

# The Textiles from Pazyryk

## A Study in the Transfer and Transformation of Artistic Motifs

KAREN S. RUBINSON

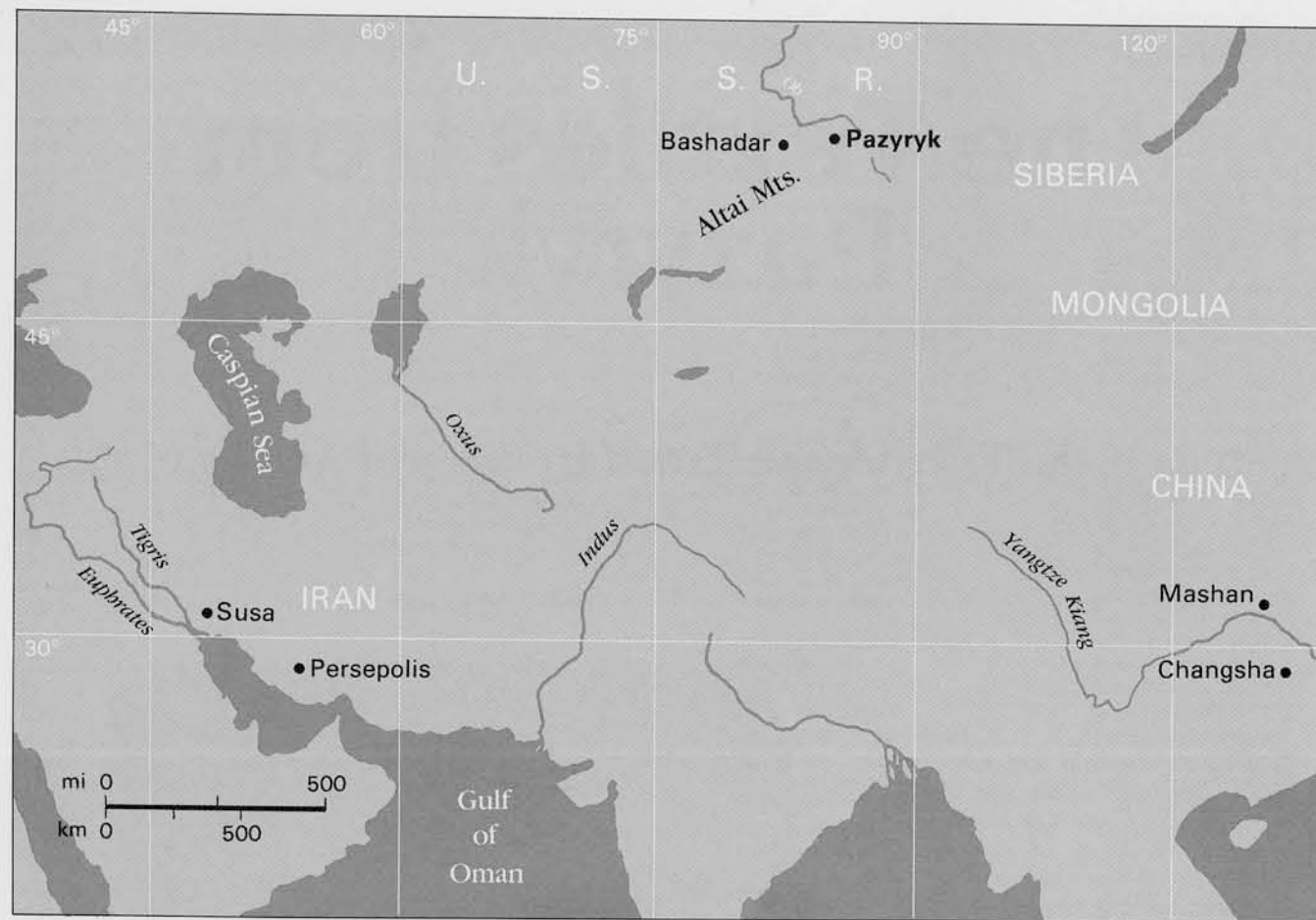
Winters are cold and summers brief at the site of Pazyryk in the Altai Mountains of Siberia. Here, in a high valley of their summer pastures, a group of horse-riding nomads once buried their dead, and with them, a rich assortment of local and imported goods that reflected the wealth and status of the deceased.

These burials took place more than 2300 years ago. Yet by a fortuitous combination of circumstances, some of the most fragile materials survived the passage of time remarkably untouched by ordinary processes of disintegration and decay. These circumstances were both natural and man-made. The tombs were broken into shortly after the burials took place. Ground water flowing into the broken wooden chambers beneath mounds of stone formed ice that preserved the organic riches of the tombs until archaeological excavation in this century. Left behind as

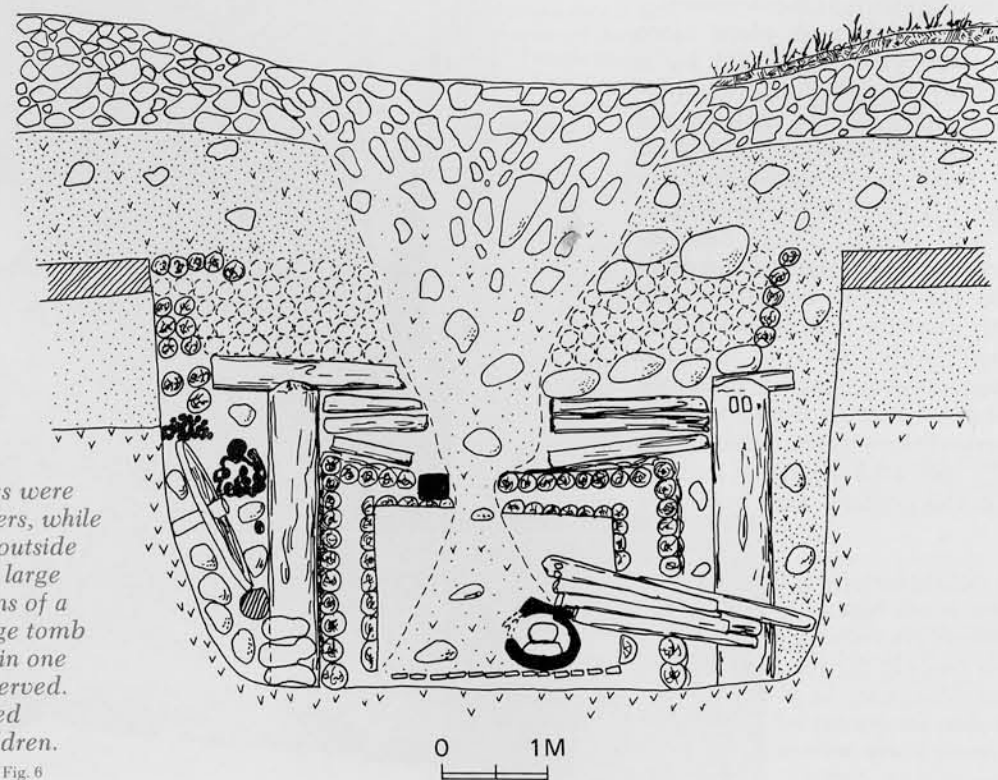
*1*  
*This felt shabrak from kurgan 5 illustrates one type of local geometric ornament. Every other row is made of the same two colors of felt. However, the positions of the colors are alternated, creating an extremely lively pattern.*

Charrière 1979: Pl. 118





2  
Map showing the places mentioned in text. Susa and Persepolis (far left) were capitals of the Achaemenid empire.



3  
Kurgan 5 at Pazyryk. Bodies were placed in the burial chambers, while the horses were entombed outside the structures. Three of the large tombs contained the remains of a man and a woman, one large tomb contained only a man, and in one the body/ies were not preserved. The smaller tombs contained remains of women and children.

Drawn by Jon Snyder after Rudenko 1970: Fig. 6

worthless by the robbers, these remains included the bodies of humans and horses, fabrics, fur, leather, wood, and other often fugitive materials.

Among the frozen finds were a large number of superbly preserved textiles that have enriched scholarly discussion ever since their excavation. Ancient textiles are rarely preserved, and archaeologists seldom have the opportunity to excavate and study actual fabrics. They are usually known to us through artistic representations in less fragile materials, if they are known at all. The splendid fabrics from Pazyryk tell us much about the artistic preferences and cultural characteristics of those buried there. From them we can learn both about the origins of the imported fabrics and about local nomadic products. In addition, we can observe the elusive process of

"influence," that is, the transfer and transformation of artistic motifs, a fundamental component of art historical analysis.

Pazyryk is situated in what is today the Soviet Union, near the Chinese and Mongolian borders (Fig. 2). Eight burial mounds, called *kurgans* (Fig. 3), have been excavated by Soviet archaeologists, seven in 1947-49 by S.I. Rudenko, and one in 1929 by M.P. Gryaznov. That those buried here were nomadic is clear from the types of burial goods: horses furnished with harnesses bits, saddles and saddle blankets, whips, structural parts of tents, felt hangings and carpets, portable wooden tables with removable legs, wooden pillows, fabric and leather containers, and usually only a single clay vessel. The felt and woven clothing of the males included long stockings and short tunics (Fig. 4), typical of

horse-riding nomads. The trousers and boots which were worn with such tunics were not identified at Pazyryk, although they have been found at other similar sites in the area.

Although the date of the Pazyryk burials has been a matter of debate, recent collaborative work by the members of the Trans-Asian Seminar of the Institute of Asian Research, City University of New York, has established that they should be placed in the second half of the 4th through the beginning of the 3rd century B.C. (see box on The Tombs). At that time, the state of Qin on the western border of China was becoming increasingly powerful. It may have been the demand for luxury goods by the aristocracy of this state that stimulated international trade, resulting in the deposition in the Pazyryk tombs of goods from China as well

### The Tombs at Pazyryk

There are several kurgans in the Pazyryk group, of which five large and three small ones have been excavated. The tombs were log-cabin-like structures placed in a pit in the ground. On top of each tomb the soil from the pit was raised in a mound, over which stones were piled up. The stones sheltered the ground below from the heat of the sun, causing lenses of permafrost that retarded the decay of the organic materials.

The annular rings of the wooden grave structures of the five largest kurgans yielded a relative chronology that spanned 48 years: kurgans 1 and 2 were both built in year 0, kurgan 4 was built in year 7, kurgan 3 was built in year 37, and kurgan 5 in year 48 (Rudenko 1970). A presence/absence seriation by the author places the smaller kurgan 6 at or near the end of the relative sequence. Kurgans 7 and 8 contained no material to support a relative or absolute date.



4  
This man's shirt from kurgan 2 is made of three different pieces of cloth varying in thickness and color and woven from hemp or kendir. The shirt is sewn together with sinew and trimmed with red woolen cords. It is 104 cm long and 93 cm wide at the shoulder.

Charrière 1979: Fig. 320

## 5a,b

Pile carpet, 1.83 by 2 m, has five borders separated by narrow bands of squares. The outer and inner borders are highly schematized lion-griffins with heads turned over their backs. The second border from the edge has horses and riders (5b). The next two borders contain respectively (1) stylized floral elements and (2) fallow deer. The central field of the carpet consists of a 4-by-6 arrangement of banded squares containing stylized floral elements that may ultimately be derived from the quatrefoils on Assyrian prototypes. The carpet is tied with a Turkish knot, 3,600 to the square decimeter.

a: Charrière 1979: Pl. 199. b: Rudenko 1968:40



## 6

The Chorasmians are one of the several horse-riding peoples represented walking beside their mounts on the Persepolis reliefs. The bobbed tail and tied-up forelock on this horse recall the treatment of the horses illustrated on the carpet found at Pazyryk.

Courtesy of The Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago



## 7

This detail of a saddle blanket, or shabrak, from kurgan 5 shows the delicate Chinese embroidery of the imported fabric. The silk is faded, but the original colors, in limited areas against a broad pale ground, would still have been subtle. The Pazyryk nomads added strips of blue and red felt ornamented with foil cut-outs to form the border of the shabrak.

Charrière 1979: Fig. 114

as west, central, and south Asia.

The nomads could have acquired these goods as protection payments from traders passing through the territories they controlled or as booty from raids on traders or entrepôts along the trade route. Additionally, the Chinese may have been providing the nomads on their borders with Chinese-made goods in order to guarantee a peaceful relationship with their potentially troublesome neighbors. Once in the hands of nomads on the northern or western borders of China, Chinese goods could easily have reached the Altai through more localized trade.

We do not know the names of the people buried at Pazyryk nor the language they spoke, for they did not leave any written records. All we have are their remarkable grave goods. However, these tell us much about the artistic preferences



## 8

This shabrak from kurgan 5 combines three imported textiles. Note how the fabric in the central panel has been pieced so that the squares containing stylized towers are oriented in several directions.

Photo by author, taken at the State Hermitage Museum in Leningrad

## 9

The archer on this glazed tile relief from the Palace of Darius at Susa wears a garment made from a textile decorated with crenelated towers stylized into a flat repetitive pattern. Compare the fabric found on the shabrak illustrated in Figure 8.

Courtesy of Musée du Louvre/AO

and cultural characteristics of those buried at the site, as well as the nature of the process of artistic borrowing. For example, which imported motifs were copied and which were ignored demonstrates the selective process of the transfer of artistic motifs. How imported motifs were transformed illustrates the abiding nature of native stylistic and iconographic preferences.

### The Textiles

It is generally apparent from the fabrics themselves which were locally made and which were imported. Locally made fabrics consisted of felts and plain woven wool and vegetable fibers, while the imported textiles included a pile carpet, tapestry-woven fabrics, and brocade-woven as well as embroidered silks. There are two dominant categories of imported



fabrics: one is Chinese silks and the other is woolen fabrics, including the pile carpet illustrating motifs inspired by the art of Achaemenid Iran (6th-4th century B.C.; see Fig. 5a, b).

#### Chinese Silks

The silks were both plain and decorated. One fine, plain woven fabric was made into a simple pouch, found in kurgan 3. Another silk fragment, also from kurgan 3, was covered with a geometric pattern created by brocade weave; the pattern consisted primarily of rhombs and triangles preserved as grey and green. The largest and most elaborate of the Chinese silks, from kurgan 5, was a piece of undyed raw silk on which an elegant embroidery of birds and floral elements was chain stitched (Fig. 7). Similar brocade and embroidered silks, dating to the Late Warring States period (4th-3rd century B.C.; Li 1985), have been excavated at Mashan, in the ancient Chinese state of Chu. In fact, the similarity of the silks from Pazyryk and Mashan is one element in the argument for a late 4th century date for Pazyryk.

What is particularly interesting about the embroidered silk is how the people at Pazyryk used this imported fabric. It has been incorporated into a shabrak, or saddle blanket, cut and stitched together without regard to the pattern in order to fit the felt base. The multi-colored embroidery was enhanced by a border consisting of two strips of blue felt outlining a wider center strip of reddish-brown felt. This central strip had saw-toothed cut outs filled with gold leaf and tin foil, some of which is now missing. The rear of the shabrak was trimmed with three tassels made of yak hair held in leather caps. Such a bright, vibrant enhancement of the delicate Chinese silk is in keeping with the aesthetic apparent in the art of Pazyryk, an aesthetic that can often be seen today among nomadic peoples in Asia.

#### Imported Pictorial Woolens

There were several textiles that probably came to Pazyryk from somewhere in western or central

Asia. In the past, scholars have generally identified these textiles as Achaemenid, and on this basis, some dated Pazyryk to the 5th century B.C. However, most of these figured woven fabrics, although showing Achaemenid influence, differ in significant ways from the art of the Achaemenid court. They are probably removed in both time and space from the royal Achaemenid centers of production.

Three different west/central Asian textiles were combined in a shabrak that came from kurgan 5 (Fig. 8). The central part of the shabrak is made up of several sections of a single piece of fabric decorated with squares containing stylized towers. This motif is derived from that seen on the costume of archers decorating a glazed

most of these figured woven fabrics...are probably removed in both time and space from the royal Achaemenid centers

brick frieze from a palace complex of the Achaemenid court at Susa (Fig. 9). The pieces of the tower fabric are laid in various directions, indicating that the decorative motif itself was not of particular meaning to the person who made the shabrak.

The borders of this shabrak consist of a second piece of imported woven wool (Fig. 10). According to the published reconstruction, the original fabric showed pairs of women on either side of a censer (Fig. 11). Both women were crowned, although the second figure on each side is smaller than the first, which would indicate subservient status in Achaemenid iconography. The larger woman holds a flower and raises her hand in an attitude of respect. The smaller holds a towel, a common attribute of a servant, as can be seen for example in the Treasury Relief from Persepolis, another royal Achaemenid building com-

plex (see Ghirshman 1964).

The complex imagery of this textile is clearly derived from Achaemenid iconography (Fig. 12), although it is not canonically Achaemenid. However, the treatment of this textile as it was incorporated into the ornament of the shabrak indicates that the imagery as a whole had no intrinsic meaning to the nomads. Although the fabric is cut along the vertical axis and the forms of the human figures are generally preserved, the censer is usually destroyed and the women sometimes separated. In the section of the border along the rear of the shabrak, the larger figure is often partially obliterated by the black colt fur that frames the border.

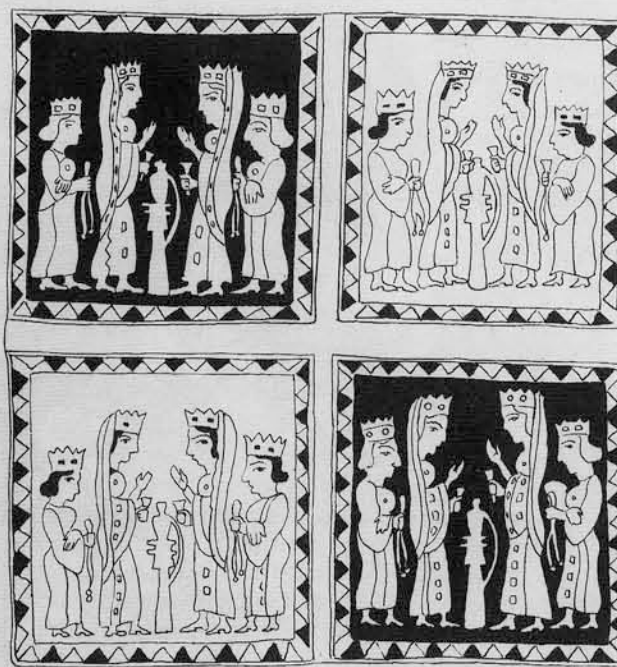
Just as the shabrak made from the Chinese silk was brightened by embellishment, this shabrak made with the pictorial fabrics is also trimmed with gold leaf and tin foil, here applied as squares on the black fur. The five tassels at the back are made from red wool held in wooden ovoid caps which were apparently painted blue.

The breast strap for this shabrak was made of felt covered by a third imported pictorial fabric, a strip of walking lions with open



10  
Detail of the imported textile that forms the border of the shabrak illustrated in Figure 8. The figures are derived from Achaemenid prototypes.

Rudenko 1968: Pl. 65



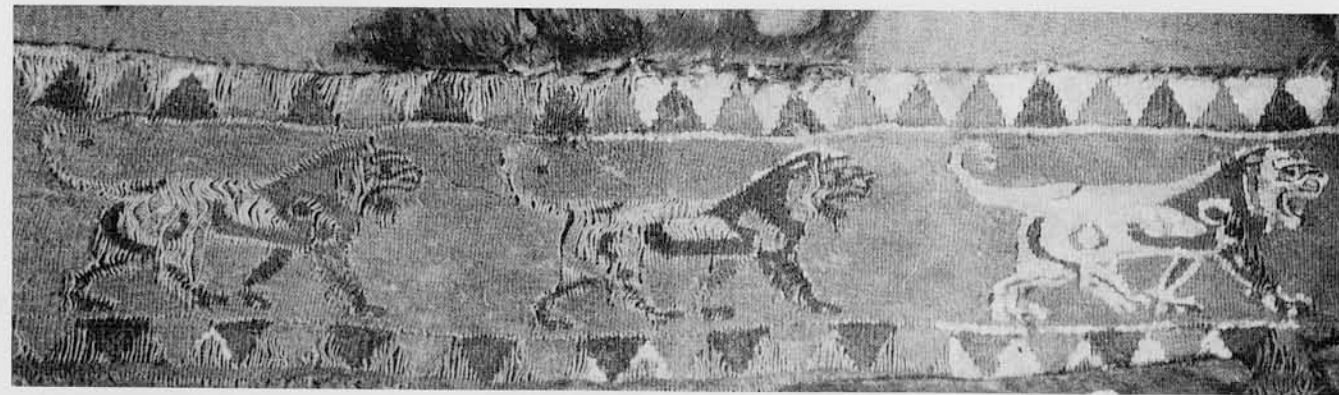
11  
Before the textile shown in Figure 10 was cut up to form the shabrak border, it probably looked like this.

Rudenko 1968: Pl. 64

mouths and upraised tails (Fig. 13). This fabric is closer to Achaemenid prototypes than the others discussed above. However, it shares the same dentate border and is technically similar, thus presumably originating in the same location as the other figural woolens. Like the shabrak itself, the lion fabric is edged with colt fur and metal foil squares, thus further enlivening and enriching the effect of the horse trapping.

#### A Pile Carpet

Another textile of west/central Asian origin is the famous pile carpet, also from kurgan 5 (Fig. 5a). Like the pictorial textiles, this carpet has often been called Achaemenid; like the woven fabrics, the carpet is made with some Achaemenid inspiration, which can be seen in the row of horses and horsemen along the outer frieze (Fig. 5b). However, the horsemen



13  
The shoulders and flanks of these lions are marked by vari-colored muscular stylizations. These are often reduced to a "dot-and-comma" in the art of Achaemenid Iran, a motif assimilated into the art of Pazyryk.

Rudenko 1968: Pl. 71



12  
The royal figures depicted on this impression of an Achaemenid seal are both larger than the suppliant, in contrast to the women on the shabrak border seen in Figure 10. Note, however, the similar attire of the royal women and the similar shape of the censer.

Courtesy of Musée du Louvre/AO

alternately walk and ride. In contrast, on the reliefs at Persepolis (an Achaemenid royal capital), the horsemen always walk alongside their mounts in the standard court presentation of this motif (Fig. 6). In addition, the spotted fallow deer, which appears on the inner frieze of the carpet, is an animal characteristic of Transcaucasia and Siberia, suggesting that the carpet was manufactured somewhere beyond the Achaemenid court.



14a,b  
The pendants from this felt saddle cover from kurgan 1 are complex compositions of two horned feline heads facing downwards and a ram or goat head nose up between them. Within the curled horn is a rosette in place of the ear. (b) The crested griffin on the body of the saddle cover has a "dot-and-comma" ornament on the haunch.

a: Rudenko 1968: Pl. 13. b: drawing by Jon Snyder after Rudenko 1970: Pl. 170

Regardless of where it was manufactured, it is the earliest well-preserved pile carpet thus far excavated. Certainly its rich colors and animal imagery appealed to the nomads at Pazyryk. And its exotic origins surely made it very valuable. This carpet, as well as the textiles incorporated into the two shabraks, gives us some idea of the variety and richness of the imported objects that found their way into the hands of these nomads.

#### Local Fabrics

In contrast with the imported pieces, textiles made locally at Pazyryk were for the most part not woven but made of felt, a common nomadic product. At Pazyryk, felt was used for clothing, footwear,

### Local Style

Local style has been defined most cogently by Winter as "when a significant number of objects of different media and/or by different hands from a single place manifest similar characteristics of style" (1977: 372). Generally, these similar characteristics include choice of subject matter, treatment of details, representation of spatial

relationships, and methods of manufacture, among other art historical considerations. These characteristics are usually defined by close visual analysis. In the case of Pazyryk, visual analysis by the Trans-Asian Seminar was combined with a presence/absence seriation of motifs and decorative elements by the author, since there were large numbers of objects to analyze. The seriation made it easy to see

which elements, both local and borrowed, were present in all the tombs and which were limited in their distributions. Since all the excavated Pazyryk tombs did not have complete preservation, the noting of only the presence or absence of a motif compensated in some measure for larger quantities preserved in some kurgans. Obviously, "absence" is not completely certain in the more poorly preserved tombs.

headgear, shabraks, saddle covers, wall hangings, and rugs (Fig. 1). Felt is made by subjecting sheared, carded wool to a warm wet alkaline solution and applying pressure. This causes the wool fibers to interlock, creating a warm, strong, waterproof textile which can be made in a range of thicknesses. The felt from Pazyryk was apparently all made from sheep's wool.

Wool was also used in some locally woven fabrics, found in fragments in several of the tombs. This wool cloth was usually red, although there are coverlets made of dark brown fabrics with whole and cut loops. Shirts were made of woven vegetable fibers, either hemp or *kendyr* (a strong fiber similar to hemp); however, most of the preserved clothing was of leather and fur (Fig. 15). But it is the artifacts made of felt, together with the wooden objects, that yield the richest inventory of local imagery.

### Local Style

The local artistic vocabulary consisted primarily of animals and

animal elements belonging to a bone and woodcarving tradition that extended back hundreds of years in the Siberian region (see box on Local Style). The roots of the tradition can be seen in carved horn and bone animals of the 3rd to 2nd millennium B.C. excavated in the region. In nomadic burials slightly earlier than Pazyryk, such as Bashadar, also in the Altai, an

textiles made locally at Pazyryk were for the most part not woven but made of felt

abundance of carved wooden animals ornamenting the grave goods were preserved (Jettmar 1967).

Animals in paired combat, animals with hindquarters twisted 180 degrees, isolated animal heads, antlers with bird-headed tines, and the prevalence of wolf, elk, feline, and bird-of-prey motifs were characteristic of the local style. In addition to animals, lively geo-

metric ornaments, often based on floral elements, were common.

Polychrome and brightly colored objects were favored in all media, as was demonstrated by the treatment of the imported textiles made into shabraks. The effect of the burial inventory when it was intact must have been dazzling. Wooden objects were covered with metal foils, painted, and decorated with leather attachments. Leather was covered with metal foil, painted, or decorated with felt, fur, and other materials. Felt was appliquéd, cut-out, decorated with metal foil, embroidered, dyed, and enhanced with wool yarn and horse hair.

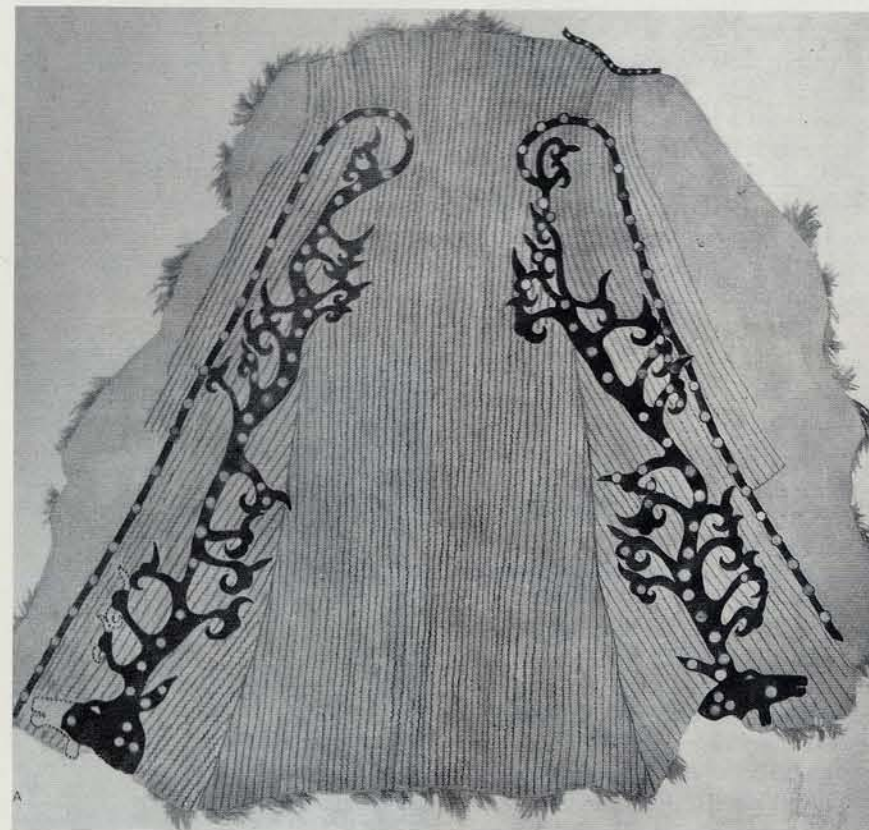
### The Impact of Imported Objects

The foreign luxury goods at Pazyryk were certainly prized for their inherent value as well as their exoticism. As we have seen, some ornamented items ordinarily embellished with local materials. Others, such as the pile carpet, as well as a Chinese bronze mirror and a silver mirror from central Asia, presumably were used for the functions for which they were originally crafted. But some imported objects had a further effect on the people buried at Pazyryk; they influenced their art.

Scholars have noted that artistic "influence" has two components. It is not only the images available from the so-called sending cultures but also the selection or choice among them by the receiving culture that together make up "influence". That process of selection is clear at Pazyryk, where only a limited number of the many foreign objects seen by the nomads inspired local imitation.

15  
This man's caftan from kurgan 2 is made of sable, reinforced by rows of sinew stitches. The fur is on the inner side and the outside is decorated with leather cut-outs of deer with elaborate antlers that branch into birds' heads. The leather appliqué is embellished with disks of gold foil.

Rudenko 1970: Pl. 151





16  
The lion-like ears and striated beard of the Bes head on this detail of an Achaemenid necklace are two of the characteristic Bes features found on the carved wooden heads on the Pazyryk bridle illustrated in part in Figure 17. Notice also on this necklace the representations of horsemen walking beside their horses. Portable objects such as this necklace could easily have found their way to Central Asia and Siberia from the west. H. of Bes head 4 cm.

Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art

There are many examples at Pazyryk of imported images or formal elements appearing on locally made objects. Sometimes the borrowing appears to have been an isolated event, occurring only once in the Pazyryk inventory. Other originally foreign images were incorporated into the local artistic vocabulary and are found on many different objects.

Although in some cases the local artist copied the foreign elements quite closely, in many cases the borrowed images were transformed under the influence of local style and iconography. Four cases, three of them occurring in textiles, will illustrate these processes of transfer and transformation.

#### Bes Head

Animals dominated local imagery, and human figures were not usually portrayed. As we have seen, the people at Pazyryk were exposed to at least one example of imported human imagery, that of the standing woman on the pictorial woolen fabric. As far as we know, based on the materials preserved in the tombs, there was no effort on the part of the Pazyryk people to copy such standing human figures. How-

ever, in one instance, they did copy another quasi-human image, that of the head of Bes, a genie of Egyptian origin who was also popular in Achaemenid art (Fig. 16).

Although no figures of Bes were found in the Pazyryk tombs, some of the five heads on a bridle from kurgan 1 (Fig. 17) were clearly copied from a Bes image that must have been imported into the area. The round cheeks, prominent eyes, rounded tab-like ears, and hair and beard locks seen on Bes heads are also seen on four of the wooden heads on the Pazyryk bridle. The

17  
In Achaemenid art, Bes is represented with a lion's ears, a mane that has the appearance of a beard, and sometimes a feathered headdress (see Fig. 16). This ornament from a bridle from kurgan 1, which was once covered with gold leaf, shows a bearded head with broad locks of hair, transforming the western iconography. The animal shape of the ears is retained, thrusting outward in balance of the inward curls at the ends of the beard.

Rudenko 1968: Pl. 100



fifth head, on the nose band of the bridle, is longer and narrower than the other four, and is a less exaggerated, more human face; it appears to be an experiment in portraiture unique at Pazyryk and in all of the Altai in this period.

Since human figures were not generally part of the artistic vocabulary of these people, how might we explain the presence of the heads on the bridle? It is possible that the explanation may be found in Herodotus's *History of the Persian War*, where he describes the customs of many different nomadic peoples of

the Eurasian steppe, all of whom shared an underlying common lifestyle. Herodotus tells us that one people, the Scythians, beheaded those whom they conquered in battle and brought the heads to their leader to prove worthy to share in the spoils. In addition, they often removed the skins from the heads, cured them, and hung them from the bridles of their horses (Herodotus IV,64). Even if those buried at Pazyryk did not follow such practices, they may have shared a belief in the power of the heads of enemies. Such a belief, combined with the common occurrence of isolated animal heads as part of their customary art, may have predisposed the Pazyryk artist to try this experiment in the representation of human heads.

#### Dot-and-Comma

In contrast, another borrowed image was widely used at Pazyryk: the body ornament called the dot-and-comma in the Near East, originally a stylization of musculature at shoulder and thigh (Fig. 14a,b). It is possible that this ornamenting of the surface appealed to the Pazyryk people because their traditional style was itself so highly decorated and colorful. For example, as was discussed above, wooden objects were embellished with gold foil, paint, and leather, and the imported textiles made more lively by borders of metal foil, felt, and fur. Moreover, traditional carved animals had textured surfaces and exaggerated features that were as decorative as the dot-and-comma ornament. Therefore, it seems likely that the imported materials that portrayed animals with dot-and-comma motifs—a pair of silver belt plaques from kurgan 2, the walking lion fabric (Fig. 13), the pile carpet from kurgan 5 (Fig. 5), or some other object not preserved in the tombs—provided inspiration for one more way to vary and enliven an image, thus appealing to local taste.

#### Crested Griffin

Some borrowings cluster in one or two graves, like the crested griffin, originally an image from the

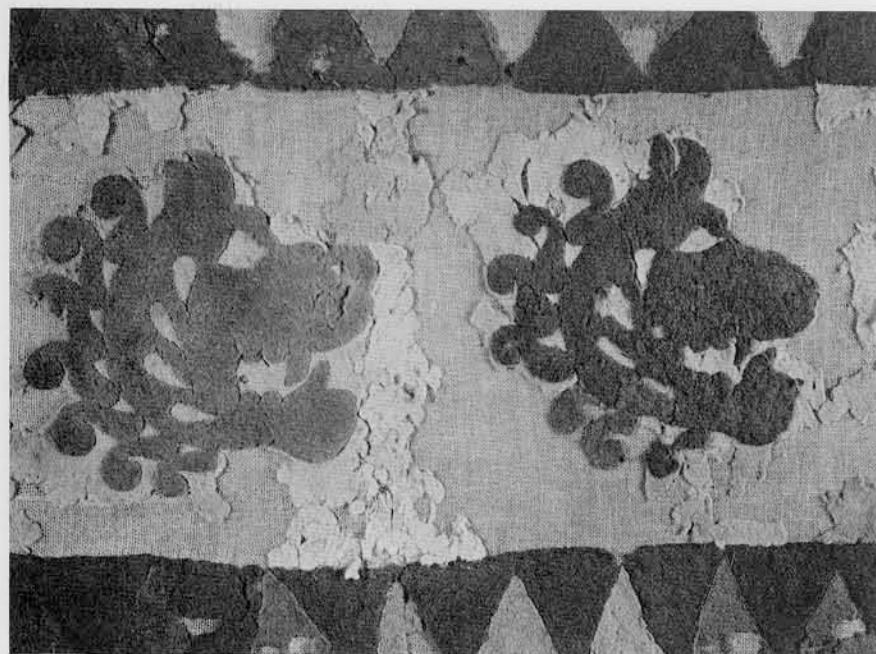


18  
This standard made of wood and leather comes from kurgan 2. Depicting a griffin attacking a stag, the sides are decorated with an incised goose held in the claws of another griffin with the body incised and the head in high relief. The composition clearly illustrates the dominant position of the griffin. Once painted and overlaid with gold, the standard is a splendid example of the energetic local style.

Charrière 1979: Pl. 358

4th century B.C. Greek world. Representations of griffins were found in the earliest two Pazyryk tombs, which were built in the same year. Also exclusively in these two tombs were images of cocks. Griffins (Fig. 18) and cocks share the large beak and crest of birds-of-prey favored in imagery in some earlier tombs in the Altai, such as Bashadar, as well as in the two tombs at Pazyryk. It is likely that those physical characteristics made the griffin image appealing to the creators of the local copies.

That the crested griffin was not found in the later Pazyryk graves, unlike, for example, the dot-and-comma pattern, reinforces the selective nature of the borrowing: the griffin is copied only by those for whom the beaked bird had particular meaning. We cannot know what the precise significance of the large-beaked and crested bird was, but it may have had a totemic meaning or have functioned as a clan symbol. Certainly it contained some kind of power, and the griffin, sharing the essential characteristics



19  
These lion heads formed an upper border on a felt hanging that was on the wall of kurgan 1.

Charrière 1979: Pl. 214

of the beaked bird, probably shared its meaning as well in the eyes of the Pazyryk people.

#### Lion Head

An image borrowed from western Asia and transformed by the people at Pazyryk is the lion head. The felt lion heads (Fig. 19) made at Pazyryk as a border on a wall hanging have as their prototype Achaemenid lion heads, such as a gold clothing appliqué (Fig. 20) which might easily have found its way to Pazyryk. Rather than being copied exactly, however, the imported lion heads become wolf-like. Their elongated snouts and the size and overlap of their teeth are taken from the image of the wolf, which is found widely in the art of Siberia before the time of Pazyryk, as well as in many objects found in the Pazyryk tombs.

It is likely that the wolf, like the beaked bird, had symbolic meaning for these nomads. We know from Herodotus about the Neuroi, who once a year become wolves for a few days before returning to their original human forms (IV,105). His report is possibly a misunderstood description of a ritual where individuals assume the costume of a tribal or clan totem.

The power of the image of the wolf, whatever its specific meaning, transformed the borrowed lion image. The image was clearly borrowed, since lions do not occur earlier in Altai art and are not native to the area. Was it borrowed because the lion resonated with the traditional imaginal vocabulary of powerful felines and wolves? It is striking that it is the traditional wolf

we cannot invariably assume that if no foreign contact is reflected in local goods, then no such contact existed.

rather than the traditional panther that colors the imported lion image. The two may be linked because the large teeth characteristic of the Achaemenid lion are also an essential element in the Altaic representation of wolves. Another factor that may have drawn attention to the lion-head image is the very fact that the imported inspiration may have been a disembodied head. As

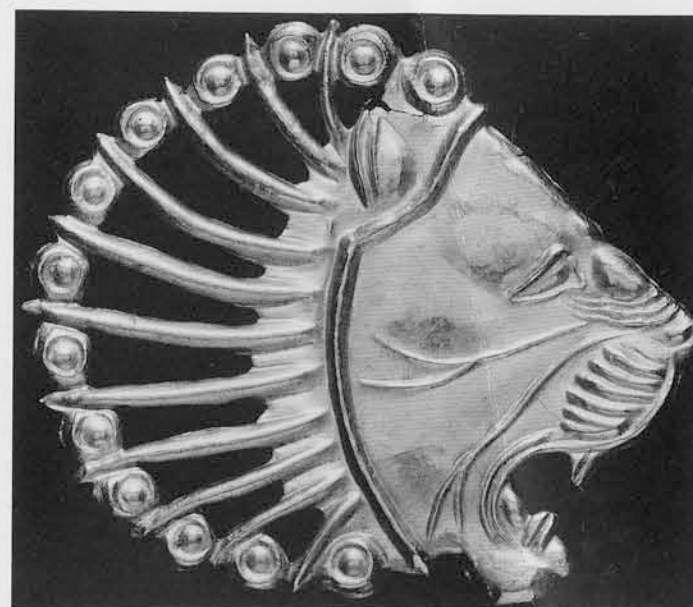
noted above, animal heads were an integral part of the Siberian artistic vocabulary, and an object such as an Achaemenid bracteate may thus have been perceived as familiar despite its exoticism.

#### Conclusion

The Bes head, dot-and-comma ornament, crested griffin, and lion head are not the only images that the Pazyryk people borrowed from among the foreign images imported into the Altai, but they are sufficient to illustrate the nature of artistic borrowing: although many foreign images found their way to Pazyryk due to external historic and economic circumstances, only a sub-set of those images was assimilated into the local art or even experimented with. There are, for example, apparently no attempts to copy the standing women or architectural towers illustrated on the pictorial textiles.

The example of Pazyryk also demonstrates that we cannot invariably assume that if no foreign contact is reflected in local goods, then no such contact existed. Choice and selections by local people can also play a role in the absence of imported images. At least one Chinese pictorial silk had reached Pazyryk, yet apparently it was not emulated. Whether this was because it had not been around long enough for local artists to borrow from or had no inherent interest for the local people cannot be determined on the evidence.

Pazyryk is unlike the ancient Near East, where associations of political power, economic strength, or military might often informed the selection of extrinsic images. In this remote area, where the imported goods were far separated from the places and peoples who created them, the exotic goods themselves apparently had power by virtue of their rarity. Thus, they enhanced the status of those that possessed them, but they came without context. Contexts were attributed to them by those at Pazyryk who saw the images and borrowed them, imbuing them with their own meanings and functions as they made them their own.



20  
This Achaemenid gold lion head probably was made as a clothing appliqué. Although this piece is not from Pazyryk, a similar object might have inspired the artist who created the lion heads illustrated in Figure 19.

Courtesy of Metropolitan Museum of Art

#### Bibliography

- Basilov, Vladimir N.**  
1989  
*Nomads of Eurasia*. Los Angeles: Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County.
- Bunker, Emma C., C. Bruce Chatwin, and Ann R. Farkas**  
1970  
"Animal Style" Art from East to West. New York: The Asia Society.
- Bunker, Emma, Annette Juliano, Trudy Kawami, Judith Lerner, and Karen Rubinson**  
1991  
"Collected Papers on Pazyryk." Source. Forthcoming.
- Burkett, M.E.**  
1979  
*The Art of the Felt Maker*. Kendal, England: Abbot Hall Art Gallery.
- Charrière, Georges**  
1979  
*Crafts of the Early Eurasian Nomads*. New York: Alpine Fine Arts Collection.
- Chirshman, Roman**  
1964  
*The Art of Ancient Iran*. New York: Golden Press.
- Jettmar, Karl**  
1967  
*Art of the Steppes*. New York: Crown Publishers.
- Li, Xueqin**  
1985  
*Eastern Zhou and Qin Civilizations*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Rolle, Renate**  
1989  
*The World of the Scythians*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Rudenko, Sergei I.**  
1968  
*Drevneishiy v Mirye khudozhestvennyye kovry i takani*. (The World's Most Ancient Artistic Carpets and Textiles). Moscow: Iskusstvo.
- 1970  
*Frozen Tombs of Siberia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Winter, Irene J.**  
1977  
"Perspective on the 'Local Style' of Hasanlu IVB: A Study in Receptivity." In *Mountains and Lowlands: Essays in the Archaeology of Greater Mesopotamia*, ed. Louis D. Levine and T. Cuyler Young, Jr., pp. 371-386. Malibu: Undena.

#### Acknowledgments

This article could not have been written without the work of the members of the Trans-Asian Seminar of the Institute for Asian Research, City University of New York. I initiated a collaborative study of Pazyryk by scholars whose specialties in art history and archaeology ranged from Greece to China because that approach could most effectively clarify the various elements which contributed to the art as well as more precisely date the tombs. The members of the Seminar are: Emma Bunker, Annette Juliano, Trudy Kawami, Judith Lerner, David Mitten. I am grateful for their enthusiasm as well as their scholarship, which yielded many of the data on which this article is based. I also wish to thank Annette Juliano, Director of the Institute for Asian Research, for allowing me the opportunity to create and lead the Trans-Asian Seminar as part of that Institute.

**Dr. Karen S. Rubinson** is Leader of the Trans-Asian Seminar of the Institute for Asian Research, CUNY. In addition, she directs Key Perspectives, a consulting firm in New York City that provides humanities information to business in the form of contract archaeology, historical exhibits, archival services, cultural background briefings, and films. She received her Ph.D. in Ancient Near Eastern Art and Archaeology from Columbia University. Before her current archaeological projects in the northeastern United States, she excavated in Iran and Turkey.

