chamber of the tomb at Jiayuguan in Gansu province depicts a man holding a stick and leading a two-humped camel. (See Figure 3.32) Both figures are painted against a simple white background. The tomb dates to the Jin dynasty (265-420 CE) and is thus only slightly later than the Sampul burials. The earliest known depiction of this motif in Chinese art dates to the 4th century BCE (Warring States): a lamp base from the Chu tomb at Wangshan, Jiangling county in Hubei province.[288] Bactrian camels with mounted riders also appear as figurines across tombs in Southern Ningxia during the Han dynasty as well as in animal style metalwork in the form of plaques and belt buckles.

Figure 3.31 Camels and stylized trees, Sampul tomb no.6

Figure 3.32 Man leading a camel, Wall painting, Jiayuguan Tomb 5, Western Jin dynasty

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[288] Bunker, Emma. "Nomadic Art of the Eurasian Steppes..", p. 25; See also: Li, Xueqin. 1985. *Zhongguo meishu quanji. Vols. 4-5.* Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe.

The manner in which the camel is illustrated on the surface of the Sampul textile is stylistically akin to many Western Asian masterpieces produced in workshops in the Iranian plateau throughout a long period of time. Now kept at in the Louvre, the shroud of St. Josse originally woven at Khorassan before 961 CE depicts a processions of camels and elephants. This samite silk saddle cloth comes from the reliquary of the ancient abbey of St. Josse to whom it was dedicated as a votive gift during the First Crusade. It was woven prior to the beheading of the "camel king" Abdul Mansur Bakhtegin who served as an emir during the reign of the Samanid sultan of Khorassan. The textile was likely produced in Eastern Iran in one of the royal workshops of the Samanids in the city of Merv.[289] The central section of the textile contains two pairs of confronted elephants and the thin borders are embellished with geometric shapes and friezes of polychrome Bactrian camels.
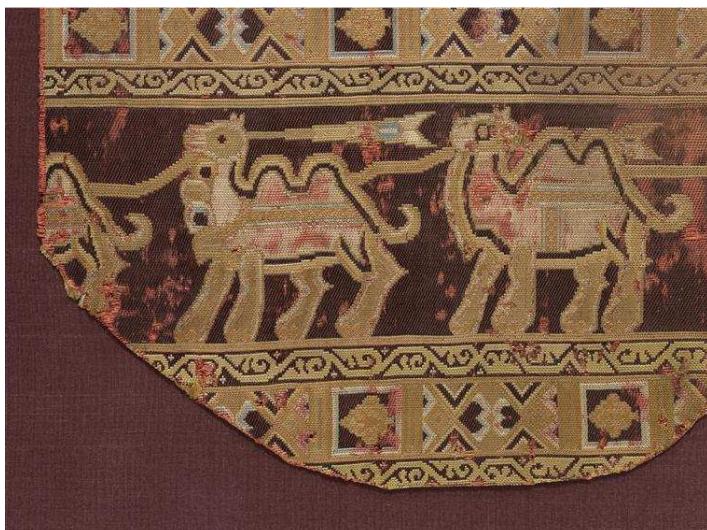
Figure 3.33 Shroud of St. Josse, mid-10th c.

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[289] Jones, Dalu., and George Michell. 1976. *The Arts of Islam: Hayward Gallery, 8 April-4 July 1976.* [London]: Arts Council of Great Britain, p. 74

It is worth noting that the image of the camel has a long tradition in animal-style art beyond textiles. The earliest known depictions of camels in animal art metalwork come from tombs in the southern Urals and western Kazakhstan dating to the late 6th and early 4th century BCE.[290] The site of Filippovka in the south Ural steppes has yielded the largest number of camel images out of the Eurasian kurgans. The camels are used as decorations attached to wooden vessels, horse regalia, and small golden plaques.[291]

The significance of animals in the Sampul burials is enhanced by the presence of goat horns and sheep bones in the graveyards. One of the tombs contained a whole sacrificed sheep and remains of local grain such as millet and barley. It is likely that the burial rites dictated the spreading of grain and animal remains around the grave as part of the proper send-off of the deceased to a different realm. The inclusion of grain into the burial was also seen at Noin Ula.[292] The presence of such organic material enhances the idea of the particular relevance of animals to the burials of the Sampul locals

The artistic penchant for horizontal depictions of fantastic creatures placed in scenes of processions can be observed in the majority of textiles at Sampul. The majority of the zoomoprhs are stylized and syncretic and similarly to the many zoomorphs decorating luxuriant metalwork, they often consist of more than one animal. There is not a single scene which depicts animal combat or violent predation; instead, the Sampul animals are all illustrated in a procession of some sort alluding to the likelihood of a spiritual belief associated with animal processions in the afterlife. Some of the zoomorphic images

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[290] Aruz 2000, p. 196
[291] Ibid
[292] Korolyuk, E.A,Polosmak, N.V, Korolyuk, EA, and Polosmak, NV. "Plant Remains from the Noin-Ul Burials, Tombs No. 21 and 30." Archaeology, ethnology & anthropology of Eurasia. 38, no. 2 (June 2009).

depicted on the textiles also adopt visual synecdoche such as the deer heads mentioned above.

Beasts Made of Wood: Carving out the Afterlife

The Altai burials are a particularly useful case study of zoomorphic imagery as guideposts inside the tomb interior; they inform and further our understanding of animal art contemporaneous with the Han dynasty as it developed and was reinterpreted in neighboring regions such as the Mongolian-Manchurian grassland. The evident emphasis on hybridity, abstraction, and visual transformation of form is characteristic not only of the textiles which were meant to embellish the interior surfaces of the tombs but also of the interior furnishings and occasionally the vessels with which the individual was interred.

A number of griffin head images decorating horse tacks come from the Pazyryk funerary culture. The most numerous examples were found in Pazyryk and Berel. These carvings were originally fixed on top of a copper-alloy nail fastening the wooden lid of the coffin in the burial chamber. Some of the Berel objects in this series of carvings depict griffin heads with curved beaks seen in profile, while others show representations of feline predator whose body is seamlessly interlocked with that of a mountain goat or some other ungulate. The wild goat is usually depicted with a single stylized horn bitten by an abstracted, unrecognizable predator. The highly curved and twisted lines of the openwork and the intricate intertwining of animal parts makes the scene difficult to decipher and absorb. This is a stylized version of scenes of animal interaction depicted on plaques and belt buckles across the Altai region and the Kazakh steppes. Along with animal heads depicted in profile and highly dynamic abstracted scenes of unrecognizable syncretic beasts, the carved work of the Altai craftsmen also demonstrates a desire for visual

symmetry. The coffin lids placed in the funerary chambers at Pazyryk are illustrated with a vertical band of identical images of a pair of stylized cockerels placed against each other along a vertical axis.[293] Overall, there are fourteen openwork leather pieces covered with tin leaf depicting either standing or symmetrically confronted cockerels. The animals' bodies are highly contorted and their heads are dramatically turned in opposite directions. Applique decorations in the form of hybrid elks with deer antlers embellish the coffins at several sites in the Altai, including Pazyryk no.2, Tuekta no.2, Ak-alakha no.3 and Bashadar no.2.[294]

Another prominent feature of the animal style images depicted on carved objects placed together with the corpse in the log coffin come from the Zhalgyz-oba burial in the Aktobe region of northwestern Kazakhstan, southwest of the Ural Mountains. (See Figure 3.34) The site belongs to the Pokrovka Culture (5th -2nd c BCE), which was likely the home of the early Sarmatians; the time frame could roughly correspond to that of the Pazyryk Culture of the Altai. A carved spoon made of bone was found along with the body; on the handle, one sees a crowded composition with condensed, stylized and contorted images of zoomorphs. The only easily decipherable sections in the small pictorial plane include the curved raptor beaks of three birds intertwined with the coiled body of an unrecognizable predator. The musculature and feathers of the animals are accentuated with stylizations reminiscent of the "dot and comma" pattern. The birds follow the already familiar idiom of representing animals only by their heads, a type of substitution which we have previously identified as an established idiom of animal-style, a visual synecdoche. This

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[293] See Figure

[294] Polos'mak. 2001. "Vsadniki Ukoka", p. 69, fig. 46b.

saturation of overlapping images crowded into a restricted space is a recurrent trend in the arts of nomads who also inhabited the Aktobe region of northwestern Kazakhstan.

Figure 3.34 Carved wooden spoon, Zhalgyz-oba, Pokrovka culture (5th -2nd c BCE)

A similar spoon with the same number of images packed into a narrow space was excavated from Nagorensk burial in the same area of Kazakhstan on the upper reaches of the the River Ilek (close to the site of Zhalgyz-oba) ; the spoons were likely produced by the same workshop or craftsman. In these examples, various zoomorphic junctures as carved onto a small surface. As such, the artisan has combined more than one of the idiosyncratic features of animal style decoration: the substitution of animal with their anatomic parts (the already familiar visual synecdoche) coupled with the intertwining of contorted, abstracted shapes crowded together in a *horror vacui* fashion. Animal style has been only associated with metalwork and (more seldom) with some of the widely-published textiles mentioned above, yet it has never been considered in the context of furniture decoration. This truly is a missed opportunity, as examples of wooden tomb furnishings and vessels abound in the early Iron Age. Collapsible tables were often deposited in tombs associated with the

Pazyryk Culture. The legs appear to have been hand-carved and secured with leather or attached to the table with a wedge.[295] The table legs of such tables excavated from the Pazyryk barrows are frequently shaped as zoomorphs. For example, one of the table legs at mound no.2 was carved into the shape of a feline predator with overly extended limps. Its open jaw and narrow body recall the beasts depicted on the two diadems from Ulandryk and Tashanta. The feline-shaped legs thus appear to hold the table.

Figure 3.35 Collapsible wooden table, Barrow no.2, Pazyryk, 4th -3rd c BCE

Animals or zoomorphic junctures are always incorporated into tombs across the Eurasian steppes in some manner or form. Of course, the individual approach to zoomorphic decoration of tomb furnishings differed from one region to the next. A pertinent example of tomb figurines shaped as stylized hybrids was excavated in the lower

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[295] Simpson et. al, p. 175

reaches of the Ural river in the Volga-Ural steppes, not far from the Ilek river cemeteries in Kazakhstan, at the 4th-century burial site of Filippovka (kurgan no.28). [296] The passageway before the entrance to the tomb chamber and the two pits dug into the earthen mound yielded two-feet tall zoomorphic figures carved from wood and covered with gold foil or both gold and silver.[297] The animal is a deer-like hybrid with the body of a carnivore and a wolf's snout. (See Figure 3.36)

Figure 3.36. Deer-Like Hybrid Animal with the Body of a Carnivore and a Wolf's Snout from Kurgan1, Filippovka., 4th century BCE

Five of the golden deer with antlers terminating in bird heads had been placed in the passageway in front of the chamber before the earth was heaped over the grave; in addition, five other deer with stylized antlers without bird terminals were placed in the treasure pits. The ears and head are exaggerated and the legs are overly short and thick. The bird-shaped ends of the antlers can be traced to ancient Thracian burials in modern-day Bulgaria. The

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[296] Yablonsky, Leonid Teodorovich. "New Excavations of the Early Nomadic Burial Ground at Filippovka (Southern Ural Region, Russia)." *American Journal of Archaeology* 114, no. 1 (2010): 129-43.
[297] Aruz 2007, p. 6

earliest known deer figures with bird-shaped antlers comes form a tomb in Sevlievo in Central Bulgaria and dates to the 10th -7th century. (See Figure 3.37) The body of the Thracian deer looks mush slimmer and more elongated in comparison with the Filippovka deer thus serving to illustrate that ancient nomads could have borrowed, copied or exchanged artistic concepts but these motifs would usually be transformed or partially altered to fit the local context.

Figure 3.37 Bronze stag, 10th -7th century BCE, Sevlievo, Bulgaria

The five hybrid deer with stylized antlers ending in bird heads at Filippovka was strategically positioned in the passageway leading to the funerary chamber. Their teeth were also visibly carved onto the wooden surface and appear wolf-like in a gaping jaw. Their placement tells us that animals with hybrid features would not just have been placed around the coffin in the main chamber but could also serve as guards of the chamber itself; perhaps the exact placement of the zoomorps with hybrid traits varied by region, and this was a local development in the Ural area.

Fantastic Beings above Ground: Deer Stones as Antecedents

While the spread of animal imagery characterized by signs of hybridity and stylization indicates a relative unity in the decorative and conceptual approach to tomb interior design, one needs to also take into consideration the relatively likely scenario that such imagery was derived from monuments erected above ground. The deer or deer antlers consistently occupy a prominent place in the construction of mortuary space. The penchant for depicting deer could have its antecedents somewhere else, however, Numerous rock drawings and megalithic structures are found near Bronze Age cemeteries, thus preceding in date the Iron Age burials discussed so far. The majority of these objects and monuments, dated to the first half of the first millennium BCE or earlier, invite close comparisons with the fantastic beasts depicted on portably luxury goods placed inside the kurgans.

The burial mounds, known as kurgans, constitute almost the entire body of archaeological evidence associated with the nomads of early Iron Age Eurasia. They are not, however, the only structures associated with nomadic groups active in the first millennium BCE. The Transbaikal region of Siberia, particularly modern-day Buryatia, and the steppe area of North-central Mongolia constituted a relatively homogenous area which became home to the Bronze Age "slab grave" culture. The term refers to relatively simple rectangular stone slabs set into the earth. These burials follow a uniform layout: they are of medium size and the stones are organized in rows in a north-south direction. As was the case with the Central Asian kurgans, here, one comes across both individual and collective burials, with as many as eight bodies interred together. The corpses were placed on their backs and the head of the tomb occupant turned to the east. It is worth noting that while the majority of these structures contain corpses, some were created as cenotaphs, that

is, empty surface structures resembling stone fences with a ritual purpose.[298] One observes a fairly even distribution of all indicators of prestige and wealth. The slab graves offer no visible signs of intense social stratification. Dating is uncertain; so far, scholars such as M. P. Gryaznov have tentatively attributed the Slab Grave Culture to the Karasuk period in South Siberia and characterized it as an expansion out of the immediate orbit of the Karasuk culture based on scarce finds of bronze tools and artistic products.[299]

The most idiosyncratic feature of the slab structures are the accompanying stone monoliths embellished with carved depictions of animals and humanoid figures. These monuments were erected at the corner of the slab burial or were occasionally constructed as part of the fence. In his *magnum opus* work on the subject, V. Volkov suggests that due to the noticeable lack of skeletal remains and the extreme scarcity of large tools and furnishings, these stone slab constructions were not actually graves but ritual spaces unique to the eastern Mongolian grassland, the Transbaikal and the region east to the Govi-Altai province where shamanistic ceremonies would have taken place.[300] The most commonly depicted animals on the stone megaliths which accompanied the slab structures are reindeer with exaggerated, "flowering" antlers, heads with wolf-like snouts or raptor-like beaks and extremely elongated bodies. The common presence of such stylized images of deer on these stones has given birth to the loose term "deer stones".

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[298] The slab graves have, in the past, been attributed to both the Bronze Age Karasuk (1500-800 BCE) and Tagar (8th -2nd c BCE) cultures of South Siberia. In these cultures, however, mounds and steles are regarded as part of dwelling complexes

[299] Dani, Ahmad Hasan., and V. M Masson. 1992. *History of Civilizations of Central Asia.* Paris: Unesco

[300] Volkov, V. V. 2002. *Olennye Kamni Mongolii.* (Deer stones of Mongolia). Moskva: Nauchnyĭ mir.

V. Volkov was the first to adamantly point out that the deer stones were not only associated with the Slab Grave culture, which likely spread out of the Late Bronze Age Karasuk culture of South Siberia.[301] The deer stones associated with slab graves were distributed east of Lake Baikal in South Siberia and northern and eastern and parts of the central Mongolian steppes, as far as the Khangai mountain range.[302] However, such stone monuments also appear in a distinct type of structure. The Uyuk culture (7th -6th c BCE) present in the Tuva basin and northwestern Mongolia is characterized by a variation in the type of stone burial, called *khirigsuur* (also known as *khereksur* in Russian). Such surface structures contain a central mound framed by walls or fences made of stones; the space between the central area and the frame is usually left unfilled, but there are also examples of rays of stones radiating in the cardinal directions from the central structure towards the outer circle.[303] Among the largest *khirisguurs* known to date is a complex called Urt Balagyn located in the Khanuy valley of north- central Mongolia. The cemetery complex has a square outer wall and includes more than a thousand circular stone altars with deer stones.[304] Such altars of unknown function are often to be found outside the fence of the *khirigsuur*. (See Figure 3.34) The circular *khirigsuurs* are often to be found in large plains, at the confluence of rivers or river valleys. A subtype of this surface structure is known as a boulder *khirisguur*, in which the central mound is substituted by a naturally located

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[301] Dani, Ahmad Hasan., and V. M Masson. *History of Civilizations of Central Asia.* Paris: Unesco, 1992., p. 450

[302] Numerous Karasuk graves have been unearthed in the last decades indicating the possible division of the culture into two sub-periods, that is, Karasuk proper and later Kamennyi Log culture.

[303] Jacobson-Tepfer, Esther, and James Meachan. 2009. "Interactive Media Group." Archaeology and Landscape in the Altai Mountains of Mongolia | Interactive Media Group. Accessed January 22, 2017.

[304] Jacobson 2015, p. 252; See also: Allard, Francis, and Diimajav Erdenebaataar. 2005. "Khirisguurs, Ritual and Moblity in the Bronze Age of Mongolia". Antiquity 79, no. 305: 547-63

boulder which rolled from surrounding cliffs and slopes.[305] The example shown here comes from the left bank of upper Tsagaan Gol in Western Mongolia (Monglian Altai). (See Figure).

Figure 3.38 Boulder khirisguur with circular frame. Upper Tsagaan Gol, Mongolian Altai

Most of these structures appear to have played a ritual function rather than a funerary one. Deer stones of slightly different appearance have been found in those ritual complexes thus indicating a vaster cultural intrusion out of the Mongolian grassland into the Sayan-Altai region and Tuva basin. Approximately six-hundred deer stone structures have been discovered in Central Eurasia, covering an expansive territory stretching from South Siberia and Northern Mongolia to Dobrudzha in present-day Northern Bulgaria and parts of the Elbe valley.[306] Since the deer stones are also (and in fact, primarily) associated with

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[305] Jacobson-Tepfer, Esther, and James Meachan. 2009. "Interactive Media Group." Archaeology and Landscape in the Altai Mountains of Mongolia | Interactive Media Group. Accessed January 22, 2017.
[306] Jacobson, 1997

the *khirisguur* culture, their role in these surface structures could have differed from the part they played in the ritual space formed by slab graves.

Based on their structural and stylistic differences as well as geographic location, Volkov's classification model outlined in his 1981 monograph divides deer stones into three main categories: Classical Mongolian, Sayan-Altai type and West Asian/ East European. [307] (See Figure 3.39) The Classical Mongolian type of deer stone features the most elaborate and detailed surface decoration. Radlov's drawing reproductions of Mongolian deer stones offer the first glimpse into the structure, distribution and iconography of the zoomorphic and anthropomorphic imagery carved onto the monoliths.[308] The sketches indicate the overwhelming presence of stylized deer, which is anatomically closest to reindeer[309], as well as the manner in which they were carved into the stone surface. Radlov suggests that the stones were part and parcel of large complexes with a very particular ritual significance. In his later work, Okladnikov offers additional interpretations based on the in-depth study of a deer stone found in the Ivolga river valley, near modern-day Ulan-Ude in Buryiatia, southeast of Lake Baikal, now in the Irkutsk State Historical Museum. [310] According to Okladnikov's account of the 1856 discovery by D.

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[307] Volkov, V. V. 2002. *Olennye Kamni Mongolii.* (Deer stones of Mongolia). Moskva: Nauchnyĭ mir.

[308] Radlov, V. V. 1892. *Atlas Drevnosteĭ Mongolīi.* (Atlas of Mongolian antiquities). Sanktpeterburg: Tipografīia Imperatorskoĭ akademīi nauk.

[309] The reindeer was likely first domesticated in the Altai-Sayan region as a pack animal some 2000-years ago following the model of horse breeding. The Sayan reindeer is rather large in size. Among the candidates who may have domesticated the reindeer are the speakers of Proto-Samoyedic. From the Sayan and Amur cultures, reindeer breeding practices spread towards the heartland of Siberia and reindeer was later ridden by Siberian peoples, a practice which continues even today among the Ewenki people.
See: Mair, Victor. 2016. "Reindeer Lore", Animal Behavior, Awesomeness, Language and Culture. Language Log, Last Accessed 20 April, 2018

[310] Okladnikov, Alekseĭ Pavlovitch. 1954. *Olennyĭ kamen's reki Ivolgi.* (The deer Stone of the Ivolga river). Sovetskaya Arheologiya 19: 207-220

Davydov, the stone had once been found lying flat on the ground covering the bones of a horse. The stone measures roughly 3.5 meters in height. Several elegantly carved images of deer decorate the surface of the stone.[311] In between the large images of deer, the artisan had placed smaller depictions of both deer and horse-like zoomorphic images as if to fill the space in a «horror vacui» manner. Towards the bottom of the surface, a battle axe is depicted in between the crowded zoomorphic designs. Most of the smaller deer are portrayed in a recumbent position with their heads turned backwards towards their rear and their legs folded, thus recalling the widely spread coiled deer images which embellished much of Iron Age metalwork (See Figure 3.40). Their unnaturally elongated snouts protrude horizontally and recall the beaks of Altai raptor images.
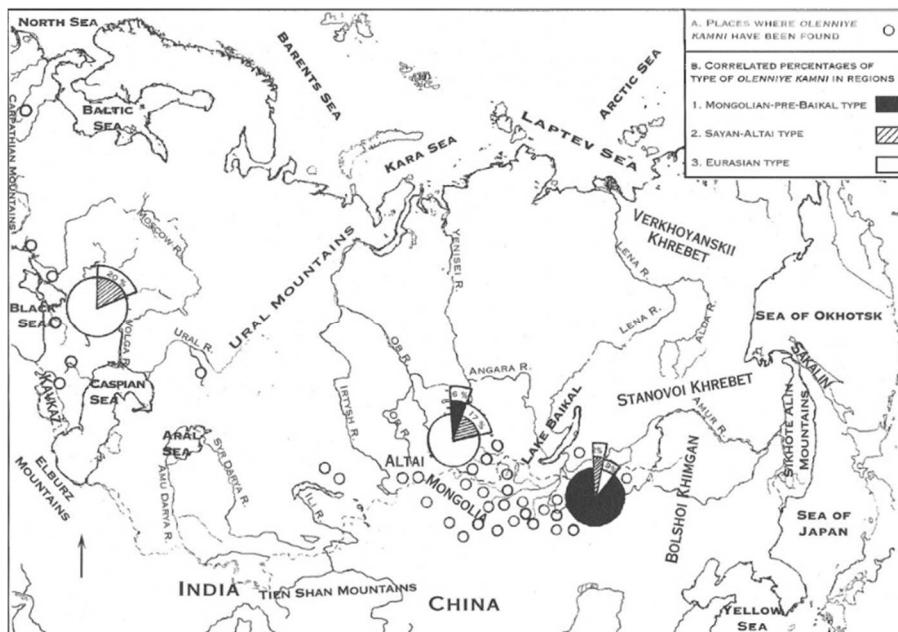
Figure 3.39. Distribution of deer stones on an east-west axis from Mongolia to Eastern Europe. (Volkov, 1981)

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[311] Jacobson, 1997, p. 143
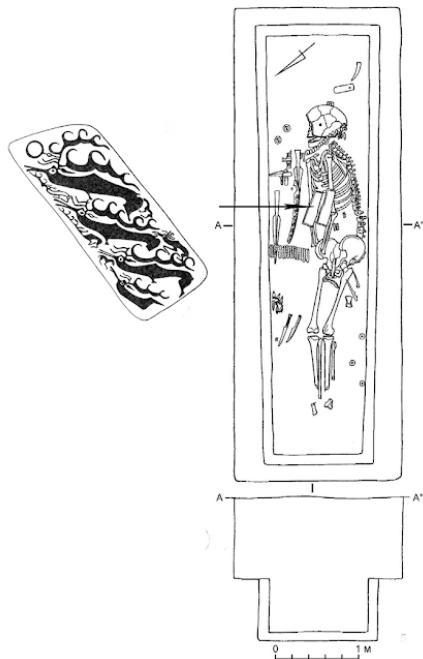
Figure 3.40. The Ivolga deer stone and the cemetery (After Okladnikov 1954)

On its east side, the Ivolga stone is covered with images of weaponry and unidentifiable tools terminating in a hook, as well as a small deer.[312] Two circles are carved onto the north face of the stone monument. The presence of quiver bows and other utilitarian objects has prompted Okladnikov's interpretation of this monument as a commemorative impersonation of a male warrior.[313] This is in tune with the general assumption that a well-defined warrior elite dominated the sociopolitical structure of the nomadic and semi-nomadic polities which formed in Central Eurasia in the late Bronze and early Iron Age. The Ivolga stone, however, is devoid of any direct human representations; any vestige of human presence is represented through a visual metonymy in the form of weaponry and accessories which a warrior would have embellished the body of a real-life warrior. As a

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[312] Jacobson 1993, p. 143
[313] Okladnikov 1954, p. 218

result, the monument appears to represent an overall anthropomorphic shape enveloping deer hybrids which become "trapped", encased into the overpowering human form.

The notion of human-animal and even purely animal hierarchy continues to develop throughout the region of the western Mongolian steppes and east of lake Baikal. Several examples illuminate Okladnikov's argument further. Among them, the most well-know monolith is the deer stone from Uushigiin-uver in the largely mountains Mongolian Province of Khövsgöl. Two rows of fifteen deer stones in total were found adjacent to a *khirisguur* mound encased by two concentric circles, probably stone ritual altars of sorts. A representative example of the stones in this complex is decorated with a plethora of different images including hybrid deer with raptor-like beaks identical to the Ivolga type, as well as tools and weapons such as arches, saddles, shields, knives, and schematic representations of the sun and moon. The stone appears to have been carved diagonally and the deer placed in vertical registers once again forming a crowded composition of overlapping animal and figural patterns.
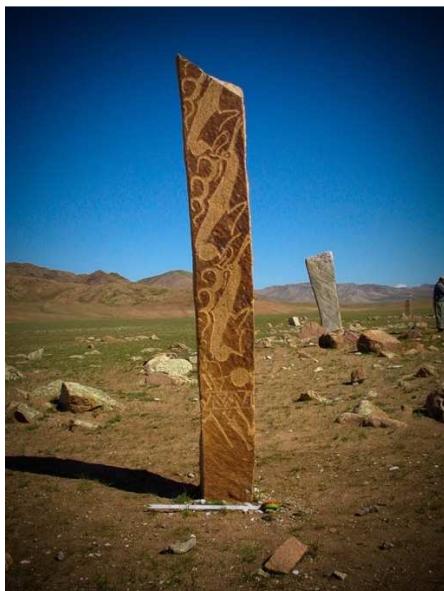
Figure 3.41 Deer stone complex of Uushig-uver, Bürentogtokh sum, Khövsgöl aimag, Northern Mongolia

A great concentration of deer stone complexes akin to the overall structure identified at Ivolga are found throughout Khövsgöl province, and its adjacent provinces of Bulgan, Arkhangai with many sites consisting of numerous circular khirigsuur mounds and ritual altars. A complex which marks a slight departure from the styles observed so far was found as far south as present-day Bayankhongor aimag, a territory of diverse geography marked by the Khangai mountains to the north, the grassland in the center and the Gobi Desert to the south. The area of Shatar Chuluu in Erdenetsogt district contains several barrows with deer stones which are embellished with the already established visual idioms of stylized hybrid deer; that said, several of the stones have relatively unfilled surfaces with only a single decorative design featuring abstracted antlers or deer heads in lieu of an entire animal image. Similar sparse depictions of antlers appear in other sites from South and Central Mongolia, including the neighboring Övörkhangai province (Khairkhandulaan district).
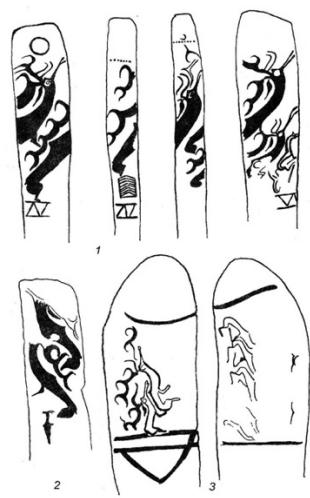
Табл. 44. Оленные камни
1 – оленный камень №8. Баянхонгорский аймаг. Эрдэнэцогт сумын. Местность Шатар чулуу; 2 – оленный камень №12. Баянхонгорский аймаг. Эрдэнэцогт сумын. Местность Шатар чулуу; 3 – Увурхангайский аймаг. Хайрхандулаан сумын. Местность Хужирт овоо.

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Figure 3.42 Top to bottom: Deer stones from South Mongolia; Deer stones from Bayankhongor Aimag; Deer stones from Övörkhangai

A nearby site, located in the Gurvanbulag district in the same province, contains a few other variations of the deer stones found north of the Selenga River shores (See Figure 3.43). Of particular interest are three stones placed in a horizontal line with a female image placed at the uppermost register of the central deer stone. This is a rare full-length depiction of a seated personage of ambiguous sex. The small protrusion on top of the figure's head could be a headdress indicating its royal or devine status. The stone itself is divided into three uneven in size registers: the top register contains the figure's head which is "cut off" by a frame in the shape of a necklace which leads us into the second (and largest) section crowded with deer. The third and smallest sector is separated from the second register by pattern reminiscent of the "braided rope" design seen in metalwork from Ordos to the Altai. There are several variants of this compositions, with one of them completely doing away with the frontal anthropomorphic image and another substituting it with a simple head outline devoid of facial features. The detailed seated personage, however, is not entirely human in nature: the lower part of the body is interwoven into the deer directly under it, ultimately serving as a replacement for the deer head and antlers.
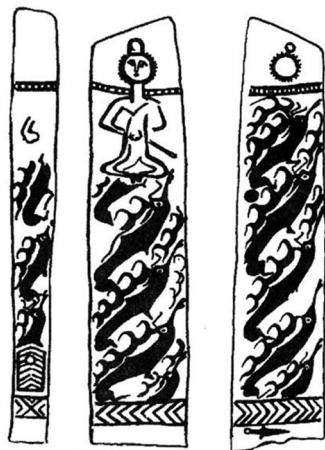
Figure 3.43 Images of deer stones, Gurvanbulag district, Bayankhongor Province

The stylized, highly hybrid images of deer dominate the visual landscape shaped by deer stones. However, in some instances, we also observe the elegant incorporation of other animals into the crowded registers to completely fill the surface with carved imagery. Out of the Classical Mongolian type, the deer stones found throughout ritual complexes and burials in present-day Arkhangai province located on the northern slopes of the Khangai mountain range are among the few ones which feature decorative patterns inclusive of animals other than deer. (See Figure 3.44)

Figure 3.44 Deer stones with deer and other small animals, Khashaat sum, Arkhangai province

Miniature tigers and horses with texturized bodies embellish the antlers of the deer. In the rare instances when other animals appear on deer stones, they are always depicted as several times smaller in comparison to the deer and often serve as embellishment and "space fillers" rather than active actors in the visual narrative. They also remind us of the

animal hierarchy unfolding along a vertical axis familiar to us from burial pieces such as the Aluchaideng headdress.

Conceptually, the *horror vacui* decorative approach and extreme stylization coupled with elegantly incorporated hybrid elements are features which do not disappear after deer stones do. In the Mongolian Classical style of deer stone monuments, one can clearly distinguish antecedents of the animal style associated with the early nomads who moved around the Mongolian steppe region and further west to the Altai area. The largest paradox stems from the fact that while the "frame visual narrative" idea of enveloping one animal within another (in the case of deer stones, anthropomorphic figure) as well as the antler stylization and zoomorphic hierarchy are prevalent in the visual culture of the Altai people, particular the Iron Age Pazyryk culture, the deer stones of the Sayan-Altai type in the Chuya and Katun' river valley do not abound in animal imagery. On the contrary, their depictions are much simpler and relatively realistic often featuring no more than two free standing deer distributed in separated registers. Horses as well as other animals appear more often in the Sayan-Altai type as compared with the Classical Mongolian. This marks a significant departure from the visual culture of Iron Age Altai cultures which rely on decorative formulas akin to the decorative elements used in Classical Mongolian deer stones. A mysterious and unaccounted for intrusion of visual motifs out of Northern Mongolia and the Transbaikal occurred in the direction of Pazyryk valley and the larger Altai region. During this "travel" of decorative concepts and the associated ritual and political beliefs, the social lives and designated roles of animal designs underwent significant changes somewhere along the way. Thus, the crowded, horror-vacui composition of fantastic flying deer diminishes its presence on carved monuments above

ground as it reaches the Sayan-Altai area only to find a new life in portable goods which furnish underground burial spaces, such as the frozen kurgan mounds of Pazyryk. At the present moment, the theory that the deer stones represent the bodies of deceased warriors and envelop, even perhaps subjugate real and fantastic beasts within their bodies is almost unanimously accepted by scholars studying the ecological landscape and transmission of visual traditions from Northern Mongolia and South Siberia. If this theory is indeed accurate, then it would also account for the strategic placement of hybrid animals on furnishings and, particularly, the body of the deceased. The Pazyryk man buried in kurgan no.2 as well as numerous other tomb occupants from the Pazyryk kurgans in the Altai were interred with their bodies tattooed with intricate patterns. (See Figure 3.45) The abstracted images evolving in a vertical arrangement echo the zoomorphic arrangements of the majority of luxury metalwork, wooden furnishings, vessels and textiles placed around the tombs (in fact, they are especially redolent of the meandering design on the Sampul textile from Fig. 3.28). Some tattoos combine depictions of fantastic hoofed beasts and birds, while others show more realistically depicted animals such as horses, asses, roe deer, mountains sheep and felines as well as birds. The feline predator tattooed on the left shoulder of the man buried in Pazyryk barrow no.5 finds its parallel in the feline "filler animals" from the Arkhangai deer stone. (See Figure 3.46) The trope of visual synecdoche, defined as intertwined zoomorphic junctures which represent a larger beast conceptually, coupled with the equally strong emphasis on *horror vacui* seem to be present in the artistic formula behind the Pazyryk tattoo and the deer stones.

Figure 3.45 Tattoo of a hoofed griffin found on the arm of the man buried in tomb no.2, Pazyryk
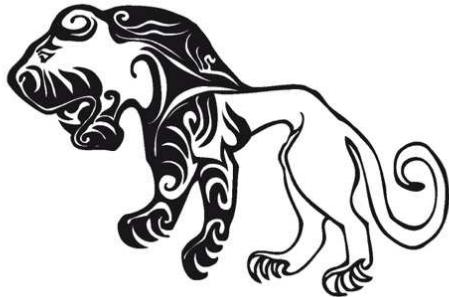
Figure 3.46 Tattoo of a feline predator, Tomb no. 5, Pazyryk

One reason as to why we hardly see any apparent animal combat or predation in the tomb furnishings, regalia or personal tools of Iron Age nomadic cultures of Central Eurasia could lie in the deer stone imagery being the source for the later development of this visual vocabulary. There are virtually no extant examples of explicit animal confrontation depicted on these deer stones but the vertical arrangement, *horror vacui* manner of image placement as well as the underlying concept of animal metamorphosis are features which might have travelled from the Bronze Age ritual spaces defined by the monoliths and stone circular burials to the kurgan mounds of the early nomads. Again, if

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we return to the idea of "frame" and its role in giving shape and meaning to an object, we would clearly see how the variations of the framing entity, that is, surface monument versus underground burial, defines the social life of the animal image in the specific circumstances. The concept of placing the zoomorphic arrangements directly on the body or on the sacred space surrounding the body (such as the coffin and tomb walls) is, in its own right, an alternative to erecting a commemorative stone in the shape of a male warrior figure embellished with fantastic and real animals.

Painted Imagery in a Steppe Context

After a comprehensive examination of the spatial distribution and funerary objects of burial sites dispersed across the Tarim Basin, the Altai mountains, Kazakh and Mongolian steppes, one can clearly differentiate several categories which would potentially help further our analysis of the mortuary art of Eurasian nomadic groups and their sedentary neighbors. Highly ornate textiles and pieces of clothing were found at Noin -Ula and smaller fragments were also discovered at sites in the Tarim Basin and the Altai mountains due to a fortuitous combination of external factors; however, one cannot establish a sense of spatial or typological continuity as many of the tombs in the Ordos region and North China did not yield any textiles. It is possible that such fragments did not survive or were simply not used in the decorative program and/or burial ceremony at these sites in China. In any case, as seen in the examples from Noin Ula, richly decorated textiles, composed of felt lining and twilled silk incorporated into the embroidery, were used as decorations of the main burial chamber and the wooden coffin. Unlike Han funerary art, mural programs are absent in burials of the steppe people, and the complete lack of painting on wall has led to the persistent assumption that the so-called Xiongnu of the Mongolian

steppes and the Pazyryk culture of the Altai region did not place particular importance on guiding the soul in the afterlife through painted narratives or symbols. However, such an assumption ignores the elaborate ornamental elements on the Noin Ula, Sampul, and Niya textiles which covered the surfaces of the funerary chambers, the felt cutouts decorating coffin lids, and the numerous carved masterpieces in the shape of fantastic zoomoprhs placed around or inside the chamber. The elaborate reindeer images pecked onto the surface of deer stones enclosed in ritual spaces of burials or cenotaphs are also viable alternatives to the artistic practice of wall painting.

While burials such as the kurgans associated with the Noin Ula archaeological culture did not emulate or adopt Chinese Han dynasty mural programs on the walls of the tombs, they did not do away with symbolic imagery in their burial practices. The animal combat scenes depicted on carpets may be references to Pazyryk artistic traditions, but the presence of elks and other animal imagery in almost every tomb, coupled with the continuous remains of animal sacrifice in Xiongnu burials, places a special emphasis on the significance of the act of metamorphosis and animal interaction. The fact that these motifs would surround the deceased placed in the coffin speaks of the conscious adoption of symbolism in the construction of the funerary program. The placement of a human Europoid face, perhaps the face of the deceased, on a celling hanging placed above the coffin in one of the Noin Ula kurgans, for example, most certainly held some sort of symbolic significance to the person buried inside. However, scholars have placed disproportionate emphasis on the provenance of these motifs (Pazyryk vs Chinese vs indigenous Xiongnu), rather than attempting to view them for their intrinsic significance in constructing ideas of the afterlife. There is an increased emphasis on decorating the

spaces in immediate proximity to the deceased such as the coffin as opposed to the walls of the tomb. This discrepancy between nomadic and sedentary treatment of imagery in tombs accentuates their different conceptions of the burial process. Since the collapsible yurt played an integral role in the lives of nomadic people active across the steppes, it is highly plausible that they chose to furnish their tombs in a fashion that would emulate their abodes on earth, hence the significance of wall hangings, carpets and other textiles which even in the modern day, are still being used by nomadic peoples in Mongolia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The common depiction of animal heads, anthers and horns as well as animals in or after the process of transformation emphasizes the concept of metamorphosis. The notion of transition between realms and the simultaneous conversion of form were likely the very core of the artistic decisions of the artisans.

With this in mind, it is worth noting that the presence of imported goods such as Achaemenid textiles or objects which emulated foreign masterpieces had little to do with symbolism other than the adjustment of these foreign motifs to make them pertinent to the expectation of the local audience. Wrapping up the coffin which, in the case of elite burials was most likely carried in a ceremony in front of the eyes of the deceased's peers (also members of the elite), was as important as the actual process of interring and paying respect to the body. It is likely that during his or her lifetime, the tomb occupant had acquired a Persian textile as a gift or as protection payment from traders passing through the local communities. The proper commissioning and preparation of the burial required the display of the most luxurious and idiosyncratic textiles as their quality and "exotic" provenance would have been seen and judged by the attending audience. Thus, as was the case with headdresses and burial regalia, the objects which furnished the tomb and materialized life

on earth into this new space did not simply exist in order to accommodate the transition of the deceased into the afterlife. The main purpose was to visually communicate messages to the social group which the tomb occupant was a part of. Every single object in the tomb was supposed to fit within the broader patterns established as norms by the respective social group. Thus, the variations in the appropriation of certain foreign motifs in different regions of the steppes which are not necessarily culturally dissimilar may be the result of variations in social hierarchy and the underlying social expectations. While the hybridity, symmetry and abstraction of the animals depicted might have been linked to a set of religious beliefs associated with metamorphosis and/or the journey of one's soul, the strategic combination of foreign and domestic animals along with Chinese writing and non-animal imagery had little to do with religion. Rather, these artistic choices were decisions dictated by social expectations and the politics of memory.

Both the Issyk burial of an elite man whose body would have been covered with thousands of golden regalia symbols and the deer stones with anthropomorphic and animal imagery share an important feature: these structures were built to function as commemorative frames for the emerging warrior elite in the nomadic world of Central Eurasia. This commemorative process adopted various techniques of placing what was essentially the same conceptual order of images both under and above ground. It is highly feasible the striking *horror vacui* approach to decoration inside the kurgans and in surface ritual sites was simply chosen in accordance with the expectations of the viewer. We have no evidence of who entered the tomb or surface ritual space, who had access and carried the body before its internment, and we do not know whether members of the same family or larger lineage would have had an active role in the ritual. That said, the disheartening

scarcity of such evidence is countered by the consistent theatre-like "staging" of animal transformation in monuments above and under ground. Ultimately animal style extends beyond portable goods: we see larger versions of animal art at reliefs from Persepolis' Apadana Palace (Chapter One) and we also see such images at surface burials and ritual altars in the Mongolian-Manchurian grassland stretching towards the Sayan-Altai area. It is likely that as mobility and freedom of movement due to transportation advances increased from the middle of the first millennium BCE, the necessity for showing off one's status also increased and the pastoral nomads' developing relationships with other nomadic groups and adjacent sedentary empires became a new priority. Hybrid reindeer imagery, for instance, becomes a tool for visual communication with two types of viewers, the surrounding warrior elite, still alive at the time of the burial, and the imagined spectators of the afterlife.

Chapter 4: Revisiting the "Disappearance" Narrative

The extensive ongoing research on textiles in the Abegg-Stiftung and other private collections around the world demonstrates the increasing commercial and scholarly interest in early and early medieval Central Asian and Chinese works of art. This newly developed awareness is further evidenced by Sotheby's recent announcement that a Sogdian shirt embroidered with golden thread was scheduled to be put up for auction in April, 2018. The shirt belonged to an elite member of the Eastern Iranian-speaking people known as Sogdians, who were skilled Inner Asian merchants often referred to in early Han dynasty texts as Kangju 康居 or Dayuan 大宛. The heartland of the Sogdians encompassed the Zeravshan Valley in modern-day Uzbekistan. The Sogdians, whose language became the *lingua-franca* of the Silk Road, would cross the high passes which led in and out of the Tarim Basin transporting commercial goods all the way south toward India, often settling in sedentary entities such as China .[314]

The luxuriant garment from Sotheby's collection, currently valued at approximately half a million pounds, had been woven sometime between the seventh and ninth century CE.[315] The shirt is embellished with repeated images of symmetrically positioned pairs of ducks facing one another along a vertical axis which consists of medallions and floral motifs. (See Figure 4.1) The animals, identical in size and appearance, are wearing decorative scarves and holding jeweled necklaces in their beaks.

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[314] Benjamin, Craig. 2018. *Empires of Ancient Eurasia: the First Silk Roads Era, 100 bce-250 ce*. [S.l.]: Cambridge University Press, p. 406; La Vaissière, Étienne de. 2005. *Sogdian traders: a history*. Leiden: Brill

[315] Kennedy, Maev. "1,000-year-old Silk Shirt Expected to Fetch £500,000 at Auction." The Guardian. April 01, 2018. Accessed April 06, 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/apr/01/1000-year-old-silk-shirt-expected-to-fetch-500000-at-auction.

They are portrayed standing on colorful platforms and their highly textured feathers and torsos appear to be decorated with various geometric motifs which echo the rest of the garment's decorative patterns. This visual narrative recalls the imagery depicted on a saddle from the Abegg-Stiftung collection: the heads of a pair of confronted, highly geometricized images of birds with elongated necks are enclosed within pearl roundels, a motif commonly used in the decorative traditions of the Sasanian empire (224 – 640 CE). (See Fig. 4.2) A remarkably similar set of garments, dated to the eighth century, comes from the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art. The outer fabric of a child's coat is made of Sogdian silk, whereas the lining of the pants and the coat consists of Chinese twill silk.[316] (See Figure 4.3) The decorative patterns on the garments from the Cleveland collection echo the iconography of Sotheby's Sogdian dress: pearl roundels enclose several reflected pairs of ducks holding hanging pendants in their beaks. The ducks are standing on platforms made of palmettos. The spacing and repetition of rosettes, pearl roundels, and standing, symmetrically positioned ducks is a recurring motif in the design of Sogdian textiles with a likely Sasanian prototype. A similar sleeveless coat, also from the Abegg-Stifftung collection, exhibits the incorporation of the Sasanian-Sogdian roundel pattern encircling pairs of identical reflected deer standing on the tips of their hooves as well as two pairs of ducks with handing medallions in their beaks. (See Figure 4.4) The shape and design of the attire is akin to that of the decoration of the painted coffin panels from the Tubo-Tuyuhun (吐蕃吐谷渾)-period[317] tomb of Golmuud (Chinese: Guolimu) on the

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[316] Watt, James C. Y., and Anne E Wardwell. 1997. *When Silk Was Gold: Central Asian and Chinese Textiles.* New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art in cooperation with the Cleveland Museum of Art

[317] The period in question spans between the seventh and ninth century CE when the Tibetan empire reached the peak of its military and diplomatic capacities as it established significant economic and diplomatic ties with Tang China and India.

southern shore of Lake Bayin in Dulaan, modern-day Qinghai.[318] On the coffin planks from two robbed tombs of the Guolimu cemetery, one sees painted images of guardian beasts, such as the red encased within floral borders and cloud-shaped patterns. (See Figure 4.5) Similar roundel medallion shapes appear on the textiles excavated from the same tomb. It appears that the practice of incorporating a pair of identical animals facing each other into a highly ornamental floral design or pearl roundel was commonly adopted by various ethnic groups along the Chinese northern periphery during the Tang dynasty.

It is clear that the concept of placing mirror images of stylized animals along a vertical axis is not an innovation unique to the Sasanian or the succeeding Sogdian visual tradition; we have already traced the presence of the "reflected imagery" decorative approach back to burials of the Ordos culture of Warring States China, and the Pazyryk culture of the Altai frozen kurgans in the early Iron Age. Is this similarity in the visual formula simply a coincidental overlap due to limitations imposed by materials and techniques? Why is symmetrical zoomorphic imagery depicted on a vertical axis several centuries after the disappearance of the nomadic groups which occupied the Eurasian steppes in the first millennium BCE? The animal images on the Sogdian textiles have never been characterized as "animal style" decoration, likely due to their later date and non-nomadic context. The term "animal style" is never applied in discourse regarding the artistic traditions of both nomadic and sedentary traders, merchants and royal elites of Central Eurasia after the dawn of the first millennium CE. There exists the underlying

[318] Baumer, Christoph. 2014. *The history of Central Asia. Vol. 2: the age of the Silk Roads*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd.; Zhao, Feng. *Fang Zhi Pin Kao Gu Xin Fa Xian*. Di 1 ban. Hangzhou: Yi sha tang/Fu shi gong zuo dui, 2002.

notion that animal style is the preserve of the early nomads and its artistic legacy did not last after the displacement of these groups on the Eurasian steppes at the dawn of the first millennium CE. Yet zoomorphic imagery, as evidenced by these rich Sogdian finds, are rarely missing from the visual traditions of later period and cultures in Central Eurasia. The Sotheby's garment's decorative scheme is apparently based in the symmetrically placed zoomorphic imagery. But is this animal art or is it a completely unrelated approach to design which happens to independently adopt animal motifs as decorative patterns? Does it show any existing links with earlier Eurasian visual cultures which have so unequivocally been characterized as "animal style"?

Figure 4.1 Shirt with ducks and medallions

Figure 4.2 Figure 4.2 Saddle cover, 7th – 9th century CE

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Figure 4.3 Pattern from a child's coat, 8th c CE, Cleveland Museum of Art

Figure 4.4 Sleeveless coat with animals, 6th century

Figure 4.5 Red bird enclosed in a floral medallion motif, Tomb of Guolimu, Reshui, Dulan, Qinghai province, 7th -9th century

The hidden notion that animal art disappeared from the artistic traditions of the steppe peoples and their sedentary neighbors almost overnight after the early years of the first millennium BCE has permeated the field of Asian art history. At present, exhibition catalogs and art history monographs continue to embrace the common practice of referring to animal art as "the minor decorative art of ancient pastoral nomads". Such a classification approach carries the inherent implication that animal art is portable, small-scale, easy to transport and is rarely mixed with elements derived from other decorative traditions. These assumptions are all at odds with the large-scale animal style scenes depicted at the Apādana Palace relief at Persepolis as well as the sizeable carpets placed in Pazyryk tombs, both of which were discussed in the preceding chapters. The study of animal style is currently an inextricable component of the study of the arts of the deep past (however loosely defined); when animal art is not considered as part of the Eurasian nomadic tradition, it is viewed marginally through the lens of ancient Hellenistic art. [319] According to the present consensus among the majority of art historians in the field of minor decorative arts of Asia, then only portable objects with zoomorphic junctures which have been carbon -14 dated somewhere in the first millennium BCE or the 1st-2nd c CE can be designated under the category "animal style" with utmost certainty. There is little to no mention of the factors behind what many consider to be an overnight disappearance of animal style aesthetics in Eurasia. Such generic oversimplification often reduces animal style to the notion of "ethnographic evidence" of ancient nomadic lifestyles by containing its aesthetic and

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[319] Williams, Dyfri, and Jack Ogden. 1994. *Greek Gold: Jewelry of the Classical World*. New York: Abrams.; Althaus, Frank, and Mark Sutcliffe. 2006. *The Road to Byzantium: Luxury Arts of Antiquity*. London: Fontanka.

cultural significance within very specific yet inaccurate spatial and temporal boundaries, that is, "Eurasia BCE". The portable belt buckles, human and horse regalia, armor decoration, vessels, furnishings and textiles discussed so far have clearly delineated several trends in animal art production which proliferated along the ancient nomadic networks. While the manufacture of portable animal style regalia flourished in the first millennium BCE, animal style did not disappear after the fall of the Chinese Eastern Han dynasty in the third century and the gradual disappearance of the Pontic Scythians in the West and the Xiongnu in the Eastern part of the steppes. Neither was its end marked by the gradual disintegration of the so-called Sarmatian cultural realm on the western side of the Eurasian steppe belt around the fourth century. This chapter will show the enduring legacy of animal art and its consistently important role in shaping later artistic trends during and even beyond the first millennium BCE. The concepts of animal metamorphosis, transformation and hybridity coupled with the theatre-like staging of tomb interiror continued to be developed and refined by nomads and sedentary populations which came to occupy the regions of the Eurasian steppes and adjacent territories throughout the first millennium CE.

After the Xiongnu: The Xianbei and Landscape Aesthetics

The art of the Eastern steppes from the middle of the first millennium BCE certainly demonstrates an aesthetic proclivity toward abstraction and reduction of realistic forms to pure geometric shapes or abstracted designs. The remains of the nomadic alliance of the Xiongnu in the region of South Siberia east of lake Baikal, the Tuva basin, the Ordos Loop and the Mongolian steppes demonstrate the increased tendency to use the device of visual synecdoche in the decorative scheme of portable objects: zoomorphic junctures gradually come to replace a fully portrayed, anatomically precise animal. A common method of

stylization depicts details of the body as animal forms: antlers, horns or claws may consist of bird heads, while other animal forms may be merged into the hindquarters of a predatory beast. These zoomorphic junctures are not as commonly depicted on decorative objects from the Eastern steppes, specifically the Chinese northern periphery including the Ordos zone and Tarim basin, as they are in Central and West Asia. The art of the various nomadic groups active at the Chinese northern border, loosely referred to as the Xiongnu alliance, took this stylization trend even further as it started to reduce the animal images to pure geometric shapes.

This transition towards geometricization is reflected in numerous burials in the Ordos region of Northern China which, as already shown in the previous chapters, was occupied by various nomadic and sedentary Han border elites from the Warring States period towards the end of Western Han. (See Figure 4.6) The cemetery of Xichagou located in present-day Xifeng county, Liaoning Province, is a representative example of the "visual synecdoche"[320] conceptual device of decoration. The burial complex, which contains around 450 individual graves, was built on a hill in the easternmost area associated with Xiongnu activities. The sixty-three excavated tombs were constructed as rectangular pits oriented to the north.[321] Plaques with animal scenes of intertwined zoomorphic junctures

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[320] Like its role as a figure of speech (more precisely, a type of metonymy), here the term "synecdoche" will be utilized to describe the conscious replacement of a whole with one of its parts, or vice versa to create a pre-calculated affect, as is the case with its usage as a rhetorical trope. The affect of figurative tools outside the textual tradition (such as visual metaphors) has been well documented in our contemporary society where visual stimuli are being constantly conveyed to us through visual metaphors in advertisements. Such visual tools were guiding the viewer's sensory experience in the case of animal style or, any other decorative tradition, for that matter.

[321] Sun, Shou-Dao. "Xiongnu Xichaogou wenhua gumuqun de faxian" 匈奴西岔沟古墓群的发现. (The Discovery of the Ancient Xiongnu Tombs in Xichagou Culture). *Wenwu* 1960 (8-9)., p. 25-36.

are found at this site. (See Figure 4.7) The composition is crowded with various abstracted

elements; there exists virtually no attempt to depict realistic proportions and many of the

animal shapes are abstracted to the level of unrecognizability. The zoomorphs are framed

by the braided rope design which can be traced back to the early Iron Age.
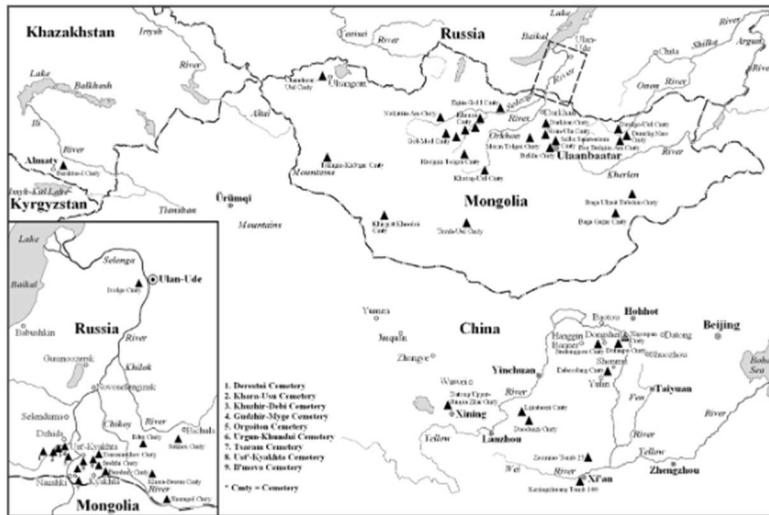
Figure 4.6 Map of Xiongnu discoveries along the Chinese northern periphery

Figure 4.7 Plaques from Xichagou cemetery, Liaoning province

A similar decorative approach can be observed in the metalwork findings from important

Xiongnu-type cemeteries in the Transbaikal, such as the Ivolga complex located in present-

day Buryatia Republic of the Russian Federation, southeast of Lake Baikal.[322] The decorative plaques unearthed from Xiongnu burials in South Siberia, Ordos Loop and Manchuria as well as territories to the west of Ordos such as the Tarim basin, show an approach to decoration which moves away from the hybridization of fantastic zoomorphs into zoomorphic junctures and gradually transitions into a new style of abstraction accomplished through the introduction of geometric shapes in place of animal anatomy. A great number of plaques excavated from cemeteries in the region southeast of Lake Baikal (referred to as the Transbaikal zone), specifically Ivolga and Deresty, are decorated with simple intertwined spirals which are likely meant to replace the actual contorted animal bodies.

Another blindspot in the study of animal style and its potential impact on later decorative traditions exists in the lack of research regarding the animal style of the southern Chinese frontier. This material, in its own right, should be the subject of a separate study but its importance warrants a brief digression here. While hitherto, our discourse has exclusively focused on the animal style objects produced and traded along the northern Chinese periphery and the steppe region in Northeast Asia, such approach to decoration existed in far-flung places in the south. The preference for abstracted figural shapes in the place of animal imagery seems to have spread southward ultimately reaching the southern periphery of China, or present-day Guangdong. Further evidence of highly geometric, abstracted animal style designs in luxury portable metalwork comes from the royal tomb of Zhao Mo, the second king of the Kingdom of Nanyue 南越 (204 BCE- 111 BCE) in

[322] Davydova, Antonina V., and Sergej S. Minjaev. 2008. *The Xiongnu Decorative Bronzes: new discoveries in Russia*. St. Petersburg: Publ. House "Gamas".

present-day Guangzhou. The Kingdom of Nanyue was established after the fall of the Qin and managed to sustain a strained yet semi-peaceful relationship with the Han court for a century before ultimately being conquered and annexed by the Han.[323] The golden plaques excavated from the royal tomb of Nanyue continue the geometricization trend: in the example shown here, the plaque is framed by the commonly used "braided rope design" and unrecognizable animal junctures are fitted within its narrow, framed space.[324] While in Xiongnu art, it was still feasible to make out the elements from each animal form, in this case, the zoomorphic junctures have transitioned into purely geometric patterns, and have thus lost their meaning as zoomorphs. (See Figure 4.8)

Figure 4.8 Golden Plaque, Tomb of the Nanyue King, 3rd -2nd c BCE

It is out of these Xiongnu innovations in animal art design that the art production of the 3nd -6rd c CE emerged and continued to reinvent itself. After the fall of the Eastern Han dynasty in 220 CE, China entered a long period of political disunity which brought about turbulent social and economic changes. The process of power consolidation in North China starting from the middle of the third century CE entailed a series of uneasy, and often

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[323] Lam, Peter. 1991. *Nanyue Wang Mu Yu Qi.* 南越王墓玉器. (Jades from the Tomb of the Nanyue King). Chu ban. [Guangzhou]: Guangzhou Xi Han Nanyue wang mu bo wu guan
[324] Lin, Qihua. *Xi Han Nanyue Wang Mu Bowuguan. (The Museum of the Western Han Tomb of Nanyue King).* 西漢南越王墓博物館. [Guangzhou: Xi Han Nanyue wang mu bo wu guan, 1999.

unsuccessful alliances of pastoral nomadic warrior groups and sedentary Chinese populations working together towards the establishment of cities with fully functioning local bureaucracies. The emergence and incursions of the Xianbei 鮮卑 people into the regions occupied by the Xiongnu ultimately destroyed the latter's political hegemony along the Chinese northern frontier. The Xianbei (or Xianbi, which was originally pronounced as "Serbi") likely originated from the Eastern Hu peoples whom the Xiongnu had defeated and forced to pay tribute in cloth and skin tax.[325] During the Western Han, the two Donghu split into two main groups, each following its own path. The Xianbei and Wuhuan 烏桓. The two likely shared a common language and customs, and the sources often treat them as a homogenous group.[326] However, during the Eastern Han, the Xianbei reemerged as a significant threat ultimately driving the Xiongnu out of the Northern Mongolian steppe region: their leader Tianshihuai unified the steppes but left no successor. The Xianbei did not manage to form an enduring large confederation similar in structure and stability to that of the Xiongnu. After the death of Tianshihuai, the Xianbei confederation split into various newly emerging dynasties once it settled into Chinese territory; each clan pursued its own territorial aspirations. The Murong clan which was predominantly occupied in agriculture, was active in two distinct parts as it further disintegrated. One brunch of the Murong Xianbei subjugated the Qiang people of present-day Qinghai province where the newly formed Tuyuhun dynasty continued to rule until the destruction of the Tibetan empire.[327]

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[325] Atwood, Christopher Pratt, 2004. *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire.* New York, NY: Facts On File, p. 593

[326] Xu, Bingkun. 1996. *Xianbei, San Guo, Gu Fen: Zhongguo, Chaoxian, Riben Gu Dai Di Wen Hua Jiao Liu.* (Xianbei, Three Kingdoms and Kofun: The Ancient Cultural Exchange between China, Japan and Korea). Di 1 ban. Shenyang Shi: Liaoning gu ji chu ban she, p.18-19

[327] Ibid

The main brunch of the Murong group, however, remained around the area of Northeastern China, or present-day Liaoning province. The Tabghach (Tuoba) clan settled into the Dai area of Northern Shanxi province and Southern Inner Mongolia (approximately overlapping with the Ordos cultural zone of the Warring States and Han dynasty).

Following their successful consolidation of power, the Tuoba Xianbei established the Northern Wei dynasty (386-528). References to the Xianbei start to appear late in Chinese texts. A brief reference to them comes from Records of the Three Kingdoms *(Sanguozhi* 三國志*)*. The Book of Wei (*Weishu* 魏書) along with scarce references in the Later Book of Han (*Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 provide the most detailed records of the Xianbei. *Weishu* demarcates the territory of the Xianbei in rather vague terms, as stretching from the Liao river in the east to the Western regions to the west. (其地東接遼水，西當西城). The texts make multiple references to the agricultural activities and products of the Xianbei as well as their relationship with the natural world：

> 俗識鳥獸孕乳，時以四節，耕種常用布穀鳴為候。地宜青穄、東牆，東牆似蓬草，實如葵子，至十月熟。能作白酒，而不知作麴蘗。米常仰中國。[328]
>
> They have the custom of observing the gestation and birthing practices of birds and beasts according to the passage of the four seasons, and in cultivating (the land), they always make use of the cuckoo for the purpose of timing. Their land is suitable for growing millet and *dongqiang (Agriophyllum squarrosum);* the later is like *pengcao,* its seeds, like the millet, ripen in the tenth lunar month. They can make distilled alcohol, but they cannot ferment it. They rely on the Central states for their grains.

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[328] *Sanguozhi 30.832*

A very similar account of the Wuhuan and Xianbei branches of the Eastern Hu nomads exists in the *Hou Hanshu*, thus confirming the various agricultural products produced by these people and the lack of uniform calendar. Their concept of time seems to have been inextricably linked to natural phenomena. As for their husbandry, the texts provide an account of the types of animals they used in their daily activities:

又禽兽异于中国者，野马、原羊、角端牛，以角为弓，俗谓之角端弓者。又有貂、豽、鼲子，皮毛柔蔻，故天下以为名裘。[329]

. . . .
. . . .

The animals of the Xianbei differ from those in the Central States, consisting of wild horses, sheep, and saiga antelopes[330] the horns of which are used in the making of bows, customarily named "horn bows." They (the Xianbei) also have marten, *na*, and *hunzi,* the furs of which are soft and elastic. They are thus known among all under Heaven for their famous fur garments.

This description does not deviate too much from the records of animals used by the Xiongnu in the *Xiongnu Liezhuan* 匈奴列傳 in the *Shiji*: the Xiongnu migrated around the grasslands, and among their domesticated animals, the most common were horses, cows, and sheep, but they also had strange ones like camels, hinnies, asses, *jueti, taotu* steeds[331]

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[329] *Hou Hanshu 90*.2985

[330] This is currently an endangered species which was widely spread in a vast area stretching from the Caucasus across Dzungaria into the Mongolian steppe. At present, the saiga antelope can only be found in one location in Russia and several locations in Kazakhstan. Only the males have horns.

[331] Earlier references to the *taotu* come from the Shanghaijing which mentions a mythological beast resembling a horse roaming at the Northern Seas (北海內有獸，其狀如馬，名曰騊駼).

and *dianxi*. (隨畜牧而轉移。其畜之所多則馬、牛、羊，其奇畜則橐駝、驢、驘、駃騠、騊駼、驒).[332]

References about the auspicious meaning of animals in the rites and customs of the Xianbei, however, is much more abundant compared to the extant records of the Xiongnu. The 'Treatise on Auspicious and Inauspicious Influences" (*Lingzheng z*hi 靈徵志) in the *Weishu*[333] is divided into two separate sections (shang 上 and xia 下), the later segment of which (*xia* 下) lists the occurrences of auspicious events related to the sudden appearance of the following animals: spirit animal, (*shenshou*), female unicorn (*qin*), turle (*gui*), large elephant *(juxiang)*, foxes (*hu*), five-colored dog (*wuse gou*), white deer, one-antlered deer, one-horned animal, white wolf, rabbit, and more than ten kinds of different birds.[334] The intertwining of the brunches which "glow together" is also outlined as an auspicious in the section. The opening paragraph of the treatise outlines the anecdote related to the appearance of the auspicious beast, the so-called *shenshou* (spirit beast):

Taotu is also briefly mentioned in *Yizhoushu* 逸周書 (Recovered Documents of Zhou) as a foreign breed of horse which was bestowed to King Tang of Shang. The *Erya* refers to this mythological horse as being green. For a complete discussion of all mentions of animals, both domesticated and fantastic, see the recent dissertation: Duthie, N. (2015). *Origins, Ancestors, and Imperial Authority in Early Northern Wei Historiography.*

[332] *Shiji* 110: 2879; See also *Hanshu* 94a.3743

[333] Weishu 112; The other treaties include discussions on celestial phenomena (*Tianxiang zhi* 天象志), administrative geography (*Dixing zhi* 地形志), musical principles and calendar (*Lüli zhi)* 律曆志 , state rituals (Li zhi 禮志), court music (*Yue zhi* 樂志), nourishment and goods (*Shihuo zhi* 食貨志), penal law codes (Xingfa zhi 刑罰志), official ranks (*Guanshi zhi* 官氏志), Buddhism and Daosim (*Shilao zhi* 釋老志).

[334] Ibid

魏氏世居幽朔，至獻帝世,有神人言應南遷，於是傳位於子聖武帝，命令南徙，山谷阻絕，仍欲止焉。復有神獸，其形似馬，其聲類牛，先行導引，積年乃出。始居匈奴之故地。[335]

The Wei clan resided in Youshuo until the reign of Xiandi when a *shenren* (spirit person) said that they ought to move southward. Thereupon, the throne fell into the hands of Emperor Shengwu who ordered them to migrate southward. Yet the mountains and gorges obstructed the path, thus he (the emperor) wanted to halt (the journey) there. Once again, there was a *shenshou* (spirit beast), shaped like a horse, with a cow-like voice, who went in front, guided them for many years and then they emerged. Since that time, they (the Xianbei) have come to occupy the Xiongnu's former territory.

Both domesticated and fantastic animals which slightly differ from those in earlier references to the Xiongnu appear in the various events listed in the treaties. In addition, animals are mentioned on numerous occasions in the context of sacrificial rituals performed by the ruling class in the Northern Wei after the Tuoba Xianbei consolidated their power and established the dynasty. The Book of Wei contains several paragraphs which detail events during which the emperor sacrificed sheep, bulls and horses.

Horses and deer are the two most commonly represented animals in the animal art of the Xianbei. At present, almost all zoomorphic images associated with these people come from depictions on metalwork. The images seem to place emphasis on the relationship between the animals and their natural surroundings. Foliage, trees and grass

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[335] *Weishu 112b. 2927*

are part and parcel of the visual formula in Xianbei decorative plaques. Examples of golden plaques featuring designs of openwork incorporating three identical deer whose heads are intertwined with abstracted foliage abound in the arts of elite Xianbei tombs. An example from southeastern Inner Mongolia is cast in gold in the lost-wax technique. The image depicts three identical stags. (See Figure 4.9) Their bodies are hollow on the reverse and the rest of the design is completely flat.[336] In this stylistic idiom, the heads of the stags are always turned backwards towards their hindquarters. The area above their heads is filled with curvilinear meandering designs which stand for vegetation. While this is not the first precedent for stylized vegetation (as seen through the numerous examples of the Tree of Life and the crowded foliage in the Kargaly diadem), there exists an unparalleled emphasis on structure and geometric accuracy in this Xianbei piece. The circular shapes formed by the openwork create a cluster in each of the three segments in-between the deer figures. In other variants of this design, such as a golden plaque excavated from Sandaowan, Qahar Youyi Hou Banner of Inner Mongolia, the deer are raised on a platform which also consists of geometric abstracted shapes which recall foliage.
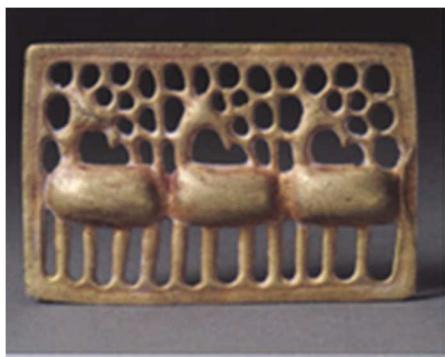
Figure 4.9 Gold Plaque with Three Deer from Jingtan Village, Chayouhou Banner, Wulanchabu City. 265-316

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[336] Bunker 1997, p. 167

The Xianbei's penchant for abstracted landscape is further attested by the design of their luxuriant headdresses. Both the Murong and Tuoba Xianbei made crowns with antler-like protrusions and hanging leaf-shaped pendants. The most idiosyncratic item excavated at a site related to the Murong Xianbei culture is the golden cap ornament, which has been successfully and thoroughly studied by Sarah Laursen in her recent dissertation.[337] The gold objects in Murong Xianbei[338] tombs are decorated with a combination of openwork and pendant gold leaves attached by wires, some taking the form of trees or antlers. Several examples excavated from southeastern Inner Mongolia and associated with the Tuoba clan show a slight variation in this design as they incorporate a base made to resemble an animal head. (See Figure 4.10 and 4.11) The antlers are thus protruding directly from the head of the beast and are further embellished with leaves to imitate tree foliage. A golden headdress ornament, now kept at the National Museum of China, consists of an ox head with deer ntlers and leaf-like pendants.

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[337] Laursen, Sarah. "Leaves that sway: Gold Xianbei cap ornaments from northeast China" (January 1, 2011). *ProQuest.* Paper AAI3463014. http://repository.upenn.edu/dissertations/AAI3463014

[338] This term refers to an ethnic Xianbei branch.

Figure 4.10 Gold headdress with an ox head, deer antlers and leaf pendants, Northern dynasties, Inner Mongolia, now in the National Museum of China

These objects were probably affixed to fabric caps and have been associated with ornaments described in the Chinese histories as *buyao* ("step-sway") ornaments because their thin sheet gold leaves would tremble and sway with each step the wearer takes.[339] It is worth noting that the "Treatise on Auspicious and Inauspicious Events" of the *Weishu* specifically mentions the intertwining and "glowing together" and incidental interlacing of tree branches (連理木)[340] as perceived to be an auspicious event by the Xianbei.[341] It is

[339] Ibid

[340] This is an early occurrence of the concept of intertwining tree branches. This concept becomes increasingly symbolic as used in Tang poetry masterpieces such as Bai Juyi's "Song of Everlasting Sorrow" (*Chang henge* 長恨歌)in which the lovers vow to be like two intertwined brunches of a tree ("願為連理枝"). The term 連理木 (Japanese: れんりぼく, renriboku) refers to a sacred tree at a shrine complex near the Suemori Castle ruins, the brunches of which part at the bottom but end up intertwining. There is a great level of auspiciousness attached to the intertwining of trees and foliage in both China and Japan.

[341] Weishu 112; For specific references in *Lingzheng zhi* to auspicious events as they relate to the stars and appearance of animals, see Xu, Zhentao., David W Pankenier, and Yaotiao Jiang. 2000. *East Asian Archaeoastronomy: Historical Records of Astronomical Observations of China, Japan and Korea.* Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers

likely that a common feature of several brunches of the Xianbei was a set of beliefs which were linked to the positioning of natural elements of the surrounding flora.
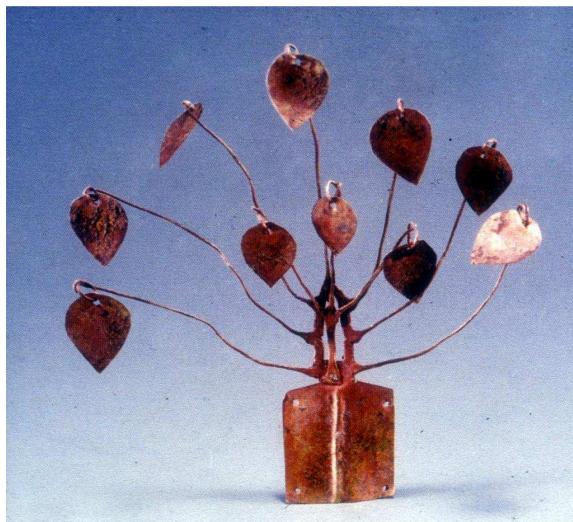

Figure 4.11 Golden "buyao" hat ornament, Beipiao, Liaoning province, late 3rd c – beginning of 4th century

This idea of headdress' movement to emulate elements borrowed from the natural world has a continuous tradition in Eurasia and the Pontic Steppes which deserves further investigation. In the case of the Aluchaideng crown, the turquoise bird on top had a movable head which would turn with the movement of the wearer. The Sarmatian diadem excavated from the Khokhlach kurgan at Novocherkassk region discussed at the end of Chapter Two also features attachment of separate moving heart-like pendants to form a tree; thus, through the movement of the zoomorphic image incorporated into the vertical arrangement of the headpiece, the individual reenacts the performative function of what appears to be a symbolic object. This concept is not necessarily new to the Chinese northern periphery as several royal wreathes with pendants, somewhat reminiscent of both the *buyao* headpieces and the Tillya tepe crown have much earlier precedents in the Balkans as evidenced by elite undisturbed Thracian barrows (4-3rd C BCE) in modern-day Bulgaria.

So far, six golden wreathes have been excavated from Thracian tombs. Two of them are made of pure gold, and two of them have golden pendants attached to a band made of organic perishable materials.[342] (See Figure 4.12) It is likely that these headdresses were not manufactured specifically for the burials of the Thracian aristocrats and had been worn in the tomb occupant's life on earth, as indicated by several wall paintings from elite Thracian tombs. The famous Kazanlak tomb, which is the most widely-known Thracian burial known to date, contains a mural of a man seated at an altar wearing a wreath which recalls the excavated golden pieces. (See Figure 4.13) The attachment of golden leaf-like embellishments to the Thracian headdresses is conceptually rather similar to the Xianbei crowns excavated from elite Thracian tombs.

Figure 4.12.1 Golden Wreath excavated at Golqyamata Mogila (4th c BCE) , South Bulgaria

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[342] Tonkova, Milena. 2013. "Gold Wreaths from Thrace". Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on Thracology. Vollume II, p. 414-445

Figure 4.12.2 Golden cap, National Archaeological Museum, Bulgaria (1st c BCE)

Figure 4.13 Mural from the tomb ceiling of Kazanlak mogila, Bulgaria, 4th c BCE

Another Xianbei innovation in metalwork is the manner of dress: unlike in previously examined aesthetic nomadic traditions, the Xianbei usually carried their animal plaques as pendants on a chain as opposed to attaching them to a garment or belt.[343] A gold pendant in the shape of a crouching horse was excavated in 1984 from the Horqin Zuoyizhong Banner in Inner Mongolia.[344] The same tomb yielded another similar beast which was worn by the tomb occupant as a pendant on a necklace. Both animals are highly

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[343] Watt, James C. Y., and Prudence Oliver Harper. 2004. *China: Dawn of a Golden Age, 200-750 AD*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; See Fig.

[344] Kaogu 1989 (5)

stylized, with the limbs significantly smaller in size and proportion in comparison to the rest of the body. They are unnaturally curved to connect to each other and also to link the torso and head of the horse. Two factors may be behind the craftsman's decision. These pendants are relatively smaller when compared to the plaques seen on the clothing or attached to a belt; thus, this distorted, unnatural intertwining of body parts could be the result of a concern for space and weight. However, we have already observed the intertwining of branches and deer heads in the "three-deer" plaques and thus, the more likely scenario is the development of a new, uniquely Xianbei aesthetic tradition which favored a sense of "closed directionality" within the pictorial plane and thus concentrated the visual narrative inward rather than outward.

Figure 4.14 Gold pendant, Horqin Zuoyizhong Banner, Jerim League, Inner Mongolia, 2nd -3rd c CE

Another plaque worn as a pendant is inscribed with Chinese characters which mention the name of Yituo, the leader of the Tuoba Xianbei confederation at the peak of their ascendency to power in the late third century. (See Figure 4.15) The plaque incorporates two pairs of highly stylized animals with contorted bodies intertwined into one another. The striking feature in this case is the symmetrical positioning of the animals

along a vertical axis. This continues the visual tradition of vertical axis and symmetry which we can trace to Warring States Ordos sites such as Aluchaideng, but also adds innovative patterns such as extreme twisting of the body, and the usage of thin lines to connect all parts of the various bodies to one another. While in the arts of earlier nomadic groups, the animal images are often visually overlapping with one another or gradually transition into a different animal, here the artisan has still preserved the overall shape of the horse but has also severely exaggerated the proportions and length of various parts of the body. As a result, the bodies of the animals in this plaque, as is the case with the "three deer" pattern, appear emaciated; they do not project a fearsome aura. The complex intertwining of geometric and rigid shapes and lines demonstrates a repudiation of the concept of the fearsome through the depiction of a violent, awesome predator. Also bygone is the desire to create an animal hierarchy, a concept which, as we showed in the previous chapters, had been extremely prevalent in the arts of Eurasian peoples until the dawn of the first millennium CE. The bulky, highly textured bodies with accentuated musculature are more or less absent from the arts of the Xianbei.

Figure 4.15 Gold of Yituo, 300 CE, Xiaobazitan, Inner Mongolia

The pendants from Xianbei tombs in northern China immediately recall similar decorations found in the much later Kitan Liao (907-1125)[345] burial sites from Inner Mongolia. A period of approximately five centuries separate the findings from Xianbei tombs and those from burials of the Liao dynasty. The royal tomb of the Princess of the Chen state and her husband, located in modern-day southeastern Inner Mongolia, yielded numerous golden objects, including golden masks placed on the faces of the deceased.[346] The bodies of the tomb occupants were covered in mesh silver-wire suits. The attire of the deceased couple contained a whole ensemble of luxuriant accessories such as a lavish headdress, earrings, belt buckles and silver-gilded boots. As Nancy Steinhardt has convincingly demonstrated, the layout of this joint tomb, as was the case with other elite Kitan tombs as well as their walled cities and palaces, for the most part adhered to Chinese building concepts although there are also clear signs of the adoption of Northeastern and Central Asian decorative concepts in the wall decorations.[347] Among the rich burials inventory was an elegant box with eight arc-shaped sides made of gold and shaped like a flower (See Figure 4.16).[348] The object hangs on a chain as a pendant. Images of two ducks with overlapping bodies are placed amidst stylized mountain-shaped forms. The ducks are encircled into an

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[345] Liao is the Chinese name of an empire which ruled over the northeastern Chinese periphery from the 10th to the beginning of the 12th century. They ruled over sixteen prefectures in Northern China and retained their control over Inner Mongolia and eastern and central Mongolia throughout their rule.

[346] Steinhardt, Nancy. (1998). "Liao Archaeology: Tombs and Ideology along the Northern Frontier of China". *Asian Perspectives, 37*(2), 224-244.

[347] Ibid; See also: Steinhardt, Nancy Shatzman. 1997. *Liao Architecture.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press

[348] Zhongguo lishi bowuguan, and Inner Mongolia (China). 2002. *Qidan wang chao: Nei Menggu Liao dai wenwu jinghua.* 契丹王朝 : 内蒙古辽代文物精华 / 中国历史博物馆, 内蒙古自治区文化厅编辑. Beijing Shi: Zhongguo Zang xue chu ban she.
p. 128

octagonal floral medallion shape. The headdress unearthed from tomb no.3 at the same burial complex contains two carved jade images of dragons holding hanging pendants of golden leafs, thus recalling Xianbei headdresses. It is worth noting that according to the accounts of the Kitan people from the *Beishi* 北史 and the *Suishu* 隋書, they most likely arose out of the Yuwen 宇文 southern branch of the Xianbei people. We thus observe the continuation and reinterpretation of distinct Xianbei art motifs into the arts of their successors along the Chinese northern frontier. The Kitan Liao portable decorations indicate a move away from the visual emphasis on animal interaction towards a more static depiction of animals and their incorporation into a stylized landscape.

Figure 4.16 Gold Box with Eight Arc Shaped Sides Decorated with Ducks, Qinglongshan, Naiman Banner, Inner Mongolia, Joint tomb of Princess of Chen and Husband, Liao Dynasty

Another object unique to Xianbei burials in Chaoyang, Liaoning province (the starting point of the Murong Xianbei's expansion) is a type of saddle plate with no well-known parallels. (See Figure 4.17) The openwork pattern on these decorative plates, composed of hexagons with fantastic beasts and birds surrounded by foliage, does not seem to have been derived from the Eurasian steppes and China. The closest known such approach to decoration is the pattern on the Kargaly diadem unearthed from Kazakhstan (see Chapter 1) which also includes human images and inlay of precious stones. Here, the decorative patterns are more complex and the transitions between the images even more subtle and meticulously rendered. It is worth noting here that such saddles made in openwork with subtle images of beasts and natural landscape elements demonstrate connections with states further east. Multiple saddle fittings in openwork dated to the Kofun period (300-538) and Asuka period (538-710) in Japan-are very similar in design and iconography to the saddle excavated at Liaoning province.[349] A closer look at the Japanese piece reveals a similar incorporation of hexagons which contain images of coiled animals with intertwined bodies. The piece comes from the relatively undisturbed elite tomb at Fujinoki (藤ノ木), in Ikaruga, Nara prefecture. The tumulus, known as *kofun* (古墳)[350], dates to the sixth century CE and was likely the tomb of Prince Anahobe and Yanake.[351] The stone sarcophagus was filled with gilt-bronze plaques and horse regalia

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[349] The possible connections between the Xianbei, Silla Korea, and Bactria as seen through striking visual similarities in patterns on plaques, headdresses, and saddles still remain a large unanswered question. The hanging leaves from Xianbei metalwork also recall Bactrian goldwork which has been known to us from excavations of the Greco-Bactrian site of Tilliya-tepe in modern-day Afghanistan.
[350] Such tombs appear as early as the third century CE in the Kinai region of Japan. The mounds are traditionally surrounded by a body of water and have a keyhole shape. They inventory often contains unglazed *haniwa* figurines which likey served a protective function.
[351] Kidder, J. Edward, Jr. "The Fujinoki Tomb and Its Grave Goods." Monumenta Nipponica Spring 42.1 (1987): 57-87

reminiscent of Northern Wei luxury goods.[352] (See Figure 4.18) The inventory of the tomb consists of myriad other portable luxury goods which have rarely been found in Japanese burial site prior to the 6th century. There is no evidence that these trappings were in any way reflective of Japanese tomb design aesthetics and thus, linked to their perceptions of the afterlife. A square diadem made in openwork of curvilinear designs resembling deer antlers had been found in the Daisen kofun in Osaka, which was arguably constructed as the the mausoleum of Emperor Nintoku in the 5th century. The design of that square head ornament is also strongly reminiscent of fourth-century square plaques excavated from Xianbei graves in Inner Mongolia. We know from references in the *Weishu* that in the first Japanese tribute missions to China occurred somewhere in the first century CE. *Hou Hanshu* recalls an anecdote regarding Tanshihuai: as there was shortage of agricultural products, and thus, the ruler captured a thousand families of the "Wa" people (residing in Japan) who lived eastward and forced them to catch fish for the local population.[353]

Figure 4.17 Saddle Plate, Sixteen Kingdoms, Former Yan (337-370), Excavated at Chaoyang, Liaoning province

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[352] Katsube, Mitsuo, and Tsutomu Suzuki. 1989. *Kodai No Waza: Fujinoki Kofun No Bagu Wa Kataru.* 藤ノ木 古墳 の 馬具 は 語る. Tōkyō: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan
[353] *Hou Hanshu* 90: 2994

Figure 4.18 Gilt bronze Saddle fitting, Fujinoki tumulus, 6th –early 7th century, late Kofun or early Asuka period, Japan

Figure 4.19 Detail of decorative hexagon

The networks of Buddhism in the Northern Wei which developed a visual culture permeated with Buddhist imagery would have further enhanced the potential for exchange between China, Korea and Japan. Thus, it is highly likely that the portable gold trappings and regalia with zoomorphic imagery consistent with Xianbei traditions in Japanese tombs could have been diplomatic gifts obtained by Japanese elite on missions to Northern China. As such, the idea that any trace of animal style in the Eastern steppes simply disappeared after the fall of the Xiongnu appears less and less plausible as we come across material evidence of the proliferation of a new approach to small-scale decoration made of zoomorphic imagery outside the boundaries of Northern China and the Central Plains.

Overall, by the Northern Wei period, the slightly abstracted designs of Xiongnu metalwork had reached a full level of abstraction through the treatment of the animal and landscape motifs as conceptual geometric shapes rather than realistic representations. The most important trend observed in Xianbei art production is the "geometricization" of animal style, which had already begun in the late Xiongnu period. The golden plaques with wild animals found in Xianbei burials across Northeastern China usually feature three identical animals along a horizontal axis, a departure from the vertical axial order of the steppes. In this case, the three deer antlers are exaggerated and distorted as they intertwine with the abstract landscape around them. The newcomers in the Mongolian plateau added their own interpretive elements to animal style metalwork to show their idiosyncratic conceptions of the natural world around them. A stark departure from animal art of the previous centuries is the increased emphasis on both flora and fauna, specifically stylized vegetation which often emanates from the bodies of animals. This is not a Xianbei precedent and does have antecedents in metalwork excavated from the Kazakh steppes (the Kargaly diadem) as well as numerous Sarmatian finds from the Caucasus and Pontic steppes (Novocherkassk diadem, Merdzhany and many examples from Peter the Great's collection). In Chapter Three, we encountered the repeated appearance of a tree with stylized brunches resembling deer antlers, often connected to the image of a female goddess. However, such finds were scarce and fragmented and they could not have defined aesthetic tendencies of craftsmen of any particular region. In the case of the Xianbei, both the Murong and Tuoba visual cultures, while showing subtle differences in decorative approach and style, demonstrate a desire to create an organic visual narrative which merges abstracted animals and vegetation into an organic whole. The *Weishu* connects the

auspicious beliefs of the Xianbei to various animals and natural phenomena; since the Xianbei did not have their own calendar and their lifestyles were heavily reliant on nature, it is likely that their art production reflects their conception of flora and fauna.

The Mysticism of Permian Animal Style (6ᵗʰ -12ᵗʰ c CE): The Totemism Narrative

The visual culture of the peoples who inhabited the Ural Mountains starting from the first millennium BCE has received very little scholarly attention and almost no coverage in art historical publications outside of Russia. However, a distinct approach to animal style decoration of portable luxury objects did develop in the various cultures which flourished on the Kama and Volga Rivers of the Ural region of present-day Perm region. The style of toreutics developed here marks a departure from the animal style of the Altai mountains, Pontic steppes and the Eastern steppes. Several ethnic groups of Finno-Ugric origin such as Zyrian Komis, Permian Komis, Ob-Ugrians and Udmurts resided west of the Urals from the third century BCE to the thirteenth century CE and their settlements were mostly concentrated on the Komi and Volga Rivers. These bronze casts fascinated travelers at the end of the seventeenth century: the travelogues of the Dutchman Nikolaus Witsen, mentioned in previous chapters with regard to his affiliation with Peter the Great, included multiple references to the numerous bronze casts from the region of the Ural mountains. [354] Later, in the nineteenth century, the Finnish archaeologist J. Aspelin published several pictures of bronze objects from Perm in his album series entitled "Antiquités Nord Finno-Ougrien" (1877–1884)". The zealous research into the various origins, content and iconographic significance of Permian style took off after the Russian

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[354] Autio, Eero. "The Permian Animal Style". *Folklore* 18 (2001), p. 167; For the original publication see Aspelin, J. R. 1877. *Antiquités Du Nord Finno-Ougrien.* Helsingfors: G.W. Edlund

revolution with the publications of A.V. Shmidt whose work analyzed the possible meaning of different bird motifs in the art of the ancient Permian settlements.[355] It should be noted that almost all the metalwork excavated from the tombs of the Permian type are either bronze casts or copper alloy objects. Although questions of social hierarchy still remain unanswered, many of the findings come from graves of commoners as evidenced by the simple pit structure and lack of more advanced manufacturing tools and luxury metalwork and textiles.

The images on the bronze objects can be divided into several types. The most common is the depiction of anthropomorphic images of male and female personages which likely personify local deities. The visual idiom includes a schematically-rendered image with a geometric face and disproportionately short and slim body. There is little to no emphasis on the individual facial features and facial expression of the personage. The figure rarely stands alone: in some cases, it is enclosed into a frame made of zoomorphic images of hybrids or animal junctures, reminiscent of the animal art of the Eurasian steppes, and sometimes, zoomorphic shapes such as bird heads or beaks protrude out of its head and body, forming a larger hybrid. For instance, a plaque excavated from a tomb near the village of Limezh in the Perm krai of the Ural Mountains in South Russia depicts an elongated human face surrounded by three crowded images of multiple elks, two of each appearing to be facing each other. The outer rim of thick circular-shaped plaque is embellished with the braided rope design which can be traced to the Ordos region and Altai cultures of the early Iron Age. (See Figure 4.20).

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[355] Shmidt, A. V. 1927. K Voprosu o Proiskhozhdenii Permskogo Zverinogo Stilia. (On the Question of Permian animal style). Sbornik Muzea Antropologii i Etnografii. Leningrad

Figure 4.20 A human head surrounded by elks with stylized circular antlers, Limezh village, Perm Krai, 8th -9th c. CE

There are numerous examples of female goddesses riding hybrids. In some cases, animal heads or junctures protrude out of the female figurine's head. (See Fugure 4.22) Occasionally, the female goddess is enclosed within the body of a large predatory bird (See Figure 4.21). In yet other cases, the personage stands on a horse or two reflective images of horses and in others, she is raised on a platform made of deer heads with raptor beaks. In several plaques, the deity is flanked by two male anthropomorphic figures whose heads terminate into raptors with curved beaks recalling the bird images from the early Iron Age tomb complex in Arzhan in Tuva. Two main features stand out in the designs of these plaques: the anthropomorphic figure is always placed in the center and the visual tokens of hybridity are added to form a circular enclosure around the personage. One observes the relative lack of diversity in the depiction of animals; most of the animals represented in Permian metalwork are either horses, elks or birds with exaggerated beaks.

Figure 4.21 Female figures with raptor's heads on the sides, Cherdyn region, Perm, 6th - 7th c.

One of the female personages here deserves special attention. The female goddess rides on a hybrid half-horse, half-elk beast. There are five elk heads depicted behind the rider and two in front of her. (See Figure 4.23)

Figure 4.22 Bronze cast with an anthropomorphic image and multiple bird heads, Peshkovsky treasure, Usolsky district, Perm Krai, Lomotavskaya culture, 6th -8th c.

Figure 4.23 Goddess riding a horse-elk hybrid, 5th -6th c, Village of Melnichug, Upper Kama region, now in Perm Regional Museum

Seven animal heads substitute the lower part of the braided rope design. A bird in profile opening its wings is depicted as if emanating from the lower body of the horse-elk hybrid. Finally, a yet different animal climbs onto the tail of the fantastic beast. The visual formula brings immediate associations with the numerous female personages depicted on the textiles discussed in Chapter Three. It appears that the Permian visual tradition has taken

the concept of hybridity to a new stage: here, human- animal hybrids undergo further metamorphosis as they are merged with or transformed into other animal junctures.

A second type of Permian bronze plaque depicts interactions between animals, which in terms of content, recall Siberian plaques of the Iron Age. However, the visual vocabulary of the Permian peoples differs significantly from that of their Siberian neighbors: most of the plaques lack borders and have a sculptural, three-dimensional quality as compared with the relative flatness of the traditional rectangular animal style plaques. In one examples excavated from the Upper Kama river valley, a dog-lizard hybrid stands on top of another hybrid which resembles a half-fish, half-lizard. (See Figure 4.24) A similar plaque depicts (in the following order as shown from top to bottom): a realistically depicted eagle with its claws on top of a bear which in turn holds small prey and is pecking on it. (See Figure 4.25) Pairs of animals are never shown facing one another on a horizontal axis as was the case with virtually all of the plaques excavated from other parts of Central Eurasia, from Ordos to Thrace. The placement of a bird on top of another animal which in turn holds a third prey is reminiscent of the notion of animal hierarchy reflected in the iconography of the Aluchaideng headdress from Iron Age Ordos. In the Perm case, the animal depicted on top is always the largest, the most detailed and most realistically depicted as stylizations are placed on certain parts of its body to accentuate scales or fur. By comparison, the prey at the bottom of the image is usually hardly recognizable. There are numerous variations of this visual formula from the tombs in the Perm region, thus indicating that this decorative and conceptual approach was an integral part of the visual vocabulary of the people who inhabited the area.

Figure 4.24 Two hybrids, Perm Krai, 7th -9th c.

Figure 4.25 Animal scene, Village of Ples, Upper Kama river region, 7th -9th c

Several competing interpretations regarding the Perm animal style have been put forward by Russian scholars. One possibility includes the concept of "totemism" which was briefly discussed at the end of the second chapter. Researchers have suggested that these casts were made to contain the souls of the tomb occupants, and as such, they were the final resting places of the spirit. Shamanism seems to be included as an explanation for

the common depiction of human heads.[356] There is no extant evidence which suggests that the Udmurt or Komi people of the Ural mountains had shamanistic practices which involved the usage of animal heads. The majority of these plaques were sewn onto garments as suggested by the holes on the surface. There is no doubt, however, that like the female image depicted on the Pazyryk carpet or the Hellenistic goddesses on plaques which belonged to the Pontic Scythians, here, the female image and its relationship with fantastic zoomorphic images is of central importance to reconstructing the role of these objects in the original burial practices. The centrality of the female image recalls a large depiction of a female goddess carved onto the wall of the Ignatievskaya cave (also known by the name Yamazy-tash) located on the shores of the Sim river in the southern part of the Ural Mountains. (See Figure 4.26) A recently discovered rock drawing from the same cave depicts a female personage with red dots painted between her legs, likely to represent the concept of menstrual cycle. The woman is surrounded by individual animals. Numerous images of deer and elks also appear in the Kapova cave which is located only 120 km away from the Ignatievskaya cave, near Ufa in the Southern Urals. Despite the large geographic distance from the Alai mountains, the imagery represented in the Permian animal style plaques indicate a return to the familiar Iron Age concept of animal syncretism. Here, the local people offer a slightly different take on this decorative approach as they also incorporate female images in most of the metalwork thus making even more complicated visual narratives of hybridity. If we go back to the Pazyryk visual idiom of a "frame narrative" from the depictions of various layers of hybridity into three-dimensional objects

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[356] Gribova, L. S. 1972. *Slozhnyi Obraz Permskogo Zverinogo Stiliya*. Etnografia i folklor komi. Syktyvkar; See also: Gribova, L. S. 1975. Permski Zverinyi Stil: Problemy Semantiki. Moskva.

such as antlered horse masks, we would discover that in terms of its underlying premise, the conceotual approach to decoration of the Permian animal style is similar. Animal (and human-animal) hierarchy coupled with the concept of metamorphosis and transition between realms is indubitably present in the art of the people who inhabited the southern Urals from the early millennium CE to the 13th century CE.

Figure 4.26 Human figure, Ignatievska Cave, South Ural Mountains

Turkic peoples of the Altai: Vestiges of Animal style

The material culture of the Türks (Chinese: *tujue* 突厥) and (later) Uighurs who established their political hegemony along the Chinese Northern frontier from 6th- 8th c differs substantially from preceding cultures in the region and marks a departure from the funerary and decorative traditions with regard to animals from the peoples active across the Altai all the way to Mongolia and Northern China. The Türks who emerged as an important political and military power in Central Eurasia in the sixth century, established the first literate empire on the Mongolian Plateau.[357] Their language was a dialect of Old

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[357] Atwood 2004, p. 553

Turkish belonging to the Oghuz family.[358] At the beginning, they frequently made use of Sogdian as evidenced by a number of Sogdian inscriptions, such as the Bugat inscription of 589 from North Khangai. Sogdian as well as Turkish were commonly used in court correspondances. We have extensive information about the personal appearance of the Türks from texts as well as petroglyphs uncovered in Mongolia. (See Figure 4.27) However, no substantial settlements have been discovered to date.
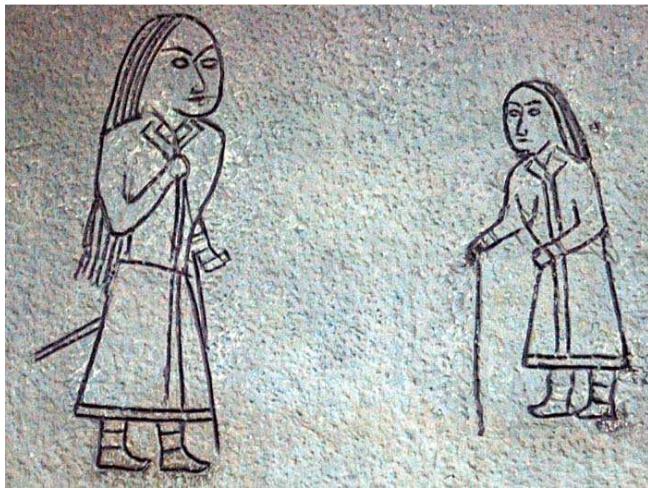
Figure 4.27 Rock Drawing depicting Türks, 6th-8th c., Aldarkhanu Sum, Zavkhan Aimag (Courtesy of the National Museum of Mongolian History)

The burials of the Türks were marked by a distinctive type of monument known as stone man (Russian: *baba*; Mongolian: *khün chuluu*). Some burials were surrounded by several such stone figures. These monuments were likely meant to embody the deceased, a representative f the warrior elite, and their family members. The art of the Türks is significantly less varied and detailed in terms of emphasis on decoration in comparison with the art of the early Central Eurasian nomads. Overall, if animals were to be present in Türkic burials at all, there was certainly a shift toward building stone sculptures of large, life-sized animals such as lions, goats or rams which would occasionally appear next to the

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[358] Ibid

burial complex. Several silver deer, currently on display at the National Museum of Mongolian History in Ulaanbaatar, were excavated from the tomb of Bilge Qaghan (683-734), a ruler of the Second Türkic Qaghanate (682-744). (See Figure) The accomplishments of the qaghan, particularly the military acumen behind his far-flung campaigns, are described in inscriptions rendered on stone steles in the Orkhon River valley. The golden crown from Bilge Qaghan's tomb has an image of five brunching petals. (See Figure 4.28) On the front petal, the image of a bird was fixed with two nails. A mythical bird also appears in the portrait stone of Bilge Qaghan's brother, Kül Tegin, which has been discovered at a nearby ceremonial complex.[359]

Figure 4.28 Crown of Bilge Qaghan, Gold and ruby, 730 CE, Arkhangai Aimag, Orkhon River Valley (Picture Courtesy of the National Museum of Mongolian History)

The presence of the bird as part of royal headpiece has its precedents in the Aluchaideng in Inner Mongolia and other pieces from the northern steppes prior to the arrival of the

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[359] "Bilge Khagan's Treasures" in International Conference on Archaeological Research in Mongolia, and Jan Bemmann. 2009. *Current archaeological research in Mongolia: papers from the First International conference on "Archaeological Research in Mongolia" held in Ulaanbaatar, August 19th-23rd, 2007.* Bonn: Vor- und Frühgeschichtliche Archäologie, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität., p. 342

Xiongnu (all discussed in the first section of this discussion). While making adamant claims about continuity and inherited tradition in the usage of specific animals in the regalia used to commemorate power and evince political clout in this region throughout the period of almost a thousand years would be far-fetched and unsubstantiated, it is clear that the peoples migrating across the Chinese northern border, particularly Mongolia and Inner Mongolia, have been relying on dynamic animal imagery in the construction of a visual system which is mean tto convey and enhance their status.

The Bilge Qaghan treasure also contained a significant number of silver objects, including Sogdina-style ewers, cups and bowls, door decorations, and two silver deer figurines.[360] (See Figure 4.29) The reappearance of the deer in this context brings back associations with the deer images on megalyths and metalwork uncovered in tombs of nomads in the first millennium BCE. However, the context here may be more complicated. There are references about the role of deer in worship practices among the Türks in the Chinese source *Youyang Zazu*, which was compiled in 860 CE by Duan Chengshi in the Tang dynasty.[361] There are multiple mentions of a white deer with golden antlers in a passage of the document which describes anecdotes related to the Sea-Gold by the *tujue*. According to the legend, the white deer is an integral element in the *shenmo*'s (leader) ability to communicate with the Sea-God. Thus, the inclusion of a silver deer in the burial

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[360] Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, and Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde München. 2005. *Dschingis Khan und seine Erben: das Weltreich der Mongolen*. München: Hirmer., p. 76-77

[361] Osawa, Takashi. "The Relationship between Old Turkic Kingship and Deer Image" in *Current archaeological research in Mongolia: papers from the First International conference on "Archaeological Research in Mongolia" held in Ulaanbaatar, August 19th-23rd, 2007*. Bonn: Vor- und Frühgeschichtliche Archäologie, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität., p. 401

of a qaghan is in line with the spiritual beliefs of the Türks inhabiting this region in the 8th century, at least according to Chinese records. The exceptionally life-like rendering silver deer figures, however, marks a departure from the zoomorphic junctures and highly abstract animal images of earlier traditions.

Figure 4.29 Silver deer from the Tomb of Bilge Qaghan, 734 CE, Khöshöö Tsaidam, Arkhangai Aimag, Mongolia

None of the said images place any particular emphasis on the role of animal interaction and none of the tombs or religious sites associated with the Turkic elites feature scenes involving zoomorphic junctures as we know them from previous centuries. That being said, animal art elements had certainly not disappeared overnight as seen through archaeological remains from the burials of Turks in the Altai.[362] For instance, the Kudyrge tomb complex in the Altai features close parallels to the traditional animal style associated with Saka and Xiongnu aesthetics.[363]

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[362] Gavrilova, A. A. 1965. *Mogil'nik Kudyrgë kak istochnik po istorii altaĭskikh plemen*. Leningrad: Nauka [Leningradskoe otd-nie].
[363] Kubarev, G. V., and E. I Derevianko. 2005. *Kul'tura Drevnikh Tiurok Altaia: Po Materialam Pogrebal'nykh Pamiatnikov*. Novosibirsk: In-t arkheologii i ėtnografii SO RAN

A facing for saddle arch made out of horn features a dynamic hunting scene which reiterates some familiar elements of the Saka animal style: a wounded coiled deer is depicted with a twisted croup and its head turned backward running away from the rider who is shooting several animals.[364] Two tigers are placed opposite each other on either side of the saddle. (See Figure 4.30) The Kudyrge inventory also contains saddle-bows embellished with animal style scenes showing signs of connections with the decorative traditions of the older period. (See Figure 4.31)
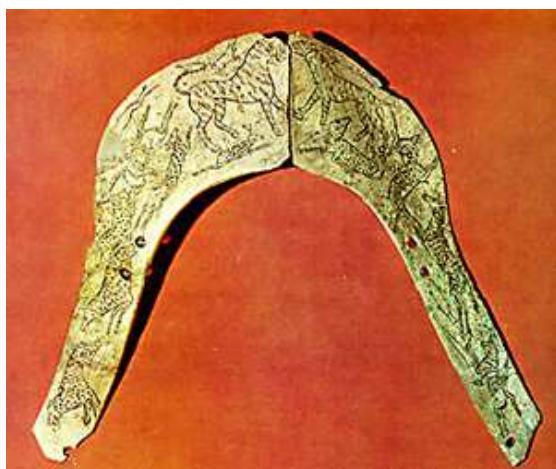
Figure 4.30 Saddle from the Kudyrge tomb no.9,
Russian Altai, 6th -7th c. CE
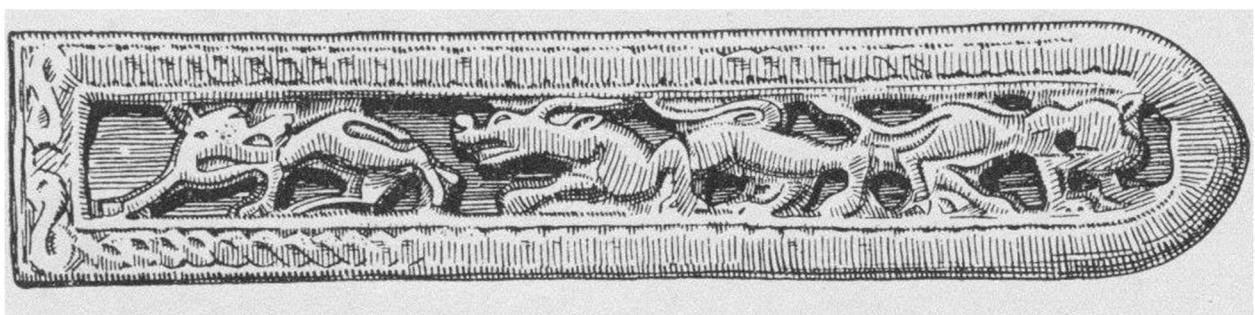
Figure 4.31 Part of a belt, Kudyrge tomb No. 10

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[364] Basilov, V. N. 1989. *Nomads of Eurasia.* Seattle: Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County in association with University of Washington Press

Overall, however, the Türkic period in Central Asia was marked by the relative lack of images consistent with the zoomorphic interactions and junctures seen on portable objects from earlier periods. Deer stone monuments from Northern Mongolia and the Transbaikal, the Upper Altai and Sayan-Altai region are the main feature of the artistic traditions of the peoples who came to inhabit the regions along the Chinese northern periphery and further west. Deer stones, which we studied more extensively in Chapter Three, can serve as sufficient evidence of the new directions in which the Türks took their approach to animal iconography. While they date back to the Bronze Age, the concept of erecting a handmade stone sculpture was continued throughout the Türkic period. One could thus be tempted to assume that after the arrival of the turks on the sociopolitical scene of Central Asia, animal style gradually disappeared exactly due to a change of aesthetics which favors anthropomorphic images in terms of content and standing stelae in terms of media. This assumption should be studied further in the context of the turbulent changes brought about by the incursions of the Mongols.

Treasures of the Great Khans: Vestiges of Animal Art in the Golden Horde (1240s-1502)

The Mongols redrew the map of the world with their conquests of various ethnic groups which inhabited Eurasia: Han Chinese, Jurchens, Uighurs, Kimeks, Qipchaqs, Khorazmians, Cumans, Tatars, Volga Bulgars, Alans (proto-Ossetians), East Slavs are among the peoples conquered and assimilated into the fabrics of the newly formed Mongol state through the various far-flung military campaigns of the khans. The subjugation and consolidation of incredibly expansive territories stretching from the Mongolian steppe to Crimea resulted in the largest land empire in human history. (See

Figure 4.32) There was no attempt to create a homogenous cultural sphere and institutionalize a single state religion; in fact, Chigghis Khan and his successors adopted policies which promulgated general religious tolerance. But for a few exceptions such as the persecutions of specific sects of Islam and Buddhism, the Mongol rulers demonstrated an attitude of cultural pluralism.[365] In 1265, four semi-independent political entities were officialy declared within the boundaries of the Mongol Empire: The Golden Horde in the northwest, the Ill-Khanate in the Middle East, the Chaghatai Khanate in Central Asia and the Yuan dynasty based in Northern Mongolia and China. Of particular significance to our study is the state of the Golden Horde, due to its key geographic location at the crossroads of Eurasia and the mixture of nomadic and sedentary peoples in the local population.
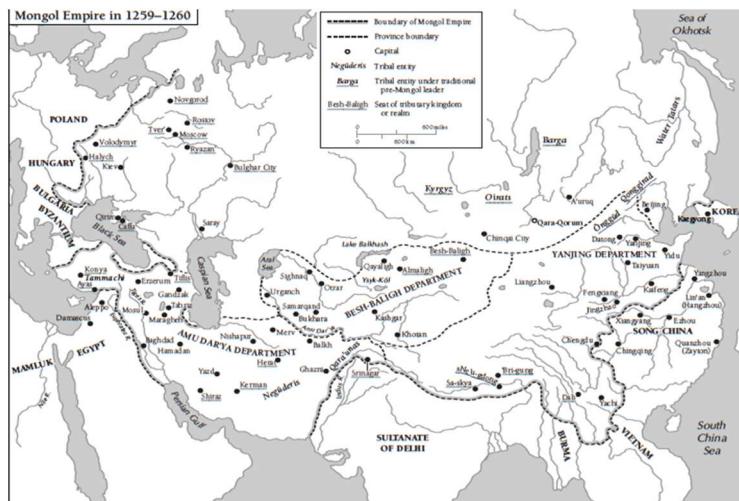
Figure 4.32 Map of the Mongol Empire at the peak of its expansion (1259-1260)

The state of the Golden Horde incorporated the Kazakh and Pontic-Caspian steppes in its core. The Golden Horde at its peak encompassed a vast area stretching from the Irtysh

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[365] Atwood 2004, p. 368

river in the east to the Danube river in the west.[366] Around the Golden Horde's steppe core, there were several sedentary societies. To the southeast was Khorazm and its capital, Urganch, a Turkic-speaking Muslim center based on irrigation agriculture with a long tradition of trade between the populations of the Volga region and Central Asia.[367] To the southeast, the Crimean port cities were active in the export of grain and fish and the import of luxury items. Volga Bulgaria (Itil Bulğar) a state centered at the Kama-Volga river region with distinctively Islamic culture, was also an important entity in the trade between Khorasm and the Baltic states.[368] They were mostly engaged in fur trade. The Volga Bulgars were ultimately subjugated by the Golden Horde 1236. divided into several principalties, each of which became a vassal to the Mongols. During the early years, the Godlen Horde khans allowed the ruler of the Bulgars to have a relative autonomy in exchange for a hefty fur tax.[369]

At its peak in the 13th century, after its founder Batu's brilliant military expansions, the Golden Horde territory stretched all the way from the Carpathian Mountains in Eastern Europe to the steppes of Siberia. The first capital founded by Batu was Sarai Batu on the lower reaches of the Volga river, but it was later moved to Sarai Berke further north. In the 14th century, Özbeg Khan (1312-1341), perhaps the strongest ruler in the history of the Jochi Ulus, converted to Islam and this triggered the gradual islamization of Golden Horde culture and the turkicization of the language. (See Figure 4.33) However, the khans

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[366] Kramarovskiĭ, M. G. 2000. *Sokrovishcha Zolotoĭ Ordy* (The treasures of the Golden Horde*).* Sankt-Peterburg: Slaviia., Preface
[367] Atwood 2004, p. 206
[368] Ibid
[369] Th. T. Allsen, "Prelude to the Western Campaigns: Mongol Military Operations in the Volga-Ural Region, 1217–1237," *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 3 (1983): 5–24. Buqa (Bögä, Boka) (d. 1289)

continued to demonstrate unprecedented tolerance of other religions, and welcome Christian missionaries from the State of Muscovy, for instance.[370] In the fifteenth century, the hoard disintegrated into three separate short-lived khanates, Crimea, Astrakhan and Kazan.

The modern-day city of Kazan is of uttermost importance for the study of the Golden Horde historical and archaeological materials, since it has the largest Institute in Russia entirely dedicated to the study of the Jochi Ulus. Since 2013, the Institute has also released its Golden Horde Review Journal, sponsored by the Tatarstan Academy of Sciences.[371] Another major development in the field of Golden Horde studies was marked by the recent completion of a large-scale translation project: all of the Arabic and Persian sources regarding the Golden Horde from 13-16th century were translated into Russian and compiled into several volumes.

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[370] Ibid

[371] Institut istorii imeni Sh. Mardzhani, and TSentr issledovaniĭ istorii Zolotoĭ Ordy im. M.A. Usmanova. 2013. *Zolotoordynskoe obozrenie (Golden Horde Review)* . DOI: http://goldhorde.ru/en/2018-t6-n1/
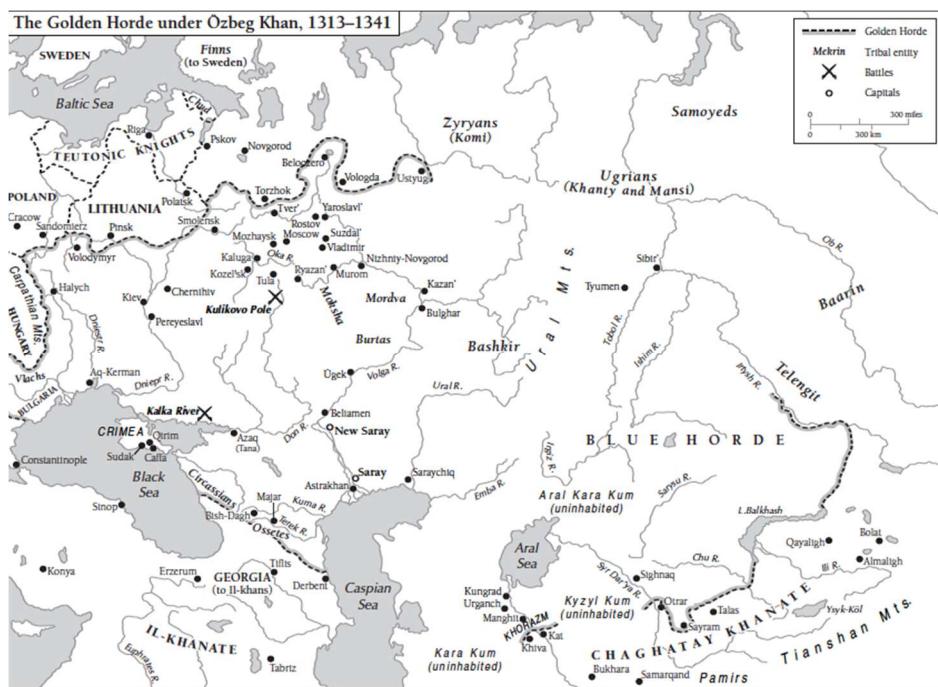
Figure 4.33 Map of the Golden Horde under Özbeg Khan

The metalwork characteristic of the Golden Horde polity can elucidate further the developments in metalwork in the region of the Eurasian steppes. Sites which have been partially or completely excavated and yielded significant finds are: Seitrennoe Village (Astrakhan), Simferopol hoard, Tsarevskoye, Voronezh, Berezhovka, Belorechensk cemetery, Gushun Usta (Northern Caucuses), Saratov (also known as Uvek), Auliyekol. The factors which resulted in the establishment of well-functioning, booming urban centers in territories formally inhabited by nomads, are beyond the scope of this study; it is perhaps sufficient to note that the Golden Horde economic model revolved around trade, which necessitated the rapid growth and maintanance of fixed urban centers.[372]

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[372] For an in-depth discussion of the rise of urban culture in the Golden Horde, one should consult the following recent study: Schamiloglu, Uli. 2018. "The Rise of Urban Centers in the Golden Horde and the City of Ukek". Golden Horde Review. 2018, Vol. 6 no. 1, p. 18-40

Despite the recent developments in the study of the Golden Horde, there are significant lacunas, blind spots and misinterpretations in the field which scholars have yet to confront and resolve. The flux of various cultures all over Eurasia and the expansive military campaigns which constantly annexed various regions all too often prevents us from coming up with a coherent definition of what the Golden Horde polity was at different times in its history. Most of the Golden Horde material is now in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, and some remains in The National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan in Kazan, but the provenance and acquisition history of some of the metalwork attributed to the Golden Horde elite are unclear. In addition, the close proximity of other states subject to the Mongols Empire such as the Chinese Yuan dynasty, Chagatai Khanate[373], and the Il'Khanate (comprising parts of present-day Iran, Azerbaijan and Turkey) makes attributions of metalwork to Golden Horde even more challenging. In many cases, it is virtually impossible to determine whether the craftsmen who created the golden and silver objects associated within the Golden Horde entity actually came from the Golden Horde or one of its neighboring states. There exists the possibility that the metalwork was acquired through trade with other parts of the Mongol empire or its sedentary neighbors, and thus, comparative analysis of regional styles is not always a reliable tool in considering such a vast geographical domain.

Another recurring conceptual problem stems from the fact that the Golden Horde was a polity which combined sedentary and nomadic populations. Nomadism remained common in the Horde up to its collapse in the 15th century, and clan affiliations lasted far

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[373] For a detailed overview of the sociopolitical structure and culture of the Chaghatai Khanate , see Kim Ho-dong, "The Early History of the Moghul Nomads: The Legacy of the Chaghatai Khanate," in The Mongol Empire and Its Legacy, ed. Reuven Amitai-Preiss and David O. Morgan (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), 290–318

longer. In Khorazm, for example, the Qonggirad and Manghit clans preserved their identities into the 20th century. To the extent that sedentarization occurred, it was more urban than rural. The discovery of portable dwellings in the courtyards of houses in New Sarai shows the continuing attachment to nomadism among the Horde's urban elite.[374] That being said, while nomadic lifestyle was the norm in Golden Horde society throughout the thirteenth century, at the end of the fourteenth century, much of the ruling elite was already living a sedentary lifestyle in the flourishing urban centers such as Sarai and Ukek.

Keeping these challenges in mind, I shall draw a brief outline of some of the major findings at Golden Horde sites and how these discoveries of metalwork may have drawn upon or reinvented some of the nomadic and Chinese traditions discussed in previous sections. In order to keep a clear record of (relative) chronological developments and stylistic changes in the arts of the Golden Horde over time, we shall consider three distinct periods of art production.

The Juchids' Treasures: Metalwork in the Early Years of the Golden Horde

What Russian historians characterize as the early period of the Golden Horde's history marks the official separation of Juchi Ulus from the number of territories ruled by Genghis Khan under his Great Mongol State (1211-1264). In this early period, one observes no rigid distinction of regional styles as the first dynasty which founded Juchi Ulus brought with them treasures likely produced in other parts of the Mongol Empire. The provenance of these works is sometimes unclear and in Russian catalogs, they are still

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[374] Atwood, Encyclopedia, p. 207; Fedorov-Davydov, G. A. 1984. *The Culture of the Golden Horde Cities*. Oxford, England: B.A.R

vaguely attributed to "the Golden Horde or The Great Mongol State". [375] The treasures dated to the early years of state formation in the Golen Horde, that is, the rule of Batu (1227-1255) and Berke (1257-1266) are comprised of gold belt fittings, drinking vessels, goblets attached to the belt, horse harnesses and *paiza* (metal tablets presented as documents of authority or exemption). The majority of these portable luxury objects served as symbols of legitimacy among the nomadic chiefs; some of them might have been gift exchanges between equals or gifts bestowed upon a deserving nomadic warrior by his senior leader. The brief account of the Mongolian-Tatars in the text *Mengda beilu* 蒙韃備錄 by Zhao Gong 趙珙 gives several insights into the decoration of horse regalia and weaponry owned by the Mongolian aristocracy. The author travelled to Mongolia in 1221 accompanying a Southern Song emissary and after his return, provided a testimony of the Mongol's campaign against the Jurchen Jin. [376] Zhao tells us that the saddles and harness straps of the horses ridden by the leaders were embellished with a pair of golden animals, usually dragons.

A belt bowl with dragon head handles. was excavated from a site in the Northern Caucasus in modern-day Stavropol, Russia. (See Figure 4.34).

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[375] Kramarovskiĭ, M. G. 2000. *Sokrovishcha Zolotoĭ Ordy (*The Treasures of the Golden Horde). Sankt-Peterburg: Slaviia.

[376] Zhao, George Qingzhi. 2008. *Marriage as Political Strategy and Cultural Expression: Mongolian Royal Marriages from World Empire to Yuan dynasty*. New York: Peter Lang Pub., p. 154; For a commentary, see Wang Guowei 王國維's edition *Mengda beilu jianzheng* 蒙韃備錄 箋證.

Figure 4.34 Belt Bowl with Dragon Head Handles. 13th c.

The dragons are highly abstracted. The body of the handle is noticeably textured. This bowl marks a complete departure from animal depictions as we know them from animal-style metalwork.

Other animals such as hare and wild sheep are depicted in the goldwork from this period as mirror images, thus continuing the traditions started by the "hu" people in Waring States Ordos. Saddle covers with detailed images of wild sheep and rabbits facing each other, surrounded by vegetal and other figural patterns, are very common in the visual traditions of the Golden Horde and the Yuan dynasty. At first, the images do not recall the crouching, intertwined bodies of wild and domesticated animals as we remember them from the portable metalwork and textiles of the early Iron Age. The treatment of the animals is undeniably different: they are life-like and show that on some level, the artisan aimed to create a realistic depiction of an anatomically accurate and well-defined animal body. The animals are neither fantastic not zoomorphic junctures made of various animal parts, as was the case with early animal-style objects. However, a closer look at the structure and content of the imagery shows us that there is more to the visual formula than one is able to detect at first. Not only did we see countless examples of animals facing each other starting

from the mirror images on the cap of the Aluchaideng headdress, but the content of the visual narrative, that is, the very concept behind the spatial and pictorial dynamics, do not deviate too much from animal-style art as we have defined it in the previous two chapters. The Xianbei goldwork examined earlier in this chapter provided a plethora of precedents of the meandering shapes which supposedly stand for vegetation. The Japanese examples of a saddle at the Fujinoki tumulus discussed earlier in this chapter draws a similar pictorial narrative by inserting a somewhat realistically-depicted animal in the middle of openwork consisting of floral designs.

Figure 4.35 Saddle covers with symmetrical rabbits and wild sheep, Terpenie Village, Zaporozhiye Region, Taurida Governorate (formerly), Present-day Crimea

A set of golden belt fittings and ornaments was found at at the site of Gashun Uta in the Northern Caucasus. (See Figure 4.35) The technique of manufacture and the motif of deer among foliage are both typical of metalwork produced in the Jin dynasty, and goes back to Xianbei ornaments of three deer surrounded by highly stylized trees. The deer antlers intertwine with and gradually transition into the surrounding foliage. This belt fitting was found among a set of ornamental plaques, including one bearing the heraldic crust of the

house of Batu[377], the founder of the Golden Horde. The highly textured vegetation in the openwork not only surrounds but protrudes form the body of the animal depicted in the center of the crowded composition. The deer's antlers are impossible to discern in this measured visual cacophony of interweaving motifs and patterns. The elements were part and parcel of the Xianbei decorative approach. They also appeared in the arts of the Yuezhi, as evidenced by the Kargaly diadem.

The early Golden Horde material has thus preserved elements from animal style, and its artistic peculiarities are redolent of trends already observed in the metalwork excavated along the Eurasian steppes. Not only were certain motifs derived from animal style alive, but the Golden Horde was not the westernmost extension of the preservation of these elements. A belt buckle similar to the Golden Horde belt fitting in terms of size, shape and decorative patterns, was recently uncovered from the modern-day Black Sea city of Varna in Northern Bulgaria. The necropolis contains 783 graves dated between the late ninth and early tenth century. The object subject to this study was thus mostly likely produced at the end of the First Bulgarian Empire (681 -1018) and after the formal Christianization completed in the 9th century by Knyaz[378] Boris I. The griffin's body is texturized, and its tail evolves into a leaf-like pattern. To the right of the griffin, there are traces of vegetal designs, also rendered in relief. (See Figure 4.37)

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[377] Komaroff, Linda, and Stefano Carboni. 2002. *The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1256-1353*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art., p, 67
[378] The word "knyaz" is a Slavic title from early medieval Europe. The linguistic provenance can be found in the Proto-Germanic term "kuningaz" which refers to the leaders of Germanic alliances during the Migration Period (300-700 CE). Knyaz is thus translated in various ways (prince, duke, count), none of which convey the power dynamics, sociopolitical structure and royal hierarchy of the specific polity ruled by the "knyaz".

Figure 4.36 Belt Fitting with Deer Amid Foliage, 13th c, Gashun Uta kurgans

Figure 4.37 Belt fitting with a griffin depicted in relief, Troshevo District, Varna, Bulgaria, 9th -10th c. CE

We know that the region of modern-day Varna was since the formation of the First Bulgarian State in 681 CE inhabited by an ethnic mix of Slavs and Bulgars, who eventually intermingled with Byzantine populations. The Bulgarians who settled north of Byzantium in the late seventh century had already adopted a semi-sedentary lifestyle. By 681, the officially accepted date for the formation of the First Bulgarian Empire, the original larger polity of Bulgars had already split into several branches: one sub-group was absorbed by

the Khazars, while another migrated further eastward to later establish Volga Bulgaria (7th c- 1240s), which was later consumed by the early Golden Horde. This brings us to a related discovery from the Kama River region of the Urals. A pair of silver plates from a hoard, dated to the early 9th century Volga Bulgaria are embellished with images of snow leopards (Russian: bars).(See Figure 4.38) [379] The leopard on the left is depicted breastfeeding two of its offspring, two small animals facing each other on opposite sides of a centrally located tree. In both compositions, the leopard's face has human-like features and is located at the visual center of a blossoming tree. The peripheries of the two plates are also decorated with smaller vegetation and hybrid, unrecognizable animals, such as birds with anthropomorphic features.

Figure 4.38 Silver plates from Volga Bulgaria, Kama River. 9th -10th century

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[379] Smirnov, Yakov I. 1909. *Vostochnoe Serebro. Atlas drevneĭ serebri͡anoĭ i zolotoĭ posudy vostochnago proiskhozhdenīia, naĭdennoĭ preimushchestvenno v predielakh Rossīĭskoĭ imperīi.* (Silver of the East. Atlas of the ancient gold and silver vessels of eastern provenance, found within the territories of the Russian Empire). St. Petersburg

Notions entrenched in the early decorative approaches reliant on zoomorphic imagery continue to exist in the visual cultures of nomadic and semi-nomadic people in the Pontic-Caspian region in the early medieval period. It appears that there is a special kind of "long-lasting, universal appropriateness" linked to the concept of "tree of Life" and its organic relationship with hybrid zoomorphs, which leads to the perseverance of this idiom in the visual vocabulary of various cultures in Central Eurasia throughout and slightly beyond the late first millennium BCE.

The Middle Period of the Golden Horde (late 13th- 14th century): The Arrival of Islam

The silverware of this period was commissioned by the Golden Horde nobility and produced by local craftsmen. However, the fusion of Central Asian and Near Eastern styles is present among these artefacts, most of which are belt bowls. The objects were likely intended for use by the military semi-nomadic elite during their first steps in adapting to the new urban lifestyle. It is worth noting that the remains of a number of yurt dwellings testifying to the remaining traces of nomadism in the middle Golden Horde period were unearthed in several sites which also yielded goldwork.[380]

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[380] Kramarovskiĭ, M. G. 2000. *Sokrovishcha Zolotoĭ Ordy (*The treasures of the Golden Horde). Sankt-Peterburg: Slaviia., p, 73

Figure 4.39 Vase, Gilded silver, 14th-15th c.

Both of the objects shown here are made of silver and feature intricate palmetto designs, characteristic of goldwork in the Iranian tradition, perhaps produced at the same type in the Il'Khanid court. (See Figure 4.39) The design of the octagonal bowl, however, draws the viewer's attention through the incorporation of fantastic animal motifs and a human head in one of the front lobes. The image is of a syncretic being, with the head of a human and the body of an unidentifiable animal surrounded by an abstracted landscape emanating from its body. (See Fig. 4.40) The anthropomorphic features of the face terminate into stylized horns resembling floral patterns while the theriomorphic traits of the body constitute of additional abstracted floral forms. Animal style is thus deftly incorporated into the elegant floral decorative patterns typical of Islamic art.

Figure 4.40 Detail of 4.39 depicting a hybrid

Another group of objects dated to this period was discovered at a burial in the Kuban region of the Northern Caucuses (Belorechenskie kurgan No.7).[381] A semicircular belt buckle form the early Golden Horde period found in the Kuban region between the Don steppe and the Northern Caucasus is stylistically relevant. The plaque's outer rim is embellished with the "braided rope" designs known from Altai, Ordos and Pontic-Caspian metalwork. The lower part of the object features two reflected leopards with menacing, gaping jaws and curved bodies. Their interlacing tails are composed of abstract floral shapes, much like the deer antlers of South Siberian Iron Age metalwork or the intertwining branches and leaves of Xianbei imagery. (See Figure 4.41)

A second type of belt ornament excavated from the kurgans also feature openwork and a more traditional battle scene, in which a lion is biting onto the rear of a deer with stylized antlers (See Figure 4.42). The bodies of the animals appear unnatural, almost

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[381] Levasheva, V.P. 1953. "Belorechenskie kurgany". Arheologicheskyi Sbornik

emaciated. The images are highly abstracted and the scenes are reminiscent of the the more typical animal style from the Eurasian steppes. A similar belt fitting, discussed earlier in this chapter, was discovered in the earlier Turkic burial of Kudyrge in the Altai. That said, the edges of the Belorechenskie belt terminal has flower and other abstract ornamental designs, more typical of Sasanian metalwork. The rest of the objects discovered in the Belorechenskie graves include imported luxury goods such as vases from Venice and the Near East, and cups from Crimea and Azov, thus indicating the thriving commerce in multiple regions of the Golden Horde even toward the last decades of its existence.

Figure 4.41 Semicircular Belt Plaque, 14th –early 15th century, Belorechenskie kurgan no.7

Figure 4.42 Belt terminal with animal combat, Golden Horde, late 14th -15th century

The Late Golden Horde (15th century)

The items dating to the late Horde period (late 14th to first half of the 15th century) include belt garniture and separate embellishments, frequently commissioned for the wide market. Due to the vast "turkisization" of the Golden Horde State after Özbeg Khan's reforms, one observes the increased presence of the artistic traditions of Anatolia, Syria, Iran and Mamluk Egypt (1250-1517).[382] Most of the items from this period have been excavated from sites along the Northern Black Sea Coast (a region which was once inhabited by the so-called Pontic Scythians of the 5th-3rd c BCE). A common feature of the objects excavated at these sites is the sense of three dimensionality, and the sculptural quality of the items, which vary in shape and function.

For instance, a silver enameled bowl with a figure of a ram on the bottom of the interior was excavated at Ivdel Village in the Sverdlovskaya area of Russia (near present-day Yekaterininburg in the Urals) (See Figure).[383] This manner of placement of a single

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[382] Ibid, p. 81

[383] Badeev, Denis. 2015. "Planirovka Zolotoordynskogo Bolgara: Istoriya I Perspektivyi Issledovaniya". (The Planning of Golden Horde Bulgar: history and research perspectives). *Povolzhskaya Arheologiya.* Rossiya, Kazan. p. 127-136

animal inside a vessel does not have its parallels in the arts of other states of the Mongol empire or the Chinese northern territories from previous centuries. This leads to the idea of local innovation; indeed, the last century of the development of the Golden Horde and the unification through a single state religion coupled with the overall tolerance of other faiths, created an environment conducive to experimentation through the fusion of old and new motifs. Thus, we see some sort of reinvention or interpretation of animal elements.

Figure 4.43 Engraved silver bowl with a ram

A great number of the objects buried within the territory of the Golden Horde and its vassal states are actually associated with distant cultural domains, as they found as part of buried treasures (hoards) which could have been acquired through plunder ot diplomatic exchange. The Simferopol Treasure, discovered near present-day Simferopol, Crimea, is one such example. The hoard yielded 328 gold and silver ornaments, many of which are

decorated with inlaid precious stones, filigree, openwork chasing, niello, engraving etc.[384]

The inventory includes head ornaments, plaques, sets of belt buckles, earrings, covers for prayer texts and charms, silverware, and *paiza*. The detailed analysis of the items has enabled researches to distinguish between several distinct groups of objects in this hoard, each bearing the stamp of its individual workshop or artisan. The hoard includes objects which were clearly imported from Western Europe and South Asia, as well as goldwork produced within the Mongol empire.

Figure 4.44 Simferopol Treasure, State Historical Museum, Moscow (Excavated from Simferopol, Crimea)

There are very few objects in this hoard which are reminiscent of the northern Chinese or Central Asian artistic traditions discussed earlier in this study; instead, the incorporation and arrangement of precious stones into much of the goldwork here invites parallels with the Byzantine tradition in the West and the earlier Greco-Bactrian tradition in Asia.

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[384] Gosudarstvennyĭ istoricheskiĭ muzeĭ (Moscow, Russia). 1980. *Simferopolskiĭ klad. (The Simferopol treasure*) Moskva: Gos. istoricheskiĭ muzeĭ.

However, we can conclude from the several case studies examined in this section that animal elements were continuously being implemented into the locally produced metalwork of the Golden Horde, particularly in its territories east of the Caspian Sea.

The fall of the Golden Horde marks the disappearance of the lingering traces of the early animal-style art. While it would not be accurate to claim that animal style, as we know it through its antecedents from Iron Age Ordos or Altai, was noticeably present in Golden Horde visual culture, a certain style of decorative approach which was indebted to developments related to animal style did exist. Secondly, while our study of Golden Horde metalwork shows that after the gradual islamicization of state institutions, the predominant decorative designs were almost entirely derived from the Middle Eastern tradition. Palmettos and other floral shapes dominated the decorations on vessels and jewelry. That said, the Horde from its inception as a state was the home of both sedentary and nomadic people with distinct traditions. As urban centers such as Ukek were built and developed in locations inhabited by populations with nomadic lifestyles, it is hard to imagine that the elements rooted in a nomadic visual culure would have disappeared overnight.

Towards a New Narrative: Beyond Disappearance and Displacement

In light of all these discoveries in Eurasia, several pivotal questions come to mind. First, can we pinpoint a single continuous tradition in the metalwork at the Chinese northern frontier zone and its affiliated territories? Could the nomadic groups which inhabited these domains in different historic circumstances have preserved and only reinterpreted certain aspects of a "quintessential" prototype? First, the term "prototype" which we encounter so frequently in publications about metalwork from the Eurasian steppes, is inherently flawed. As mentioned at the beginning of this study, I have

reservations about the recent tendency of scholars to fall back on the convenience of using the term "Scytho-Siberian" or "Scythe-Sarmatian" prototype to refer to all developments in techniques and designs in animal art produced in North China or by its northern neighbors. As I demonstrated in the first section of this study, the generic term "Scythian" or "Saka" is problematic in its own right because there were several domains of Scythian influence, including one at the Pontic Steppes near the Northern Black Sea Coast, another near the Altai region and Tarim Basin of Central Asia. The styles produced by the craftsmen in these two distinct regions exhibit significant differences. Thus, there was no single prototype of "Scythian" animal art to begin with; furthermore, the word "prototype" implies a stable beginning which does not change according to circumstances. Such a term is inconsistent with the fundamental core of the nomadic context: should we be in constant search of "stability" and "consistency" in the artistic trends of pastoral nomads as the very idea of change and movement is ingrained in their lifestyle?

That being said, an exhaustive and detailed survey of metalwork excavated along the Chinese northern frontier and the cultural zone of the Altai and Northern Caucuses can help resolve some of the issues surrounding the lack of a stable theoretical framework. While this may be an overly ambitious project, one is able to identify some patterns in the first millennium BCE which without a doubt reappear among these groups centuries later. The first examples of the mirror image of symmetrical animals facing each other surrounded by the abstracted forms of trees and other landscape animals appeared in pre-Xiongu burials at Aluchaideng, Ordos Cultural zone. Then they continuously reappeared in the arts of the Xiongnu, Xianbei, Kitan and later, the Golden Horde. At the same time, some changes occurred over time, perhaps due to the different spiritual beliefs and

practices of the newly arrived nomads. For instance, we never again see the act of "mirror smashing", the deliberate destruction of Chinese mirrors before being placed in a Xiongnu burial, after the departure of the Xiongnu from that area. However, we do see over and over again the deliberate implementation of items of foreign provenance such as Chinese silks, mirrors and lacquer, Hellenistic and Sasanian vessels, Byzantine coins etc. into burials in Northern China and its periphery. Thus, a successful study of metalwork excavated from the region of Central Eurasia, regardless of the time period, involves a careful investigation of recurrent patterns in the burial systems and simultaneous changes or reinventions/ reinterpretations of these patterns.

Again, we have reached the ultimate question of why elite members of sedentary societies choose to retain some foreign elements from the arts of their nomadic neighbors while doing away with others. It appears that, for instance, motifs deeply rooted in the Islamic visual traditions of the Middle East (specifically Il'Khanate Iran) were well-received by the local Golden Horde craftsmen who implemented floral designs and exuberant, multi-colored decorative patterns into various media. Similarly, the Turks along the Chinese northern periphery chose to reinvent the concept of erecting burial steles (started as deer stones in the Bronze Age) rather than adorning the body of the deceased with hundreds of golden plaques with zoomorphic motifs. Animal style might be, by default, the art of the early nomads of ancient Eurasia, yet it certainly resonated with the local aesthetics of the nomadic, semi-nomadic and sedentary groups which came to replace them in Central Eurasia. Then, as the people inhabiting the steppe region of Central Eurasia decided to move away from nomadism and started to actively adopt a sedentary lifestyle, it was no longer politically opportune to incorporate portable nomadic metalwork in the

burials of the elite. As production of animal style declined after the 5th century, so did its incorporation in the tombs of sedentary empires such as China. Ultimately, as was partially demonstrated in the previous chapters, the specific arrangement of animals and the formation of visual concepts such as "animal hierarchy", "animal hybridity", "animal junctures", "reflected symmetry" were certainly linked to a set of religious beliefs associated with movement and metamorphosis into the afterlife. However, the issue of politics remains relevant. The reason why we see animal style decorative elements appear centuries later in the burials of largely sedentary populations has nothing to do with any particular belief system or conceptions of life and death; rather, the elites were once again demonstrating their capacity to possess the exotic, to show familiarity with the "other" through the incorporation of decorations which at that time would appear both foreign and archaic. In the case of the Golden Horde, much of the evidence is not derived from tombs but from hoards containing treasures and remains from urban dwellings. Thus, the politically motivated desire of the elite to collect objects decorated with a repertoire of nomadic imagery extended beyond ritual or burial spaces into their social lives on earth. The strategic usage of animal art objects to decorate the bodies of the deceased in battles and feasts throughout their life and in the space of the tomb beyond their death started as a politically-driven aesthetic choice from the very beginning and continued to evolve in the next millennium preserving its political aspect. All of this is not to say that animal style did not give way to newly emerging, more strongly favored types of aesthetics such as a pantheon of Buddhist imagery in China and a plethora of floral and geometric patterns in the Near East. However, the retention of decorative motifs clearly rooted in the ancient animal style tradition continues to address the themes of negotiating political clout,

legitimacy and self-identity in a complex political environment where sedentarism and nomadism coexisted.

Chapter 5: Animal Art Revisited

The "Origin" Question and Why it is Irrelevant

In this dissertation, I have proposed an alternative mode through which we can look at animal-style art and in so dong, question, revisit and rewrite some of the traditional scholarly narratives which have been put forward in the study of this distinct visual tradition. My study's unique treatment of the subject starts with its refusal to actively engage in the heated scholarly dispute regarding the origins and transmission routes of animal art. As this dissertation has shown, it is rather the relationship of animal-style objects with their creators on a micro-level that has the true potential to enrich our understanding of the minor arts of the Eurasian steppes in prehistory and early history.

Nevertheless, in this work, I acknowledge that one of the largest gaps and blind spots in the field is linked to our inability to pinpoint a clear starting point for animal art. According to a theory articulated by the prominent nomadologist M. I. Artamonov, the provenance of what he refers to as "Scytho-Siberian continuity" was the cultural realm of the early Near Eastern civilizations, particularly the Art of the Medes and the peoples who preceded them in Mesopotamia.[385] The Scythians are thus said to have adopted and adapted the zoomorphic decorative patterns during their interactions with the Kingdom of Urartu in the Iranian plateau and the Achaemenid empire. This theory relies on evidence from isolated sites in the Dniepr region of the Northern Black Sea such as Kelermes, which have yielded objects with Urartian motifs. A sub-theory which stems from the "Near Eastern origin" theory promotes the idea that animal imagery, specifically the deer as a totemic

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[385] Artamonov. M. I. 1968. "Proizhozhdeniya Skifskogo Iskusstva" (The Origins of Scythian Art)Sovetskaya Arhologiya no.4: 27-45

animal in animal-style art, emerged somewhere between Iran and Lake Zaisan between the Altai and Tarbagatai mountains in eastern Kazakhstan, a region which was culturally bound to the sedentary populations of the Iranian plateau and yet geographically somewhat distant from the Iranian heartland .[386]

It goes without saying that there are several major archaeological finds which could be used to strengthen this theory. Panel fragments of horned hybrids and golden and silver plaques with fantastic animals were unearthed from the Ziwiye hoard near lake Urmia in the Iranian plateau. These objects, which I touched upon in the first and second chapter, have been dated to the 8th-7th century BCE, thus preceding most of the animal-style objects discussed in this dissertation. A large relief from the stairway of the Palace of Darius and Xerxes in ancient Persepolis is shown to depicts two scenes of animal predation. A lion is clinging onto the back of a bull and biting into his rears. (See Figure 5.1)

Figure 5.1 Relief from the staircase of the Apadāna palace of Darius and Xerxes, Persepolis, 6th c. BCE

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[386] Chlenova. N. I. 1962. "Skifskyi Olen". (The Scythian Deer). In Pamyatniki skifo-sarmatskoy kul'tury. (Monuments of the Scythian and Sarmatian Culture), 167-203. *MIA* 115

This scene, which was also discussed in depth in the first chapter of this study, appears to be a large-scale representation of the pantheon of images depicted on the small plaques and belt buckles which embellished the bodies of nomadic aristocrats. It is important that two identical scenes of animal art are depicted on either side of a larger, central scene of processions of people from various ethnicities paying tribute, each group represented in detail with visual indicators of their cultural bearings such as dress and facial features. The patrons of such large-scale architecture in Persepolis employed craftsmen from various peripheries of the empire, so it is plausible that the artisans responsible for these architectural masterpieces came from nomadic backgrounds or at least had previously had intensive interactions with nomadic people who carried animal style plaques on their person in battle. Thus, here, the incorporation of animal art as content in what externally appears to be a traditional Persian-style public monument (a palace relief) reveals a particular desire on the part of the ruler to make a grand political statement: the omnipresent power of the Achamenid Empire is summed up in the shrewd and politically expedient combination of these three centrally placed images at the eastern staircase of the Apadana palace. This was, in fact, not an uncommon strategy in the ancient world. In fourth-century Constantinople, the Hippodrome served as the locus for various kinds of antiquities such as statues of pagan gods, animals (lions, hyenas, dragons among many others), public figures, victory monuments, apotropaia etc.[387] Bronze tripods such as the one from the sanctuary of Apollo from Delphi, the Serpent Column which was linked to the battle between the Greeks and Persians at Plataea, and the statue of Theophanes of Mytilene (a native of Lesbos who in the 1st c BCE wrote about Pompei the Great's expedition to Asia)

[387] Bassett, Sarah Guberti. "The Antiquities in the Hippodrome of Constantinople." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991): 87-96.

are only a few of the numerous examples of non-Roman imagery included in the circus of the Hippodrome.[388] Thus, the Persians' decision to depict a lion and a bull engaged in predation may have been an early antecedent of what would become a long-standing tradition of incorporating imagery from the fringe provinces of West Asian and European empires. Since this is a relatively isolated example of animal-style art as we know it in the Siberian realm, with the animals biting and appearing contorted and highly texturized, it is impossible to determine whether these images were used as political statements or actually had an established aesthetic meaning to the local viewer, or at least to the visitors of the Apadana palace. Using images from specific finds with eclectic content such as the Ziwiye hoard (and to a lesser extent, the Oxus treasure) to substantiate the claim that animal art originated from the Iranian plateau, or territories bound to the Persian cultural sphere, is also not sufficient and is, in fact, methodologically flawed. These two discoveries include objects from various territories inhabited by various ethnicities, with many items having been received as part of annual tribute, booty or diplomatic gifts.

The discovery of the Arzhan mound in the Tuva basin as well as the Chilikty kurgan in the Zaisan district, dated to the early 7th century BCE, marks the appearance of animal art in South Siberia earlier than originally thought. Objects from kurgans in the Semirechye region of east Kazakhstan, discussed in Chapter 1, also date back to the 7th century, thus no later than the first occurrences of animal style imagery in West Asia. This suggests a narrative which could move the "Near Eastern origins" narrative further east and away from the Near Eastern world. This narrative has often been labeled as "The Central Asian origin" theory which in its own right suggest an elusive movement

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[388] Ibid

A third theory places the origins of animal art in ancient Siberia. The notion that the pantheon of animal imagery dominating animal style in the Iron Age first emerged in one of the early Siberian cultures is not new. It goes back to the early 20th-century works of Russian scholars such as G. I. Borovka and E. H. Minns. The Karasuk-Tagar Bronze Age culture in Siberia could certainly have inspired many of the designs which later on became the dominant artistic idiom in the minor arts of the steppes. Stylized deer and anthropomorphic figures mixed with zoomorphic hybrids, mostly deer with exaggerated antlers and raptor-like snouts, appear in Bronze Age monoliths associated with burials and ritual sites in the Transbaikal and Northern Mongolian steppes. Therefore, Gryaznov's suggestion that animal style's origins could be identified by tracing the emergence of the "Scythian deer" to the deer stones of the Karasuk culture appears to have gained a lot of recent popularity.[389] He identifies a Sayan-Altai reindeer prototype as it developed among Siberian cultures due to a local economy dependent on reindeer.[390] An extension of this theory has been proposed by Esther Jacobson who states that animal stylization as it appears in animal style can be traced back to the Siberian Neolithic and a distinctive tradition of bone and word carving.[391] As this dissertation has demonstrated, there is ample visual evidence derived from standing stones located in close proximity to surface burials in Northern Mongolia and South Siberia, including the Altai-Sayan region, which shows that vestiges of the features of Iron Age animal art were noticeably present in these late Bronze Age monuments. The transfer from one medium to another could have been the result of changes in environment and climate changes as nomads moved from one zone to

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[389] Gryaznov 1978. "Syano-altaisky Olen". (The Sayan-Altai deer). In Problemy arheologii (Archeological Problems), 222-231. Leningrad: Leningradskiy Universitet
[390] Ibid
[391] Jacobson 1993; Jacobson 2015

another. The regions examined in this dissertation are exceptionally diverse as they incorporate the vast taiga and tundra of Siberia, the Mongolian, Kazakh and Pontic steppes, and various mountains regions such as the Urals which was home to the Lapp and Udmurt peoples. The changes in environment certainly had an impact on how animal style imagery was translated into local aesthetics as it moved from one micro-region to another. As a newly militarized culture emerged, the system of images of flying deer was already adapted to fit portable luxury goods which could be transported on horseback and also be used as decorations in weaponry.

Ultimately, the reason this dissertation does not delve into the question of origins beyond simply presenting the various points of controversy is that there are more fruitful and often ignored avenues to be explored in writing a revisionist history of animal art. As I have stated on numerous occasions throughout this discussion, we should also take heed of the possibility that animal style was characterized by a polycentric emergence and development rooted in the natural proclivity of ancient nomads to depict their environs. After the occurrence of cultural contact, individual patterns and concepts imported from external cultural spheres were perhaps retained thus leading to the superficial similarities between regional styles. What needs to be recognized is that along with artistic contact, resistance to exchange was also a reality which could have shaped the history of animal art. This dissertation is being written at a time when the zealous pursuit of research topics linked to possibilities of cross-cultural connections has taken over the fields of art history and historical archaeology. We are so focused on finding hidden connections which have evaded us in the past that we almost lose sight of important historical examples which demonstrate a lack of or resistance to exchange to the extent of conscious repudiation of

certain artistic elements. The epistemological value of having a balanced understanding of cultural contact has been absent in studies of animal art which tend to lean towards one extreme or the other.[392]

This dissertation has replaced the search for provenance with a much needed examination of the ways in which animal style can reshape our thinking of ancient burial practices and Eurasian nomadic perceptions of life, death and afterlife. The social lives of animal-style objects as they travelled through time and space, at times from one's personal dwelling to one's resting place, is of main interest here. The objects and their various contexts have been thoroughly examined and thus, several major issues linked to the general epistemological value of ancient objects have emerged to the surface.

Rethinking Archaeological Models and Narratives

Contextual analysis of objects and the study of their biographies are contingent upon the successful reconstruction of their original usage. There exists a large number of various contexts in which objects are discovered: destroyed settlements, tombs, deposits and hoards, as well as ship wrecks, mines and extra-settlement ritual sites.[393] These are the framing entities which, in one way or another, shape and alter both the affect and therefore,

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[392] In the twentieth century, it was not uncommon to label animal style as "art of the migration period". There was a disproportionate emphasis placed on the decorative arts of the Germanic groups which produced portable goods with zoomorphic designs similar to those of the Eurasian steppes. These migrations happened much later in time, between the 4th and 9th century CE prior to the Christianization of Europe. The pioneer of the study of Northern European animal art was Bernhard Salin who never acknowledged the complex prehistory and antecedents of the European traditions. See: Bernhard, Salin and J Mestorf. *Die Altgermanische Thierornamentik: Typologische Studie Über Germanische Metallgegenstände Aus Dem IV. Bis IX. Jahrhundert, Nebst Einer Studie Über Irische Ornamentik.* Stockholm: K. L. Beckmans buchdruckerei, In kommission bei A. Asher, Berlin, 1904.
[393] Philipp W Stockhammer. 2015. "Lost in Things: An Archaeologist's Perspective on the Epistemological Potential of Objects." *Nature and culture*. 10, no. 3 (n.d.): p. 269.

the contemporary perception of the finds, that is, the way we see them, study them and engage with them in our attempt to reconstruct past contexts. An object found in a tomb, which in its own right presupposes the presence of a ritual or at least assumes a level of sanctity, tells a different story than an object found in a hoard which was buried by the owner with the likely intention of coming back and retrieving the treasure. The successful reconstruction of past distribution, usage and reception of an object is dependent on the proper differentiation of two categories. One must distinguish between a primary and secondary position of an object at the moment of its discovery.[394]

A primary position means that the object was found at the location of its last use, thus making it an "in-situ find".[395] Such a context is either the result of the object's intentional placement in a burial or hoard/depository or a cataclysmic destruction of a settlement due to a natural disaster or warfare.[396] That said, even if a settlement had been demolished by such a catastrophe, objects are often relocated by later human activities (post-depositional construction), natural processes such as erosion, plunder or insufficiently documented earlier excavations. In cemeteries which have been disturbed in the past, a great number of the items in the original burial inventory are now located in a secondary position: as the robbers open and enter the grave, their activities, regardless of their duration and success, alter forever the pristineness of the space as it was originally constructed. It is also important to discern modern grave looting from similar pre-modern practices while acknowledging the existence of both; more often than not authors who deal with the problem of grave opening address it as a modern problem without the

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[394] Schiffer, Michael B. 1987. *Formation Processes of the Archaeological Record*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
[395] Stockhammer 2015, p. 269
[396] Ibid

acknowledgement that the looting of tombs and subversive trade of antiquities was part of a vibrant industry in the ancient past.[397] Thus, for instance, as indicated in Chapter 1, none of the 240 objects from the collection of Peter the Great held by the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg was scientifically documented at the time of its acquisition. None of these precious portable belt buckles, plaques and other personal ornaments is known to have come into the tsar's possession through state sponsored archaeological expeditions.[398] We know from official royal correspondences that Peter himself issued a number of decrees aimed to put an end to the looting of Siberian graves after his collection was more or less complete in 1718.[399] As I briefly mentioned, the collection should also be viewed in the context of the now irretrievably lost collection of the burgomaster of Amsterdam Nicolaas Witsen (1641-1717). Drawings of the objects from his collections have survived and were first published in Amsterdam in the eighteenth century, before making their way to Russia

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[397] Parker Pearson, Michael. 1999. *The Archaeology of Death and Burial*. College Station: Texas A & M University Press.

[398] A common misconception regarding Peter the Great's collection exists in the assumption that all the objects in it were obtained by the tsar during his lifetime. Toward the end of the 19th century, long after Peter's death, multiple objects were added. A second common inaccuracy in descriptions of this collection is the adamant statement that no formal record of the objects' acquisition context and provenance ever existed. While the objects were mostly likely looted and sold by Swedes take captive after the battle of Poltava in 1709, or simply escaped convicts or monks from the Urals, at least partial records and Treasury invoices related to these acquisitions once existed. The records of the objects from Siberia which could have included mention of their find-spots, had been kept in the Tobolsk archive in Siberia before the site was destroyed by fire in 1788.

[399] Peter the Great received these gifts from 1715 to 1718. The first gold object was given to him by an industrialist from the Urals known by the name of Nikita Demidov. By some accounts, Nikita was the tsar's former blacksmith and was promoted due to his enterprising spirit and immense support for the tsar's political endeavors. The factory Demidov found is known to have been the major supplier of cannons, swords and munitions for the Russian army for an extended period of time. For a full account of the Demidov dynasty, see:
Chumakov, Valery. 2017. *Demidovy: Pyat' Pokolenij Metallurgov Rossii*. Moskva OOO. "Aktion upravlenie i finansy".; Demidov, Nikita Akinfievich. 2005. *Zhurnal Puteshestviïa Nikity Akinfievicha Demidova, 1771-1773*. (Journal of the Nikita Akinfievich Davidov's travels). Ekaterinburg: Sokrat

where they can be found today.[400] The pages from Witsen's illustrated book show the remarkable similarity between his and Peter's Siberian collections. A gold plaque decorated with inlay showing the intertwining bodies of a snake and a boar was recorded in Witsen's drawings, and can also be found in the Hermitage. (See Figure 5.2) The objects from the two collections could have originally been part of the same burial or belonged to the same member of the nomadic elite, but since we are not aware of their last early historic use, it is impossible to theorize with certainty about the exact relationship between these sets of objects. There are also cases in which an unauthenticated object from Peter the Great's collection bears resemblance to an already authenticated one from tombs (as was the case with Aluchaideng's headdresses and the turquoise birds in the Hermitage collection). This epistemological issue is, of coarse, not unique to the collection of Peter the Great.

A similar problem exists with the study of the so-called Ordos bronzes, metalwork associated with the generic entity known as Ordos Loop. Hundreds of bronze, brass and copper objects which have been characterized using the umbrella term "Ordos art" have come into the possession of private collectors, museums and galleries around the world. A relevant case study exemplifying this issue comes from the collection of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Art and Archaeology. The museum currently owns a collection of approximately five hundred Ordos bronzes. The only comparatively in-depth study of the bronzes was a masters thesis by Sister Mary Julia Daly in 1959 as she was completing

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[400] Simpson, St John, and Svetlana Pankova. 2017. *Scythians: Warriors of Ancient Siberia*. London: Thames and Hudson, p. 38

her M.A. thesis.[401] The collection was donated to the museum by William Mayer and his wife Isobel Ingram who were not professional collectors yet managed to amass a vast number of nomadic art objects during their travels in Asia.[402] We know that Mayer was also in touch with the collector C.T. Loo who obtained a great amount of Ordos-style metalwork from him. Later on, these objects found their way to the Freer and Sacker Galleries where they were studied and published by Emma Bunker.[403] In Chapter 1, we touched upon a great number of cemeteries in the Ordos Cultural Zone which have yielded Ordos-style bronzes: Taohongbala, Buertage Xiang, Guosinyaozi, Xigoupan, Yulongtai, Sujigou, Maoqinggou, Aluchaideng, and Shenmu county, to name a few. The animal-style metalwork in the form of belt buckles, plaques, horse harnesses, and cart ornaments have been formally recorded as part of archaeological reports associated with these excavations. They are often discussed hand in hand with the looted items from the above-mentioned collections, thus raising a major methodological issue. In fact, most of the catalogs which have brought animal style art to the attention of audiences worldwide contain objects which were given to museums by private collectors.

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[401] Sister Mary Julia Daly, S. S. J. 1959. *Ordos Bronzes in the University of Pennsylvania Museum, A Thesis in Oriental Studies Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Pennsylvania in Partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts*, p. 110.

[402] Cheng, Fangyi. "Chinese Nomadic Art and the Journey to Collect" *Expedition Magazine* 58.3 (2017): n. pag. *Expedition Magazine*. Penn Museum, 2017 Web. 23 Apr 2018 <http://www.penn.museum/sites/expedition/?p=23978>

[403] Bunker, Emma C. 1997. *Ancient Bronzes of the Eastern Eurasian Steppes from the Arthur M. Sackler Collections*. New York: Arthur M. Sackler Foundation.
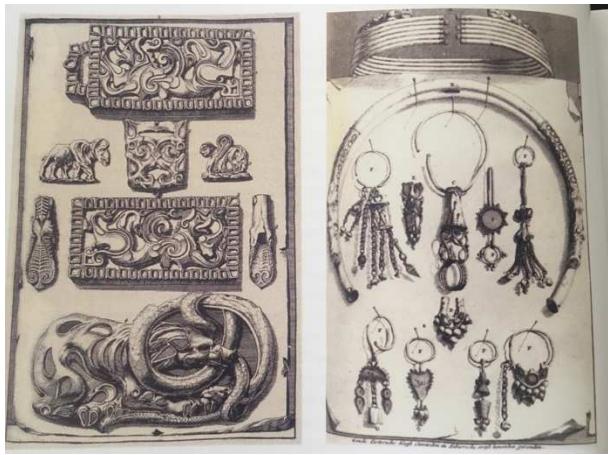
Figure 5.2 Drawings of objects from Nicolaas Witsen's collection

The myriad luxury items in collections such as Peter the Great's and William Mayer's are indispensable to the study of early nomadic art, yet they also pose epistemological problems related to the ways in which we study and compare them to similar yet scientifically authenticated objects.

The channels through which objects have come to modern establishments such as museums, galleries and archaeological institutes are of utmost significance. This study deals exclusively with objects from prehistory and early history, that is, periods when little textual evidence exists to corroborate, weaken or elucidate the theories regarding animal-style objects and related visual traditions. In the case of Ordos objects, we have seen only scarce references to a specific branch of the "hu" people, that is the so-called Forest Hu ("linhu"), who were likely active in the Ordos Loop in the early years of the Zhou dynasty. The texts in this case provide us with no significant clues which add to the study of the objects through the lenses of art historical and archaeological analysis. The same is true of objects associated with other groups of the early nomads, that is, the Pazyryk Culture, Ural cultures and the Pontic-Caspian Culture, also known as the "Pontic Scythians", an umbrella

terms which in its own right does not properly represent the cultural and artistic diversity of these peoples. The accounts of Herodotus have been used to throw light on both objects from museum collections designated as "Scythian" and objects unearthed during official archaeological expeditions. This shows a common misjudgment of what can be reasonably applied to contextual analysis. The contemporary scholar has thus taken away agency from the object and its pre-modern makers and users through an indiscriminate mixture of incongruous sources and methods.

Thus, when talking about afterlives and the possible role of animal style imagery in them, one needs to consider not only the afterlife of the buried but also the afterlife of the object itself. The path of the object from its pre-modern context to the surrounds of the modern viewer ha shaped it ways which deserve further study.

The Problem of Affect, Audience and Framing: A Triple-Edged Sword

A related problem in the study of animal art, or all ancient art in general, is its ambiguous relationship with the modern and pre-modern consumer. Stockhammer has advocated for a stronger consideration of what he refers to as a "human-object entanglement".[404] The theory of entanglement originates in physics where the terms refers to particles which cannot be measured separately and are thus "entangled" in a system. Similarly, all things have a biography which is inextricably linked to human activities: they are born, live and die in one or more cultural spheres usually fulfilling more than one function and taking on various meanings ascribed to them by their owners.[405] How do our perceptions and assumptions as consumers, viewers and users of objects from pre-modern

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[404] Stockhammer 2010
[405] Harding, Anthony. 2016. "Biographies of Things". *Distant Worlds Journal* 1, p. 1-9

contexts alter the meaning and social lives of these objects? Our concern with authenticity poses an inherent paradox. Can we even speak of "authentic" objects when the one doing the "authenticating" is also a modern consumer (archaeologist, preservation expert, art collector, museum professional, or simply an art connoisseur)? As we showed in Chapter 1, the gaze of the modern consumer is of utmost significance in how we study objects from mortuary contexts. The objects' very placement on the body of the deceased and/or the interior of a tomb, their relationship with other objects in their immediate surrounds frames the object in a specific way. When the object is taken out of that frame to be placed in a cultural institution, after having undergone various inspection and preservation procedures, it is forever changed with regard to its contextual meaning. To put it simply, we cannot assume that an object means to us what it would have meant to the early modern consumer. This is especially true in prehistoric or early historic contexts when there is no writing available to corroborate modern assumptions. In the case of animal art, the majority of objects were produced in cultures of pastoral nomads who left us no traces of a writing system and thus, no textual evidence of their cultural bearings.

In fact, even if we are to eliminate the role of the modern viewer as a factor, and consider the ancient usage of the object alone, there are multiple identifiable layers which complicate the problem of meaning and perception. The Aluchaideng crown from the Ordos Loop discussed at length in Chapter 1 could have been manufactured specifically for the burial. That presupposes the existence of a workshop or at least a separate branch of the workshop which created burial goods according to specific models. If that was indeed the case, this tells a story of labor division and an emerging industry related to mortuary artistic production. It is plausible, for instance, that the Pazyryk textiles, whether

produced locally or imported from an outside source, were never used in one's abode before their placement in the burial. The same could be true of most of the headdresses and larger decorative objects which required an extended period of manufacture. In such a scenario, the artisan would have taken into consideration the spatial parameters of the tomb (whether a kurgan, slab grave, a *khirisguur*, a beehive tomb or a simple pit) and fashioned the objects accordingly. Wu Hung points out that one of the fundamental goals of entombment is the concealment of the body from human eyes and its departure from worldly scrutiny.[406] However, as the body was being dressed, adorned and formally carried to the physical location of the tomb, it would have been purposefully exposed to view for the very purpose of public commemoration (which by default requires observation). The placement of the corpse inside the tomb, and its surrounds would have been considered in the making of the object. In the case of the frozen tombs of Pazyryk, the visual evidence points towards the notion of a theatrical staging; if the object had been manufactured specifically for such a theatre-like setting, its properties would have been tweaked to fit a trend specific to this funerary art tradition. As for objects such as the hybrid horn-deer masks placed on the heads of horses at Pazyryk and Berel, we can state with certainty that these would have solely had a funerary usage as it is hard to imagine any practical reason for their placement on the heads of horses outside the context of a sacrificial ceremony. The small personal adornments, however, could or could not have been manufactured specifically for the elite burial as many of them were portable enough to have been transported on a horseback and were likely used by warrior elite in their life on earth. The

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[406] Wu Hung, 2010. *The Art of the Yellow Springs: Understanding Chinese Tombs*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, p. 8

case of the Golden Men and Women of Issyk and other sites in modern-day Kazakhstan share a common feature: the bodies of elite members of nomadic society were embellished with hundreds of pieces of jewelry, torques and headgear placed on a textile. The question of the last known use is no longer at the center of inquiry; what matters even more is the issue of previous uses, that is, whether the object has been used during the occupant's lifetime. If the golden attire at Issyk had been worn by warrior in the celebration of a military victory (a likely scenario considering the rising warrior elite in early nomadic societies and their active engagement in warfare), that would mean that the person organizing the burial had simply recreated an already established visual pattern in the afterlife. Or they could have slightly altered the patterns to fit the spatial dynamics of the tomb interior.

A pertinent question which has not been explored, however, relates to what happens to the body in the period between the death and the time it is placed into the grave. One needs to consider the pre-modern construction of the objects' meaning as they are being prepared for their role in the burial and even as they are consciously being placed in the tomb. These intermediary actions, albeit of seemingly small significance, left their imprint on the objects' biographies. They involve the mindful acting upon the object by a human actor. No written record has ever alluded to the specificities regarding the arrangement and placement of objects in early Iron Age burials along the Eurasian steppes. The closest we have to such a description comes from Herodotus's account of the funerals of Scythian kings, which happens to be surprisingly accurate when compared to archaeological remains of royal burials from the Northern Black Sea region.[407] Such accounts give us an insight

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[407] For a comprehensive discussion of the accuracy of Herodotus' record of royal Scythian burials, see: Ivantchik, Askold. "The Funeral of Scythian Kings: The Historical Reality and the

into the preferred locations for burials of the elite, the number and content of sacrifices and the existence of auxiliary burials, as well as the types of objects commonly buried with the deceased. They do not detail the exact protocol regarding the treatment of the body after the moment of death. The meaning of an animal style plaque thus undergoes a dramatic change in an infinitesimal moment as it transitions from decorative regalia worn during one's lifetime, towards a more complex, commemorative role in an ensemble of symbolic imagery. On the opposite end of the spectrum lies the power of the object itself to shape the conceived notions of both the pre-modern and modern user. Going back to Alhazen's theory of visuality (see Chapter 1), one needs to seriously take into account the possibility that the object itself was an actor, that is, had an active rather that passive role in the construction of ritual space. The visual emphasis on animal hybridity and dramatic metamorphosis would have created an affect, and ultimately shaped the experience of the consumer of those images. However, if we imagine ourselves sufficiently capable of theorizing that experience might have been, then we are already equating our experience, entangled in modernity, to that of our prehistoric ancestors. Such an equalization is conceptually problematic: there most certainly are aspects or layers of meaning of these objects which could remain invisible to the modern mind but could have very well appeared logical to the ancient elite patrons and artisans. Did the depiction of hybrid zoomorphs, a feature which I consider the core of animal art iconography, in its original context, mean something which is completely beyond the established logical patterns of modern academic and even non-academic discourse? We must be responsible enough to consider this to be a

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Description of Herodotus (4.71-72)", in Bonfante, Larissa. 2011. *The Barbarians of Ancient Europe: Realities and Interactions*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

viable scenario despite its potential to weaken, diminish the importance of or even destroy our proposed arguments. Even among contemporary societies, there must exist a discrepancy in the ways we view "things" and perceive, embrace or repudiate materiality as essential or non-essential to our being.

In the present work, I have addressed all of the said blind spots in studying objects from ancient cultures through the concept of audience. Audience was the primary factor in the construction of visual systems which centered around animal style. All societies from pre-historic to contemporary have one feature in common: the presence of an audience. Objects have had meanings as attributed to them by human actors with agency. Yet it is also true that historically, human beings have defined their relationships through objects, thus inadvertently attaching some level of agency to the objects. This is the reality in all contemporary economies where human and cultural capital occupy the core of the sociopolitical sphere. The present study has demonstrated how this was particularly pertinent to early Iron Age Central Eurasian nomadic societies.

The problem of object-human entanglement and the issue of agency as a solely human attribute always brings us back to the question of audience. We have shown two distinct approaches through which ancient nomads, and in certain cases, their sedentary neighbors, address issues of audience. First we must differentiate between various types of audiences. There are "accidental", "imagined" and "enacted" audiences.[408] The first kind of audience does not necessarily knowingly engage in a premeditated performance; it is

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[408] Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press
 In his book, Goffman engaged with the notion of real versus enacted audience in his discussion of frames and how framing things invariably shapes our expectations. My study expands these definitions and subtypes in an attempt to apply them to a nomadic, Central Eurasian context.

simply there at the time of the event of significance. The audience present at the sudden, dramatic death of a military leader during a battle could not have anticipated with certainty the outcome which led them to take the role of spectators. They thus become an audience unwittingly and circumstantially. Those who witness the death of a royal in their chambers are also an accidental audience regardless of whether the passing was imminent. Thus, the accidental audience has been, more or less, deprived of its agency with regard to whether and how they absorb the visual characteristics of their surroundings.

An enacted audience is related to "staged" events. The most common perception of audience today is as the spectators of a play, concert, wedding or funeral ceremony, to name a few. It is a misconception that an audience requires a performance meant to entertain. While this is in many instance true, an audience is more generally present to indirectly participate in an event of some significance or relevance to them. Enacted audiences have agency and presuppose the idea of real intent; at the same time, they are "enacted" as if the organizer of the performance had anticipated their presence and shaped the performance at least partially in accordance with their expectations or their desired experience. A stages audience sees what the artist wants them to see; he, the maker behind the performance or monument appears to have the upper hand when it comes it agency. This agency, however, is only superficial, as the social status of the audience was in fact a defining factor in the decision making process. Such logic appears simple from our contemporary perspective as it adheres to the economic principles of cultural capital today: the paying customer who donates financial capital has the agency to control cultural capital such as what is being performed or exhibited at cultural institutions. This is one of the rare instance, when the same modern-day-derived logic could have been part of the construction

of cultural concepts in the ancient world. The audience which would have been present at the burial of a high member of the echelons of nomadic societies would have been there as part of social etiquette. If such an audience was in fact in attendance, it is hard to imagine that high-ranking members of the warrior elite would not have comprised the main corpus of attendees. While the assumption that such a protocol as defined by a set of social norms and expectations did exist among these nomadic groups in a similar way it does today is problematic due to the above mentioned dichotomy between modern and pre-historic logic, here, we must let the object speak for itself. We have enough consistent material derived from textual records of the Greeks and Chinese which tells us that nomadic societies such as the so-called Scythians and Xiongnu had discernible social structure. The evidence provided by archaeology seems to support the accounts in texts: graves are of varying sizes and only some contain finds as expensive and exuberant as the ones at the grave of the Golden Man of Issyk. The inventory of the tomb is thus an intersection and embodiment of the social, economic and cultural capital of a member of the nomadic elite: it constitutes objectified assets which signified social status and a place designated within a social network.[409]

As well-defined social stratification most definitely was a reality in all the cultures examined in this study of animal art, we cannot imagine that such great objectified[410] capital as the goldwork and imported Chinese silks would have been put into the tomb

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[409] Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

[410] The term is derived from Bourdieu's discussion of types of cultural capital in "The Forms of Capital".
See: Bourdieu, Pierre. 1983. *Ökonomisches, Kulturelles und Soziales Kapital*. (Economic, Cultural and Social Capital). Göttingen: Schwartz.

regardless of the expectations of spectators. The meticulous arrangement of animals, both real and fantastic, in hierarchical order where realistic animals were placed on top was one of the strategies adopted to create an experience which was well-through through and anticipated by both the artisan and patron. In this regard, the Aluchaideng, Issyk and other vertically elongated headdresses created an affect which would have been completely meaningless but for the presence of a "staged" audience. It is hard to conceive of an audience which would not have been awe-struck by the incorporation of several hundred gold plaques in the attire of the Golden Man, or an audience which would have been indifferent to the visual peculiarity of the huge deer masks with carved images of hybrids placed on the horse heads from Pazyryk. As horses would not have carried such an ornament in battle, which is the usual context in which they would have been seen, their strategic placement and decoration in burials created a special, dramatic experience for the eyes of the spectator. It was the frame of this "staged" context which made the "staged" audience normalize the experience. Hybridity, animal transformation, and the vertical axis of placement would have been meaningless outside this frame of a commemorative ritual. The images inside the kurgans communicated messages which the audience would have been likely able to decode or at least sensually absorb as they took a brief glimpse at the contents of the chamber when it was exposed to view.[411]

This brings us to the third type of audience, an imagined one present in the afterlife. After the body was interred and the tomb sealed, none of the deceased's peers and family members would have seen the body again. This was their final insight into a carefully pre-

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[411] The issue was discussed briefly in a recent monograph dedicated to the relationship between image and audience in prehistoric art. See Bradley, Richard, 2009. *Image and Audience: Rethinking Prehistoric Art.* Oxford: Oxford University Press

calculated, imaginary world created within the funerary space. Whether and to what extent the arrangement within the tomb emulated the arrangement of a dwelling or any sort of setting from the deceased's lifetime is still undetermined. However, a tomb's spatial parameters were manipulated in ways so as to prepare the body for its second presentation to an audience, this time, an imagined one. That would have been the audience, or spectators believed to be present in the afterlife. The careful placement of textiles with zoomorphic hybrids then echoes the metamorphosis depicted on the personal adornments of the body. In the case of two culturally unrelated (both temporarily and spatially) tombs, those of Pazyryk and Noin Ula, textiles with specific animal compositions reminiscent of passage between liminal spaces were placed under the coffin, around it and on some occasions, on the walls which surrounded the coffin. Tomb no. 9 at Noin Ula also contained a textile with the face of an Indo-European man with a beard, likely a portrait of the deceased himself. That fragment had been placed above the head of the tomb occupant. These similarities in the mortuary traditions of culturally and ethnically distant peoples did not necessarily result from artistic communication and transfer of ideas. Rather, it was one common resolution to the conceptual problem of an imagined audience. The same is true of similarities in personal appearance. This is why we see the combination of a torque with animal head terminals, earrings and spiral (or conical) gold headdress time and time again in disparate cultural spheres from Thrace (Sveshtari tomb in Bulgaria) through the Pontic steppes to the northern Chinese periphery (Ordos Loop burials).

Keeping in mind the pastoral (nomadic) context for most of the burials subject to study in this dissertation, we should also take note of the role of the nomadic worldview in the construction of the afterlife and its relationship with the various audiences. The

nomadic cultures in the Iron Age made full use of their portable dwellings, known as *ger*

in Mongolian. We know that late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age cultures in the region of

Central Eurasia placed significance on visualizing these dwellings as seen from images

carved or pecked on a plethora of rock complexes deposited across a large geographic

domain.[412] The tradition of covering the wall and ceiling surfaces of a portable dwelling

has persevered in the present-day among local non-nomadic populations in countries such

as Mongolia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, to name a few. We know from Chinese sources

that the collapsible yurt dates back to at least the Tang dynasty.[413] Variations of this

dwelling structure, however, were already fully functioning in nomadic societies as early

as the Bronze Age. We do not know with certainty when the practice of decorating the

interior surfaces of these dwellings started. Yet, it is not too far-fetched to theorize, as I

have briefly done in Chapter 2, that enveloping the surfaces around the body of the

deceased with elaborately ornamented textiles would have been familiar to the life

audience and to the tomb occupant from their everyday life. The placement of zoomorphs

to echo the decorative patterns on the body and the creation of a continuous visual formula

were perhaps conscious decisions to specifically designate the tomb as ritual rather than

practical space, but the concept behind textile placement would not have necessarily been

constrained to tomb decoration. All the findings in this dissertations lead to one major

conclusion: while animal-style objects could have once been used in everyday situations

by the deceased, the art of their arrangement to properly respond to the expectations of

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[412] Andreeva and Atwood, "Camp and Audience Scenes", p. 6-7

[413] Kriukov, Michael V., Kurylev, Vadim P., 1992. "The Origins of the Yurt: evidence from Chinese sources of the third century B.C. to the thirteenth Century A.D." In: Seaman, Gary (Ed*.), Foundations of Empire: Archaeology and Art of the Eurasian Steppes*. University of Southern California, Los Angeles, pp. 143–156.

several distinct types of audiences, notably a staged and an imagined one, was the most important aspect of space making.

The Politics of Animal Style: A Different Son of Heaven?

One should not leave this material with the impression that animal style was utilized as funerary solely because of religious beliefs. In fact, the lengthy discussion of audience and the proper differentiation of various audience types is crucial in this matter. Only the imagined audience would have seen the metamorphosis of zoomorphs on headdresses, animal masks and jewelry, or the symbolic bees and *soma* preparation ceremony on the Noin Ula carpet. The very belief that such an audience was present after death already establishes the existence of a set of religious or spiritual beliefs associated with intangible concepts such as life and death and what happens to the body and spirit during both. Other than that, however, the production of animal art had little to do with any particular spiritual system (except for, perhaps, standing deer stones which would not have required the usage of precious metals or particularly arduous labor). This dissertation has shown that the most important implication of the dramatic designs and compositions of animal style was actually a politically-driven attempt to turn the tomb into a cosmological realm of political negotiation of power and legitimacy. As mentioned above, the living audience at the burial would have seen the wealth and specifically the presence of unique foreign objects buried with the body. The majority of nomadic groups along the Chinese northern periphery, notably the Xiongnu, were reluctant alliances of tribal leaders. As one *chanyu* passed away, a successor came into power. The same was true of the various subgroups of the Scythians and Saka who dominated the steppes. Succession often entailed struggles for legitimacy. The purposeful deposition of "exotic" objects from far-flung (often sedentary) domains

into the burial of a nomadic royal would have either affirmed or enhanced his legitimacy as an awe-striking ruler in the eyes of those attending the ceremony. The elite needed to strategically show off those material things which demonstrated their vast network of connections while alive. Thus, it is not surprising to see animal-style objects readily accepted into the aesthetics of Chinese elite burials: those in the center of the imperial and cosmological domain also needed to show their extending dominion over the exotic periphery. Thus, animal art became a currency of political clout in which exoticizing the "other" was in fact a mindful political strategy.

The question of legitimacy brings us to the last segment of this study, the legacy and lingering traces of animal art beyond the Iron Age. This dissertation has chosen to address the commonplace reluctance to talk about animal art as an artistic phenomenon beyond the first millennium BCE. This is not to say that there was not a noticeable waning of this visual tradition in Eurasia after the disappearance of the Xiongnu. With the Xianbei, we start seeing a new trend, the occasional integration of animal-style decorative elements, rather than full objects, into the burials of the elite. Even as late as the Golden Horde polity of the Mongol empire, an entity comprised of both sedentary and nomadic populations, there are occasional finds of decorative objects with animal style motifs, reminiscent of the Xianbei and even Kitan Liao visual traditions. It is possible that making a burial appear "eclectic" with the inclusion of decorative designs rooted in the nomadic tradition also had to do with legitimacy and establishing the sedentary and nomadic connections of the deceased during their lifetime.

In a Central Eurasian context, a tomb becomes a mini-unit reflective of the desire to attest to one's identity on one's path to political legitimacy. Thus, the human-object

entanglement was the defining feature of animal art with regard to how it enacted burials as discursive, dynamic spaces of both religious and political significance.

It seems fitting to leave off where it all started: Owen Jones' *Grammar of Ornament*. When I first came across this 19th-century work in one of my art classes in college, I was overwhelmed with ineffable curiosity and a palpitating desire to expand on some of the illuminating aspects of this work. Despite its undeniable Euro-centric view of the decorative arts and the occasionally uninformed descriptions of Chinese, Indian and Near Eastern approaches to ornament, Owen's work has left an indelible trace in the study of minor arts around the world. The book's last segment "Leaves and Flowers from Nature" states that nature, in all of its forms, is the single most important underlying principle in decorative art. "Going back to nature as the ancients frequently did", he claims, is the key to creating innovative designs.[414] Owen goes on to state that truly great art consists of idealizing, not copying the forms of nature; he frequently praises the flora and fauna as a limitless source of inspiration and considers the mere imitation of these forms a sign of artistic decline. Owen wrote *The Grammar of Ornament* as a handbook for students of design and architecture; he thus encourages the reader to turn back to the decorative arts of antiquity and study the unencumbered virtuosity of ancient masters who embraced the variety of form in nature thus giving birth to new individualized patterns. This dissertation has consistently favored viewing animal-style art as inherently political, as social and objectified cultural capital, in great part defined by the audience. It has also alluded to the possibility that animal-style art was the steppe elite's de-facto visual language with its own specific idioms and tropes (such as the visual synecdoche of zoomorphic junctures); as

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[414] Jones, Owen, 1856. *The Grammar of Ornament.* London: Day and Son, p. 156

such, the acquisition, deposition and requisition for animal-style objects would have required a certain level of fluency in this visual communication system within the highest echelons of nomadic societies, as well as the sedentary polities which interacted with them. The entanglement of social status, military and political clout, and the ecology of the steppe landscape is not at odds with the simple human propensity for conceptual experimentation with nature's forms, of which Owen's book serves as a reminder. The Iron Age masters, living in a state of great dependence on nature, fashioned fantastic beasts out of gold, silver, bronze, wood and felt, and continued to experiment with design in the making of mortuary space. Animal art thus has a huge epistemological potential in the general advancement of the field of decorative art.

Appendix:

List of Museums with Significant Collections of Animal-style Art*

US and Canada

Metropolitan Museum of Art

Freer Gallery of Art

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Art and Archaeology

Ariadne Galleries

Brooklyn Museum

Royal Ontario Museum

Russian Federation

State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg

The State Museum of Oriental Art

Archaeological Museum of Ufa

Perm Museum of the Local Lore

Irkutsk Regional History Museum

Irkutsk Museum of the Local Lore

National Museum of the Republic of Tuva

National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan

Kazakhstan

National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana

Central Museum in Almaty

Nazarbayev Center, Astana

China

National Museum of China 中国国家博物馆

Ordos Museum 鄂尔多斯博物馆

Inner Mongolia Museum, Hohhot 內蒙古博物院

Shaanxi History Museum 陕西历史博物馆

Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Museum, Urumqi 新疆维吾尔自治区博物馆

Mongolia

National Museum of Mongolia (Монголын үндэсний түүхийн музей)

Zaisan Memorial Museum

Afghanistan

National Museum of Afghanistan

Europe

Magyar National Museum of Hungary, Budapest

National Museum of Historical Treasures, Ukraine

Institute of Archaeology, Kiev, Ukraine

National Museum of Archaeology, Bulgaria

Archaeological Museum of Varna, Bulgaria

British Museum, London, UK

Neue Museum, Berlin, Germany

Abbeg-Stufftung Collection, Switzerland

*This list does not include Germanic and Anglo-Saxon animal-style collections from the Migration Period.

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