

# Heightened Receptivity: Steppe Objects and Steppe Influences in Royal Tombs of the Western Han Dynasty

CATRIN KOST

LUDWIG MAXIMILIANS UNIVERSITY

Tombs of the kings of the Western Han dynasty (202 B.C.E.–9 C.E.) often contain burial items that are related to the material culture of the Eastern Eurasian Steppe. These artifacts are usually interpreted in a general sense, for instance as a sign for the fascination of the Han elite with the exotic. A closer analysis of relevant finds, however, shows different strategies of dealing with foreign influences. While the exchange with the empire's northern neighbors is evidenced through goods for which identical excavated parallels from the steppe exist, the royal tombs of the Han also contained items that resemble and reference steppe motifs and objects but were clearly produced locally and for local consumers. Especially the latter type of artifacts can thus not simply be interpreted as the passive byproduct of exchange relations. Instead, we have to acknowledge that design, production, and usage of these objects were based on conscious decisions. Based on the insight that objects always have a social function, this article argues that the Han elite not only appropriated steppe influences and motifs but also strategically (re)produced and integrated them into their world in order to redefine, enhance, and strengthen their position within their social framework.

A culture takes in what it is ready for . . . The state of the recipient, not the status of the donor, is the crucial element in reception.<sup>1</sup>

From 2009 to 2011, the Nanjing Museum conducted rescue excavations of the Western Han dynasty (202 B.C.E.–9 C.E.) tombs at Dayunshan 大雲山 (Xuyi County, Jiangsu province) and uncovered a mausoleum precinct of the feudatory kings of the kingdom of Jiangdu 江都. In total, three main tombs (M1, M2, M8), eleven attendant tombs, two chariot-and-horse pits, and two weaponry pits were excavated. The main burials, although heavily looted, still contained an impressive amount of funerary goods. Tomb 1 alone yielded more than 8,000 objects and more than 100,000 *banliang* 半兩 coins. Although none of the seals or inscribed vessels excavated mentions the name of the tomb owner, the presence of a jade suit and a jade coffin—burial goods used exclusively by members of the imperial family—as well as inscriptions referring to the year 128 B.C.E. suggest that the tomb occupant is Liu Fei 劉非 (169–128 B.C.E.; r. 153–128 B.C.E.), the first king of Jiangdu and one of the older brothers of Emperor Wu of Han 漢武帝 (156–87 B.C.E.; r. 140–87 B.C.E.).

Among the most striking features of this mausoleum precinct are burial goods that are material proof for far-reaching cultural contacts, for instance to modern-day Iran, southwest China, and northern Vietnam, but also to South Asia and other areas which could be reached through maritime trade routes. Other finds show clear connections to the material culture of the mobile-pastoralist groups of the Eastern Eurasian Steppe. Dating to a period when the

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1. M. C. Miller 1997: 243.

Chinese empire had entered a phase of frequent exchange in different forms with the steppe confederation called Xiongnu 匈奴 in Chinese sources, the presence of these goods comes as no surprise. In fact, Liu Fei's grave is only one of a number of royal graves whose burial items display steppe influences. These present themselves in different ways; on the one hand, the exchange with the empire's northern neighbors is evidenced through the display of goods for which identical excavated parallels from the steppe exist. With their decoration comprising depictions of real animals and composite creatures—sometimes shown individually, but also standing in groups or even fighting each other—these are visually salient. The royal tombs also contained objects that resemble and reference steppe motifs and items but were clearly produced locally and for local consumers. The latter type of artifacts can thus not simply be interpreted as the passive byproduct of exchange relations between the Han and the northern mobile-pastoralist groups. Instead, we have to acknowledge that design, production, and usage of these objects were based on conscious decisions.

The different strategies for dealing with the influx of foreign elements raise questions about the underlying motivations of the recipients. While it is generally accepted that objects always have a social function, recent publications have emphasized that the way “foreign” objects, people, and ideas are viewed, received, and treated strongly depends upon the context in which cultural contact happens (Ulf 2009, 2014; Rollinger and Schnegg 2014). Based on these insights, I propose that the steppe and steppe-style objects in the tombs of the Western Han dynasty kings and their consorts are more than just a sign for the general fascination of the Han elite with the exotic or their eagerness to be recognized as equal to their mounted neighbors (Rawson 2012). Instead we should see the artifacts in relation to the interaction between the Han empire and their northern neighbors but also the specific situation of the kings, which influenced the social and individual needs of this group.

Following a brief introduction to the historical context, I will give an overview of relevant sites and finds, illustrating different ways of integrating influences from the steppe. Focusing in more detail on a specific group of objects and the knowledge we have about them from written sources, I argue that the Han elite was especially receptive to influences from the steppe. They appropriated foreign objects and motifs and consciously integrated them into their world, which partly also gave rise to a change in social practices. I thus propose that the Western Han dynasty kings used steppe and steppe-style objects strategically to redefine, enhance, and strengthen their position within their social framework.

#### HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

##### *The Formation of the Han Dynasty and the Installation of the Kingdoms*

The emergence of the Han dynasty (202 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) is closely connected with the history of the preceding Qin dynasty (221–206 B.C.E.). After the death of its first emperor, Qin Shi Huangdi 秦始皇帝, in 210 B.C.E., the empire, which had been unified a mere eleven years earlier, quickly became unstable. The ensuing revolts led to the final collapse of the dynasty, marked by the execution of the second emperor, Qin Ershi Huangdi 秦二世皇帝, in 207 B.C.E. and the destruction of the capital the following year. For the next four years, two rebel leaders, Xiang Yu 項羽 and Liu Bang 劉邦, fought for supremacy over the empire during the so-called Chu-Han Contention 楚漢戰爭. Their struggle was not decided until 202 B.C.E., when Liu Bang defeated Xiang Yu in the Battle of Gaixia 垓下, adopted the title “emperor” *huangdi* 皇帝, and chose Chang'an 長安 as the capital for his empire.

The Han dynasty is often rightly seen as a golden age and as a dynasty that initiated various developments, thus laying foundations that were to influence China and its culture for

a long time.<sup>2</sup> Its founding, however, brought a return to already existing models of government. Liu Bang largely adopted the bureaucratic system of the preceding Qin dynasty and thus divided his realm into commanderies *jun* 郡 and counties *xian* 縣. One difference to the old system was that he formally acknowledged the existence of kingdoms *guo* 國 within the empire. Initially these were ruled by former companions who had supported his cause, by men who had been positioned to hold conquered territory, or by already existing kings,<sup>3</sup> who were spared from elimination since they agreed to submit to Liu Bang's authority.

Starting from 202 B.C.E. and until his death in 195 B.C.E., however, the new emperor Han Gaozu 漢高祖 began removing the kings then in power<sup>4</sup> and gradually replaced them with members of his family, making his brothers and sons "kings" *zhuhouwang* 諸侯王. Probably counting on his kin, clearly identifiable by the surname Liu, to support him, their military weakness must also have made them attractive candidates for these posts, as they could be easily removed as soon as there was no longer any need for them.

For the next few years the emperor spent little time consolidating his empire as he was constantly engaged in armed conflicts with the kings. In 195 B.C.E., during the battle against Ying Bu 黥布, king of Huainan 淮南 (r. 202–195 B.C.E.), he was struck by an arrow and died the same year. At the time of his death, the empire comprised ten kingdoms (Fig. 1A), nine of which were ruled by members of the Liu family.<sup>5</sup> Together with the fifteen commanderies existing by then, the kingdoms formed the major administrative units of the empire and employed a simplified version of the court administration.<sup>6</sup>

While the kings seem to have been fairly independent and enjoyed great privileges in the first years, both the location of their kingdoms in the east of the empire, far away from the capital, and the fact that these formed one big block whose size exceeded that of the fifteen commanderies posed a risk for the fragile empire that Gaozu left behind. The years following his death thus brought great changes for the kings and saw the beginning of a longer phase, in which the size of the kingdoms was constantly reduced and the rights of the kings curbed. Various measures were employed to achieve this, such as centralizing the collection of taxes, reverting lands to imperial control or dividing them among the children of a king who had died.

The repression reached new heights under Gaozu's widow empress Lü 呂 (r. 188–180 B.C.E.),<sup>7</sup> but also under the emperors Wen 漢文帝 (202–157 B.C.E.; r. 180–157 B.C.E.) and

2. The history of the Western Han dynasty has been discussed extensively. See, e.g., Lewis 2007 and the chapters in Loewe and Twitchett 1986. Nylan and Loewe 2010 and Nylan and Vankeerberghen 2015 provide a good overview, partly also focusing on aspects of material culture. More specifically on the kings see Loewe 1986a; 1986b.

3. Different kingdoms within the empire already emerged towards the end of the short-lived Qin dynasty, when the second and last emperor, Qin Ershi Huangdi, declared himself to be a king among others rather than an emperor in 207 B.C.E. (Lewis 2007: 19). Trying to reconstitute the pre-imperial status of a confederacy of states, Xiang Yu installed nineteen different kingdoms in the newly conquered empire and declared himself "Hegemonic King of Western Chu" (*Xichu bawang* 西楚霸王). The remaining eighteen kingdoms he gave to generals who had participated in the revolt but also to rivals, whom he hoped to appease (*ibid.*).

4. B. K. Miller (2011: 101) argues that Liu Bang did not want to install an autocratic empire in the first place and sees evidence for this already during the war between Xiang Yu and Liu Bang.

5. The kingdom of Changsha in the area of modern-day Hunan province remained in the hands of Wu Rui 吳芮, who was not a member of the imperial family. When in 157 B.C.E. his last descendant died without leaving an heir, the kingdom was turned into a commandery. In 155 B.C.E. it was re-established as a kingdom (Loewe 2000: 782).

6. Commanderies, kingdoms, and dependent states *shuguo* 蜀國 were divided into counties/prefectures *xian* 縣, nobilities (also called marquises) *hou* 侯, estates *yi* 邑, and marches *dao* 道 (Loewe 2006: 46).

7. While Empress Lü 呂后 (also 呂太后 or Empress Gao of Han 漢高后) already exerted great influence during the reign of the second emperor, Huidi of Han 漢惠帝 (r. 195–188 B.C.E.), once he died she made sure to put the

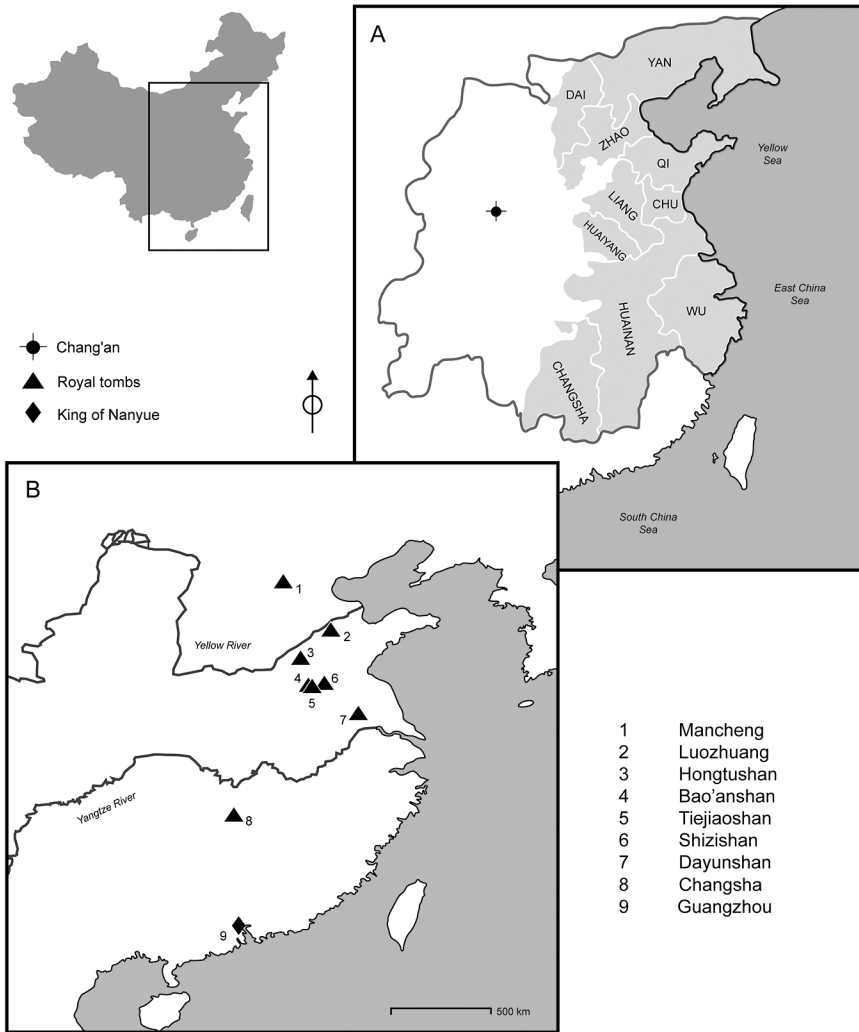


Fig. 1. A) Location of the ten kingdoms existing in 195 B.C.E. B) Key sites mentioned in the text.  
Sources: A) based on information in Loewe 2006: 197.

Jing 漢景帝 (188–141 B.C.E.; r. 157–141 B.C.E.). Especially the latter's drastic measures led to the growing dismay of the kings that culminated in the so-called "Revolt of the Seven Kingdoms" 七國之亂.<sup>8</sup> The central government quickly suppressed the upheaval and more

children of minor consorts on the throne. Both Emperor Qianshao of Han 漢前少帝 (r. 188–185 B.C.E.) and Emperor Houshao of Han 漢後少帝 (r. 184–180 B.C.E.) were too young to rule, thus opening the way for her to formally control the empire with the powers of a regent. For her actions, often carried out with brute force, she received harsh criticism especially in Ban Gu's portrayal, which greatly influenced later readings (van Ess 2006: 254). As has been pointed out, however, the description in Sima Qian's *Shi ji* is much more neutral, arguing that the empress aimed to stabilize the empire and succeeded in doing so (van Ess 2006 and 2014: vol. 1., chap. 2, esp. 114–30).

8. The revolt, which was initiated by Liu Pi 劉濞, the king of Wu 吳 (r. 195–154 B.C.E.), is usually explained as reaction to the continuous efforts to reduce the power of the kings. However, Liu Pi gave another reason, claiming

or less fully deprived the kings of their powers in the following years (Loewe 2006: 45). The reign of Wudi of Han (r. 140–87 B.C.E.) is thus usually seen as the time when they ceased to be a threat to the central government. While some kingdoms still existed and new ones were created during the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220 C.E.; see Bielenstein 1986a: 256–58; 1986b) the differences between kingdoms and commanderies barely existed any more, leading Michael Loewe (2006: 44) to conclude: “The story of the kingdoms is mainly one of Western Han.”

With the interior of China under firm control, Emperor Wu could concentrate on the expansion of his empire and on foreign relations, for instance with Korea and Central Asia.<sup>9</sup> It was during this period that the interaction between the population of the Central Plains and the mobile-pastoralist groups of the Northern Chinese Steppe, although long-standing, entered a new phase.

#### *Interaction between Han and Xiongnu*

Signs of intercultural contact between the population of the Central Plains and the mobile-pastoralist groups living to the north of it are by no means a novelty at the time of the Han dynasty. On the contrary, they are already visible in the material record of Zhou dynasty sites (Rawson 2013) as well as through inscriptions on contemporaneous bronze vessels (Shaughnessy 1983–1985). During the Warring States period and in the course of the expansion efforts of the states of Zhao 趙, Qin 秦, and Yan 燕, the exchange relations with the steppe became more direct. From 215 to 211 B.C.E. the campaigns of the Qin army under the leadership of General Meng Tian 蒙恬 curbed the living space of various mobile-pastoralist groups, thereby contributing to the emergence of the steppe confederation of the Xiongnu under the leadership of *Chanyu* 單于 Maodun 冒頓 (r. 209–174 B.C.E.) in 209 B.C.E. (Di Cosmo 1999: 14).<sup>10</sup>

Written information about the Xiongnu mainly comes from Chinese sources such as Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 *Shi ji* 史記 (SJ 110) and Ban Gu’s 班固 *Han shu* 漢書 (HS 94), which both devote a whole chapter to describing the Northerners and interaction with them.<sup>11</sup> According to these records, the Xiongnu used the upheavals following the death of the First Emperor in 210 B.C.E., which left a power vacuum at the northern fringes of the empire, to re-conquer the territory they had previously lost.<sup>12</sup> In 201 B.C.E., Han and Xiongnu armies met in the battle at Pingcheng 平城 in Taiyuan 太原 commandery (near modern-day Datong in Shanxi

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that he still had to settle accounts with emperor Jing. The latter had killed Liu Pi’s son with a gaming board over a game of chess (Loewe 2000: 335). For more details see Hulsewé 1981.

9. The ensuing military campaigns initiated cultural contacts and an exchange with other non-Chinese groups, such as those living in the area of modern-day southeast, south, and southwest China, and in northern Vietnam as well as on the Korean Peninsula. The quest for the Western Regions 西域 further resulted in an increased interaction with kingdoms in Central Asia. The specific nature of these exchange relations will not be discussed in the following; however, good overviews can be found in Loewe 1986a: esp. 163–70; 196–98; 210–13; and Lewis 2007: 128–54.

10. *Chanyu*, also transcribed *Shanyu*, is the term used for the leader of a steppe confederacy and is probably a loan word from another language. Psarras (2003: 127–28) provides a brief overview over different opinions on the origin of the term. For a translation of the story that the *Shi ji* tells of the rise of Maodun see Giele 2011: 256–59.

11. This article can only provide a brief overview of Sino-Xiongnu relations. For more details, see, e.g., Di Cosmo 2002: 161–254; Psarras 2003 and 2004. Psarras (2004: 76–93) also provides a chronology of all related events, covering the period from 201 B.C.E. to C.E. 216. Many scholars have translated and commented on relevant passages from the written records. For the latest translation of *Shi ji* chapter 110 including detailed annotations see Giele 2011.

12. Nicola Di Cosmo (2015: 58) has pointed out that the rise of steppe empires often corresponds with the decline or fall of sedentary empires, thereby disproving a common research paradigm according to which there is a

province), which proved disastrous for the Han. The armies of emperor Gaozu were besieged for several days, and as a result of their obvious victory, the Xiongnu demanded tributary payments. Shortly afterwards, these events led to the first *heqin* 和親 treaty, involving the marriage of a Han princess to the leader of the Xiongnu as well as annual payments in the form of goods such as silk, grain, and foodstuffs to the northern nomads.<sup>13</sup> While *heqin* treaties were a common form of appeasement during the Han and Tang dynasties, it has been pointed out that the first treaty changed the Han view of foreign relations fundamentally.<sup>14</sup> Both the term *heqin* (lit. “harmonious kinship relations”) and statements in written sources (SJ 99: 2719) suggest that through the measures described above the court was hoping to prevent further conflicts by eventually making the Xiongnu “kin.” The first few years indeed seem to have been marked by efforts to retain peace through formal diplomatic relations and the exchange of goods. However, from 198 to 139 B.C.E., at least ten *heqin* treaties were signed, broken, and renewed.<sup>15</sup> The constant violation of these agreements is usually seen as the main cause for the change in the strategy that the Han dynasty adopted towards their northern neighbors. A more aggressive course of action, however, was chosen only from the early years of the reign of Han Wudi, when the internal quarrels involving the kingdoms had ended. The attempted ambush and ensuing battle of Mayi 馬邑 in 133 B.C.E. are usually interpreted as the end of the amicable relations between Han and Xiongnu, and from 130 to 91 B.C.E. numerous clashes occurred, resulting in casualties on both sides. For the Xiongnu, the following years seem to have been marked by internal struggle, conflicts with other groups, and losses caused by severe temperatures during wintertime. In 53 B.C.E., the *Chanyu* Huhanye 呼韓邪 (also Huhaxie), leader over one of the five parties into which the Xiongnu by then had been divided, surrendered to the Han and signed a tributary contract including, among other things, the obligation to pay homage to the emperor once a year and to send one of his sons to the court as hostage. In return, the Han provided goods such as foodstuffs and silk but especially military protection. Usually seen as precursor for the end of the steppe empire,<sup>16</sup> Huhanye’s submission caused a change in the political order of the steppe confederation, whose final split into a northern and a southern group happened in 11 C.E.. The northern Xiongnu 北匈奴 were defeated by the Chinese General Dou Xian 竇憲 in C.E. 91; the Southern Xiongnu 南匈奴 were divided into five groups by General Cao Cao 曹操 in C.E. 216.

Both military conflicts and peaceful relations led to an increased and regulated contact between the Han Empire and its northern neighbors, causing not only the exchange of goods

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“synchronicity” between the rise and the fall of nomadic and sedentary empires, which allegedly exists because of the dependency of the nomads upon the importation of agricultural products.

13. The dates for these events given by different authors vary. Di Cosmo (2002: 193) mentions 198 B.C.E., Psarras (2003: 141) 200 B.C.E.

14. Di Cosmo (2002: 194) sees the *heqin* treaty as an acknowledgement of the superiority of the Xiongnu, remarking that “such a policy, which clearly placed the Han in a position of political inferiority, was unprecedented for the Chinese.” *Heqin* agreements have been discussed extensively. See Pan Yihong 1997; Psarras 2003: 132–43; Selbitschka 2015.

15. The exact reasons for this are subject to controversy, and various explanations, often subsumed under the umbrella term “needy and greedy,” have been put forward. While written records attribute the raids to the inherent meanness of the Xiongnu, other scholars have interpreted them as strategic measures meant to increase pressure on the Han and thus improve the negotiating position of the Xiongnu (Barfield 1989: 46–49; 2001: 236). Di Cosmo (2002: 216–18, 227) has pointed out that the lack of a central person enforcing authority might also have been a problem.

16. Di Cosmo (2015: 54–57) has pointed out that the dissolution of steppe empires can take various forms and is usually accompanied by widespread warfare. In regard to the Xiongnu, he (*ibid.*: 57) considers “different stages of dissolution, including internal rebellions, civil wars, the role of China, and the transformation of its leadership.”

but also the transmission of information about the opposite side. While Chinese sources paint a rather detailed picture of their northern neighbors, elaborating, for instance, on their social structure, religious beliefs, ancestry, and political organization, the Xiongnu have not left us any written sources. However, Chinese lacquer and silk found in burials in Siberia and Mongolia are evidence for the large territory covered by the steppe confederation as well as the long distances over which goods travelled.<sup>17</sup> Although not always in accord with the archaeological evidence, *Shi ji* and *Han shu* allow for a clear impression of the way in which the Chinese saw their northern neighbors. Like most people living at the fringes of the empire, they were regarded as being inferior to the population of the Central Plains and were compared to wild animals both in appearance and behavior. While it was mainly the disregard for ritual standards that distinguished the “barbarians” (Pines 2005), the opinions of contemporaneous authors on whether the foreigners could become civilized and thus change from beast to human differ widely (Fiskesjö 1999). The *Han shu* (94B: 3834), for instance, claims that the beastly nature of non-Chinese groups is irreversible and states laconically: “The cultivation through proper government does not reach these people” (Pines 2005: 80).

We can thus state that the clear division into what has been coined the Chinese “inner world” and the non-Chinese “opposite world” (Bauer 1980: esp. 11–13; Pines 2005: 91) was not only based on geographic locations but also on a perceived cultural superiority on the part of the Chinese. As becomes obvious through the objects presented in the following, though, this view of the northern barbarians did not prevent the reception of foreign goods or hinder the Chinese elite from using and even producing steppe or steppe-style artifacts.

#### ROYAL TOMBS OF THE WESTERN HAN DYNASTY

Steppe or steppe-style objects occur in a number of royal graves in the Chinese plains (Fig. 1B; Table 1). Relevant finds were made at the sites of Dayunshan (Nanjing bowuguan and Xuyixian wenguan xinju 2013a and 2013b) and Shizishan 獅子山 (Shizishan Chu wang ling kaogu fajuedui 1998) in modern-day Jiangsu, the final resting places of the kings of Jiangdu and Chu 楚. The tombs uncovered at Bao’anshan 保安山 and Tiejiaoshan 鐵角山 in Henan province (Henansheng wenwu yanjiusuo and Yongchengxian wenwu guanli weiyuanhui 1992) are associated with the kings of Liang 梁; those at Changsha 長沙 in Hunan province with the kingdom of Changsha (Changshashi wenhuaju wenwuzu 1979). A grave at Luozhuang 洛庄, Shandong province, is attributed to a member of the Lü family, who reigned over the kingdom of Lü 呂 (Cui 2001; Di 2001). The graves at Mancheng 滿城 (Hebei province) are associated with the kingdom of Zhongshan 中山 (Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo and Hebeisheng wenwu guanlisuo 1980); the grave at Hongtushan with the kingdom of Changyi 昌邑 (Shandongsheng heze diqu Han mu fajue xiaozu 1983). Although not a member of the Liu family by birth, the king of Nanyue 南越, Zhao Mo 趙昧 (r. 137–122 B.C.E.), was buried in the style of the kings and is thus included in the following analysis (Guangzhoushi wenwu guanli weiyuanhui et al. 1991).<sup>18</sup> The graves

17. Archaeological finds from the area comprising present-day Mongolia, Transbaikalia, and the Minusinsk Basin as well as the region stretching from the northern Chinese provinces of Liaoning in the east to Xinjiang in the west are attributed to the Xiongnu. For a brief overview see Linduff 1997; for a Chinese perspective including further literature on specific sites see Pan Ling 2007 and the relevant chapters in Wu En Yue Si Tu 2008. Further research on Xiongnu archaeology can be found in Brosseder and Miller 2011.

18. Zhao Mo was the second king of Nanyue, a kingdom located in modern-day Guangdong province. While Sima Qian calls him Zhao Hu 趙胡 (SJ 113: 2970), the name Zhao Mo is used on a jade seal excavated from the main grave chamber (Guangzhoushi wenwu guanli weiyuanhui et al. 1991: vol. 1, 199; vol. 2, pl. 131). Just like his grandfather, Zhao Tuo 趙佗 (r. 203–137 B.C.E.), the first king, Zhao Mo was keen to be recognized as equal

Table 1. Western Han dynasty royal tombs containing steppe and steppe-style objects. (RPT = rectangular pit tomb; SPT = stone pit tomb; RCT = rock-cut tomb)

Site	Province	Kingdom	Type of tomb	Date	Tomb owner	Title/Status	Repoussé						
							Decorative plaques	Round ornaments	Repsoussé ornamental plaques	Phalerae	Belt plaques	Other objects	
Bao'anshan (accompanying burial pit)	Henan	Liang	RCT	144 B.C.E.	?	Wife of the Xiao king of Liang		X		X			X
Changsha	Hunan	Changsha	SPT	Mid-West-ern Han	Cao Zhuhan	Concubine of one of the kings of Changsha					X		X
Dayunshan M1	Jiangsu	Jiangdu	SPT	128 B.C.E.	Liu Fei	King of Jiangdu (r. 153–128 B.C.E.)	X	X	X				X
Dayunshan M9	Jiangsu	Jiangdu	SPT	128 B.C.E.	Lady Nao	Concubine of Liu Fei					X		X
Guangzhou	Guangdong	Nanyue	RCT	122–120 B.C.E.	Zhao Mo	King of Nanyue (r. 137–122 B.C.E.)	X	X	X		X		X
Hongtushan	Shandong	Changyi	RPT	86 B.C.E.	Liu Bo?	King of Changyi (r. 97–86 B.C.E.)	X	X					
Luozhuang (accompanying burial pit 9)	Shandong	Lü	RPT	186–180 B.C.E.	Lü Tai?	King of Lü (r. 187–186 B.C.E.)		X			X		
Mancheng M1	Hebei	Zhongshan	RCT	113 B.C.E.	Liu Sheng	King of Zhongshan (r. 154–113)	X		X		X		X
Mancheng M2	Hebei	Zhongshan	RCT	113 B.C.E.	Dou Wan	Wife of Liu Sheng		X			X		X
Shizishan	Jiangsu	Chu	RCT	175 or 154 B.C.E.	Liu Yingke or Liu Wu	2nd (r. 178–174 B.C.E.) / 3rd king of Chu (174–154 B.C.E.)		X	X		X		X
Tiejiaoshan (accompanying burial pit of M2)	Henan	Liang	RCT	144 B.C.E.	Liu Wu	Xiao king of Liang (r. 168–144 B.C.E.)		X			X		X



date to the early and mid-Western Han dynasty. The earliest finds come from Luozhuang, to which the excavators assign a date between 186 and 180 B.C.E.; the youngest objects were uncovered at Hongtushan 紅土山, which dates to 86 B.C.E. or slightly thereafter.

To illustrate the way in which the kings were entombed, a few remarks on the royal tombs of the Western Han dynasty seem in order. These have been subject to archaeological research since the 1960s with hitherto more than eighty burials excavated in forty-three different places (Liu Zun zhi 2012: 35). This, however, is only a fraction of the total number of graves, which is estimated to be around 300 (Liu Rui and Liu Tao 2010: 61).<sup>19</sup> The relevance of these finds lies not only in their contribution to the research on the kingdoms. Based on a passage in the *Han shu* (14: 394), which states that the kingdoms were modeled on the structure of the capital, the opinion has been voiced (e.g., Jiao 2013: 78) that the same must have applied to the royal graves.<sup>20</sup> The tombs of the kings are thus also used as a means to estimate layout, size, and content of the as-yet-unexcavated imperial graves.<sup>21</sup>

Both imperial and royal tombs form part of a larger complex, which comprised the main burials of the king and his consort as well as attendant burials for servants and kin.<sup>22</sup> Additional features are accompanying pits, containing, for instance, horses and chariots or weapons. Both *Han shu* (73: 3115) and *Hou Han shu* (99: 3199) mention overground features such as ritual buildings for the imperial tombs, and describe daily, monthly, and seasonal offerings (Loewe 2010a: 218).<sup>23</sup> Archaeological evidence for such buildings at the royal tombs, however, was hitherto only evidenced for the site of Bao'an Shan, where the wife of Liu Wu 劉武, the Xiao king of Liang 梁孝王 (r. 168–144 B.C.E.), was buried (Henansheng wenwu yanjiusuo and Yongchengxian wenwu guanli weiyuanhui 1992; Liu Zunzhi 2012: 305–9; see also Liu Zunzhi 2011: 8 fig. 2 for an overview plan and a general discussion of the mausoleum precincts). All of these features lay within a park (*lingqu* 陵區) of varying size that was most likely surrounded by a wall of tamped earth. The remaining walls at Dayunshan, the mausoleum precinct of Liu Fei, king of Jiangdu, suggest that these were in the shape of a rectangular plain with each side measuring about 490 m and thus give an impression of the

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to members of the imperial family. The construction and furnishing of his grave, which was dug into Xianggangshan 象崗山 and excavated in 1983, bear further witness to this. Among other things, the king was buried with a jade suit, which was a privilege reserved for members of the imperial family. For an overview of the grave and its historical context, including high-quality images and further literature see Lin 2012b and Lin 2012a: 233–320 as well as Prüch 1998.

19. The different opinions existing in regard to the estimated number of graves are nicely subsumed in Liu Qingzhu 2013: n. 2.

20. See, e.g., Loewe (2010a: 224), who notes: “No certain evidence shows how the tombs of the emperors were designed and constructed. As it is highly unlikely that they were of inferior style to the tombs of persons of lower social status, the tombs of those immediately below them, which are identified as those of the kings (*zhuhouwang* 諸侯王) of the empire and their queens may serve as an indication.” In the case of the burial and the surrounding cemetery uncovered at Dayunshan, similarities to the burial complex of Liu Fei’s father, emperor Jing, have been postulated (Jiao 2013).

21. For more information on the eleven mausoleums of Western Han dynasty emperors see Liu and Li 1987; Loewe 1992; Loewe 2010a: fig. 7.1. The account of the burial of Huo Guang gives further ideas of their tombs (HS 65: 2948; Loewe 1999: 7–12). For a comparison of royal and imperial graves see Jiao 2013 and Liu Qingzhu 2013.

22. The location of the accompanying graves is indicative of the status of the buried person. The closer to the burial of the king the burial was erected, the higher the status of the deceased. Liu Zunzhi (2012: 135–36) assumes that persons buried in the attendant burials were mostly concubines.

23. Interestingly, already during the times of the Western Han dynasty, the number of offerings and thus rising cost of supplies, etc., led to discussions of whether some of the shrines should be dismantled. In the Eastern Han, “centralized” services addressed to all deceased emperors thus took place at less frequent intervals. See Loewe (2010a: 218–20) for more information on these discussions and the three types of buildings.



Fig. 2.

Fig. 2. Derivates combining steppe motifs with traditional objects.

1, 2) Hill-shaped censer M2: 3004 with depiction of a procession of four animals, bronze, H 32.4 cm, Mancheng; 8) Openwork disk D62 with depiction of dragon and phoenix in combative pose, jade, D 10.6 cm, Guangzhou;

Drop-shaped phalerae with the depiction of an ungulate with strongly twisted hindlegs. 3) Guangzhou C251–5, gilt bronze, L 21 cm; 4) Tiejiaoshan BM2K1: 274, gilt bronze, L 21.2 cm; 5) Luozhuang P9: 81, gilt bronze, L 16.5 cm;

Round ornaments with depiction of a crouching bear in full frontal view. 6) Dayunshan M1: 979, gilt bronze, D 4.8 cm; 10) Dayunshan M1K1⑥: 566, gilt bronze, D 3.5 cm; 11) Dayunshan M1: 2931, bronze, D 1.6 cm; 12) Hongtushan, object no. unknown, gilt bronze, D 4.9 cm; 13) Tiejiaoshan M2K1: 1, gilt bronze or silver, D 2.9–3.0 cm;

Round ornaments with depiction of a crouching bear in ¾ view. 7) Dayunshan M1: 5116, gilt bronze, D 5.4 cm; 9) Dayunshan M1: 2175–5, bronze, L 9.4 cm, D 2.8 cm.

*Sources:* 1) modified after Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo and Hebeisheng wenwu guanlisuo 1980: vol. 2 color pl. 22; 2) Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo and Hebeisheng wenwu guanlisuo 1980: vol. 1, 257 fig. 171; 3) modified after Lin 2012: 254 fig. 61 (drawing); modified after Lin 2012: 255 fig. 127; 4) Cui 2002b: 17 fig. 1; 5) modified after Cui 2002a: 24 fig. 2 (drawing); modified after Jinanshi kaogu yanjiusuo et al. 2004: pl. 1.2 (picture); 6) Nanjing bowuguan and Xuyixian wenguan xinju 2013a: 8 fig. 7 (drawing); modified after Nanjing bowuguan and Xuyixian wenguan xinju 2013a: 7 fig. 6.8 (picture); 7) Nanjing bowuguan and Xuyixian wenguan xinju 2013a: 8 fig. 8 (drawing); modified after Nanjing bowuguan and Xuyixian wenguan xinju 2013a: 7 fig. 6.7 (picture); 8) modified after Lin 2012: 25 fig. 3; 9) modified after Nanjing bowuguan and Xuyixian wenguan xinju 2013a: 7 fig. 6.3; 10) modified after Nanjing bowuguan and Xuyixian wenguan xinju 2013a: 11 fig. 14.10; 11) Nanjing bowuguan and Xuyixian wenguan xinju 2013a: 11 fig. 14.7; 12) modified after Shandongsheng heze diqu Han mu fajue xiaozu 1983: 485 fig. 14.6; 13) Yongchengshi wenwu gongzuodui 2004: 46 fig. 7.8.

dimensions of these mausoleum precincts (Nanjing Museum and the Bureau for Culture and Broadcasting and News of Xuyi County 2013).

Settlements were often located in the immediate vicinity of the graves, probably mainly inhabited by people involved in the offerings and the maintenance of royal tombs. The *Han shu* (63: 2748) states that those associated with the royal tombs comprised 300 families 家, whereas the settlement at Maoling 茂陵, the tomb of Emperor Wu, is said to have counted 60,000 households 户 (HS 28A: 1547).

The royal burials display a certain degree of variation. While their orientation does not seem to follow any fixed rules, the tombs of a king and his consort are mostly oriented towards the same direction (Liu Zunzhi 2012: 79). Husband and wife are not buried in the same grave,<sup>24</sup> but their individual grave mounts might touch or even fuse. In terms of layout the royal tombs differ widely, as do the opinions on how to classify them (e.g., Liu Riu and Tao 2010: 300; Wang Zhongshu 1982: 175–79). Liu Zunzhi distinguishes three main groups, each comprising several types and variants. These are rectangular pit tombs with grave mound and one or two sloping ramps (*shuxue tukeng mu* 豎穴土坑墓) (Liu Zunzhi 2012: 86–89; figs. 2-20, 2-21), vertical stone pit tombs with a ramp leading to the rectangular grave chamber (*shikuang mu* 石矿墓), and rock-cut tombs with multi-roomed caves (*yadong*

24. Liu Zunzhi (2012: 76) mentions a grave excavated at Daqingdun 大青墩, Jiangsu province, where a couple is buried in the same grave chamber as the only counterexample hitherto known. Note, however, the different opinion voiced by Li 2013: 94. At Woniushan 臥牛山 in the area of Xuzhou, Jiangsu province, a couple is buried in the same large-scale rock-cut grave, albeit in different parts of it (Li Yinde 2013: 90 fig. 3).

*mu* 崖洞墓). Especially the last type of burial, which occurs clustered in a single mountain or placed in individual hills, is clearly different from the other two. Carved into rock, the tombs themselves were indistinguishable from the surrounding mountain. However, over-ground structures such as the burial compound also existed. Due to the specific structure of these tombs with their multi-roomed caves, the arrangement of funerary goods also changed, causing an interpretation of individual chambers as specific rooms. Chamber E1 at Shizishan, which largely contained jars with foodstuff and bronze vessels such as a steamer, has been called a kitchen (Shizishan Chu wang ling kaogu fajuedui 1998: 6). Seals found in conjunction with the objects, however, suggest that these loci were gift chambers for officials (A. R. Miller 2011: 276).

Western Han dynasty royal tombs thus continued to use features already present in earlier graves, such as grave mounds. However, the period also saw some changes in the grave layout over time: rectangular pit tombs and stone pit tombs were used throughout the Western Han dynasty; rock-cut tombs were a novelty from the time of Wendi.

Changes are also visible in regard to the funerary goods; while royal tombs of the Early Western Han dynasty were lavishly furnished, towards the end of the Western Han, graves were far more moderately equipped. Other trends visible are decreasing numbers of ritual vessels, jades, and seals and increasing numbers of objects of everyday life. Numbers of pottery models of granaries, wells, stoves, and houses also increase towards the mid- and late Western Han dynasty (Liu Zunzhi 2012: 192–96).

The most iconic objects associated with the graves of the kings, however, are jade suits *yuyi* 玉衣. Often consisting of several thousand jade plaques sewn together with silk or sometimes even silver or gold threads, these suits held the body of the deceased. Jade suits appear in burials dating after the reign of emperor Wen and have been interpreted as a measure for protecting the body from decay (Thorp 1991; cf. Brown 2007). Statements in the *Hou Han shu* (96: 3152) indicate that silver threads were employed to manufacture the burial suits for the kings. However, the gold threads used for the burial suit uncovered at Shizishan—the hitherto earliest known example of a complete jade suit—suggest that there was some leeway.<sup>25</sup> In addition to the jade suit, the Shizishan burial also yielded a so-called jade coffin, comprising more than 2,000 jade plaques that were attached to the surface of a lacquer coffin.

It has been pointed out that the types of objects found in royal tombs are consistent across the Western Han territory but that “local traditions, customs and economic differences allowed the development of distinct characteristics in the burial goods” (Li Yinde 2012: 44–45). These also become visible through the objects presented in the following.

#### STEPPE AND STEPPE-STYLE OBJECTS IN ROYAL TOMBS

The Eurasian Steppe and its inhabitants made a lasting impression on the Han elite. The same holds true for their art, which is characterized by depictions of animals, both real and fantastic. Images of predators, deer, birds of prey, and horses as well as composite creatures with a raptor’s beak, bird-headed antlers, and strongly twisted hindquarters were used to embellish objects such as decorative ornaments, belt plaques, horse harnesses, etc. Some of the animals are shown individually, but depictions of animal combats or attacks also occur frequently. These visually salient motifs form part of the artistic tradition of the mobile groups inhabiting the Eurasian Steppe, in particular throughout the first millennium B.C.E.<sup>26</sup>

While some of the artifacts found among burial goods in elite graves of the Han dynasty make it possible to trace what might have been direct relations, others are clear evidence for

25. For a more detailed discussion of this phenomenon see Loewe 1999: esp. 18.

26. A brief overview of related sites, cultures, and objects is provided in Bunker 1997, Bunker et al. 2002, Menghin et al. 2007.

the transmission of motifs and object types uncommon in the Chinese world. These inspired artistic expression, often leading to the emergence of hybrid objects. A closer look at relevant artifacts not only reveals high levels of knowledge about the northern neighbors but also shows different strategies of dealing with the influx of foreign elements.

### *Transferred Motifs on Chinese Objects*

Many royal tombs of the Western Han dynasty contain artifacts that can be called “hybrid,” since they combine types of objects commonly occurring in the material record of the Central Plains with motifs from the artistic traditions of the steppe. In her study on *Perserie* in fifth-century B.C.E. Athens, Margaret Miller (p. 147ff.) called this kind of response to the influx of foreign elements “derivation.” Distinguishing it from other forms of cultural reception, such as adaptation and imitation, derivation, according to Miller (p. 147), “involves not copying or reworking a given model, but grafting foreign details onto traditional . . . forms.” The concept can also be applied to the many steppe-style objects in Western Han elite graves. An example for a combination of a Chinese object and steppe motif is the jade *bi* disc excavated from tomb of the king of Nanyue, Zhao Mo, in Guangdong province (Fig. 2.8; Guangzhoushi wenwu guanli weiyuanhui et al. 1991: 190). With the earliest examples dating to the Neolithic (e.g., Gu 2005: 39), *bi* discs have a long history in the area of modern-day China. This one is manufactured in an openwork fashion and depicts a dragon and a phoenix surrounded by cloud scrolls. Both creatures belong to the four animals associated with the cardinal directions, but since they are rendered in a combative pose, the object has been interpreted as “another hybrid combining Chinese and steppe taste” (Rawson 2012: 25). Further evidence is provided by the hill-shaped censer, *boshanlu* 博山爐 (Figs. 2.1; 2; Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo and Hebeisheng wenwu guanlisuo 1980: 253–55), found in grave M2 at Mancheng, which held the remains of Dou Wan 竇綰, wife of the king of Zhongshan, Liu Sheng 劉勝 (r. 154–113 B.C.E.). Originally probably introduced from Western Asia (Rawson 2006; 2012: 27), incense burners were used in China long before the Han dynasty. As becomes clear from the drawing (Fig. 2.2), the intricate decoration of the Mancheng object depicts a procession of the four directional animals. However, the turtle, which stands for the north, has been replaced by the image of a camel, an animal closely connected with the steppe. The tiny depiction of a man leading an ox pulling an open wheeled cart (Fig. 2.2a) on the lid of the hill-shaped censer has also been interpreted as sign of steppe influences (Rawson 2012: 28). However, depictions of horse-drawn carts figure prominently in Han art and models of ox-cart and master also occur in graves.<sup>27</sup> Thus, this specific detail might not necessarily stem from the artistic tradition of the steppe.

While traces of the transmission of steppe motives are subtle for the hill-shaped censer, they are obvious for five almost identical metal phalerae *danglu* 當盧 (Figs. 2.3–5). The drop-shaped objects are decorated with the depiction of an ungulate with strongly twisted hind legs. The body of the animal is decorated with a spiral-pattern filled with parallel hatching; it is surrounded by cloud scrolls partly adorned with the heads of eared raptors. Both the decoration of the body of the mythical creature and its twisted legs have strong roots in the Eurasian Steppe and occur at sites in Kazakhstan and Siberia, for instance, the fifth- and fourth-century B.C.E. Pazyryk kurgans (e.g., Barkova 2007: 123 fig. 6, 126 fig. 10).

The two earliest phalerae (cf. Fig. 2.5) come from the accompanying burial pit 9 at the site of Luozhuang in Shandong (Cui 2002a, 2002b: 16–19). Among skeletons of dogs and horses, the 26 m long pit also yielded forty decorative plaques for horse harnesses. Although

27. See, e.g., the wooden model of an ox-cart found in Wuwei district, Gansu (Pirazzoli-t’Serstevens 1982: 76 fig. 42). A miniature bronze cart with ox and farmer excavated from a grave in Sichuan is held in the Minneapolis Institute of Art <http://collections.artsmia.org/art/63475/cart-with-ox-and-farmer-china>; last accessed 8 June 2016.

hitherto unexcavated, the grave with which it was associated (see Jinanishi kaogu yanjiusuo et al. 2004: 3 for an overview plan) has been attributed to a member of the Lü family—probably Lü Tai 呂台 or Lü Jia 呂嘉—based on seals excavated from the accompanying pits 3 and 4 (Jinanishi kaogu yanjiusuo et al. 2004: 5 fig. 3; cf. Di 2001: 52). The excavators dated it between 186 and 180 B.C.E. (Jinanishi kaogu yanjiusuo et al. 2004: 12).

Slightly longer and narrower in their execution, two iconographically identical phalerae were excavated from the burial ground of the kings of Liang, located on Mangdangshan 芒場山 in Henan province. One object comes from the accompanying pit 1 of Tiejiaoshan grave M2, a large-scale rock-cut tomb with multiple chambers that has been identified as the burial of the Xiao king of Liang (Fig. 2.4; Cui 2002b: 17). The other was unearthed from a burial pit associated with the rock-cut grave at Bao'anshan (YBM: 18, gilt bronze, L 20 cm; Henansheng wenwu yanjiusuo and Yongchengxian wenwu guanli weiyuanhui 1992: 135–37, 136 fig. 6.1). Covered by the same mound as the grave of the king, it is regarded as the burial of his wife. Since the king died in 144 B.C.E., his date of death provides a terminus post quem for both tombs.

The burial of the king of Nanyue, Zhao Mo, dated between 122 and 120 B.C.E., also yielded a drop-shaped phalera (Fig. 2.3; Guangzhoushi wenwu guanli weiyuanhui et al. 1991: 98). Worked in a solid fashion, it shows similarities to the objects just described; however, depicted is a creature with the head of a dragon, a slim elongated body, and four paws. The animal seems to be depicted in a walking motion, surrounded by cloud scrolls partly ending in raptor heads.

So far there are no direct parallels for these phalerae in the material record of the Eurasian Steppe and we can thus assume that they were not made there. Instead, it seems sensible to suppose that they were manufactured in Chinese workshops and to Chinese taste.

Many additional examples for the adoption and adaptation of northern influences have been found in the royal tombs of the Western Han dynasty. Among them are round ornaments that could function both as rein guides and as decoration for belts and horse harnesses (Figs. 2.6–7; 9–13). In the Northern Chinese Steppe, these types of objects occur in plain as well as figuratively decorated form, with one of the earliest examples coming from the site of Zhoujiadi 周家地 in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo Nei Menggu gongzuodui 1984: pl. 6; So and Bunker 1995: 78 fig. 34). Here, the deceased in an eighth- to seventh-century B.C.E. grave was buried with two leather belts, one of which was decorated with two rows of plain round ornaments that also occur in groups of three and arranged in a triangular shape on what could have been the seam of his jacket. Further examples, albeit in smaller numbers, were found at the sites of Maoqinggou 毛慶溝 in Inner Mongolia (7th–3rd century; Tian and Guo 1986; see Höllmann and Kossack 1992, pl. 7.4–7, 11–12) and Zhangjiecun in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region (6th–4th century; Ningxia Huizu zizhiqu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Pengyangxian wenwuzhan 2002). Flower-shaped ornaments are also known from Maoqinggou (Höllmann and Kossack 1992, pl. 7.8). The site of Aluchaideng 阿魯柴登 in Inner Mongolia yielded objects with depictions of bird heads and curled-up ibexes (4th–2nd century; Tian and Guo 1980).

The round ornaments found in graves of the Central Plains are for the most part figuratively decorated, their main motif being a bear.<sup>28</sup> Two slightly varying types of depictions can be distinguished. The first, more common type depicts a crouching bear in full frontal

28. So and Bunker (1995: 143 fig. 62.1) show a mold with the depiction of a curled-up camel that might well have been used to manufacture this kind of ornament. The object with the accession number F1916.8 is held by the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery. For more information on the object see [http://www.asia.si.edu/collections/edan/object.cfm?q=fsg\\_F1916.8](http://www.asia.si.edu/collections/edan/object.cfm?q=fsg_F1916.8); last accessed 8 June 2016.

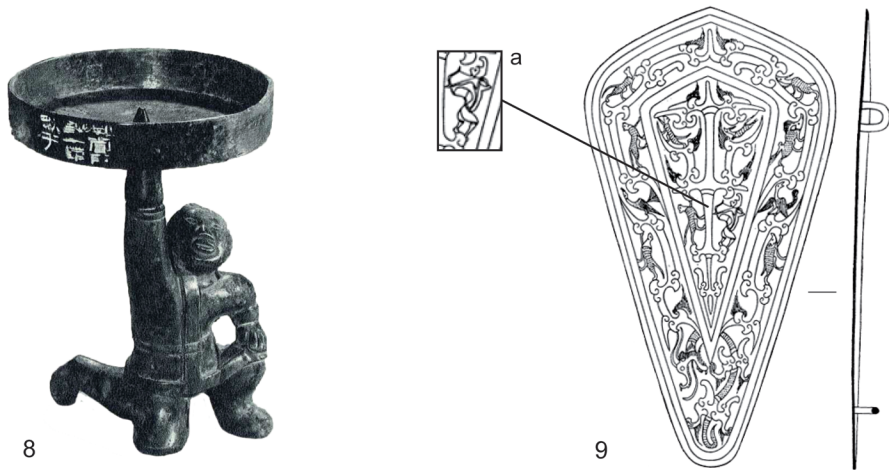


Fig. 3. Leaf-shaped repoussé ornamental plaques with depiction of ram heads. 1) Shizishan, gold, 4 × 3.4 cm; 2) Dayunshan M1K1⑥: 327-9, gold, 4.4 × 4.1 cm; 3) Mancheng M1: 4393, gold, 4.7 × 4.3 cm; 4) Guangzhou D57, gold, 4.6–4.7 × 4.3–4.4 cm; 5) Xinzhuangtou XZHM30: 18-1, gold, 3.2 × 2.9 cm; 6) Dayunshan M1K1⑥: 327-6, gold, 2.6 × 2.5 cm; 7) Mancheng M1: 4362, gold, 3.9 × 3.7 cm;

Depicting the people of the steppe. 8) Human-shaped lamp M1: 4112 with incised inscription, bronze, H 12 cm, Mancheng; 9) Archer wearing a Phrygian cap on Phalera M2: 1171, bronze, partly silvered and gilded, H 25.3 cm, Mancheng.

*Sources:* 1) modified after Lin 2012: 185 fig. 77, image courtesy of Xuzhou bowuguan; 2, 6) modified after Nanjing bowuguan and Xuyixian wenguan xinju 2013a: 40 fig. 60.4; modified after Nanjing bowuguan and Xuyixian wenguan xinju 2013a: 41 fig. 66; 3, 7) Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo and Hebeisheng wenwu guanlisuo 1980: vol 1, fig. 80; 4) modified after Lin 2012: 284 fig. 159; 5) Kovalev 2009: 403 fig. 4.6, image courtesy of Alexey Kovalev; 8) modified after Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo and Hebeisheng wenwu guanlisuo 1980: vol. 2, pl. 36.2; 9) Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo and Beijing yiqichang gongren lilunzu 1978: 30 fig. 11.

view, with the head of the animal facing the viewer and the rounded ears clearly visible (Figs. 2.6; 10–13). The head is surrounded by four paws; the body of the animal is not depicted. Five examples of this type, one made of gilded bronze, the other four of gilded silver were excavated from the accompanying burial pit of Tiejiaoshan grave M2, which has just been discussed (Fig. 2.13; Yongchengshi wenwu gongzuodui 2004: 45). Two more objects come from the grave at Hongtushan in Shandong, which is assumed to belong to Liu Bo 劉博, one of the sons of Han Wudi and king of Changyi (r. 97–86 B.C.E.) (Fig. 2.12; Shandongsheng heze diqu Han mu fajue xiaozu 1983: 486, 497). Dayunshan grave M1 yielded sixty ornaments made of bronze (Fig. 2.11; Nanjing bowuguan and Xuyixian wenguan xinju 2013a: 12) and fifty made of gilt bronze (Figs. 2.6–7; 9; *ibid.* 6). Five additional gilt bronze objects found in a looting ditch in the antechamber have a rope border, thus showing that the decoration could vary slightly (Fig. 2.10; *ibid.* 10). Identical bronze objects in varying sizes are also known from the grave of the king of Nanyue (Guangzhoushi wenwu guanli weiyuanhui et al. 1991: 99, 98 figs. 66.8–12).

Made of bronze, the hitherto only excavated parallels from the steppe come from grave 100 at the cemetery of Ivolga in the Republic of Buryatia (Linduff 1997: 87–89; Davydova 1995; 1996; for radiocarbon dates see Brosseder and Marsadolov 2010).

The second type shows the bear in  $\frac{3}{4}$  view, its front paws clearly visible (Fig. 2.9). Between the paws are the hind legs of another animal, which the predator, shown with an open mouth, seems about to bite. Six gilt bronze objects of this type were found in the accompanying burial pit associated with the grave of the Xiao king of Liang's wife at Bao'anshan (YBM: 1, 12–14, 19, 20, D 7 cm [YBM: 1], D 4 cm [YBM: 12–14, 19, 20]; Henansheng wenwu yanjiusuo and Yongchengxian wenwu guanli weiyuanhui 1992: 135 figs. 5.1, 2). Further examples come from grave M1 at Dayunshan (Fig. 2.7). Hitherto, no exact parallels for these ornaments have been excavated in the area of the steppe. However, the decoration just described is a detail of the scene depicted on belt plaques found at sites such as the already mentioned rock-cut tomb at Shizishan discussed in more detail below (Fig. 4.14).

Both the fastening method and the *in situ* location of the objects allow for conclusions as to the way they were used among the Han elite. The artifacts excavated from the accompanying burial pit at Tiejiaoshan were furnished with four loops arranged in a rectangle and associated with more than 1,000 horse and chariot fittings, suggesting that they were used as rein guides (Yongchengshi wenwu gongzuodui 2004: 45). One of the Dayunshan finds, however, has a long pin, and was probably used as a fitting, perhaps for a chariot (Nanjing bowuguan and Xuyixian wenguan xinju 2013a: 6) (Fig. 2.9). The same holds true for the round ornaments from Hongtushan, which were cast with four short pins on the reverse and used as decoration on one of the roughly twenty chariots found here (Shandongsheng heze diqu Han mu fajue xiaozu 1983: 486). Other finds show that the motif of the bear was used to decorate *se* 瑟 zither-string anchors (So and Bunker 1995: 150–51).

The decorative ornaments just described are thus evidence for the creative integration of transferred motifs. These were combined with types of objects that already existed in the Chinese world and had partly done so for a long time.

#### *New Types of Objects as Part of Established Social Practices*

While the combination of traditional and new elements is one of the responses to intercultural exchange, the leaf-shaped repoussé ornamental plaques described in the following are a



good example to illustrate that cultural contacts can also lead to the creation of new objects (Figs. 3.1–7). Made from gold sheets, the objects were ornamented by hammering on the reverse side, thus creating a design in low relief. All plaques are decorated with the depiction of two ram heads; however, slight variations occur. On the examples from the accompanying burial pit at Dayunshan grave M1 (Figs. 3.2; 6; Nanjing bowuguan and Xuyixian wenguan xinju 2013a: 40–41), Mancheng grave M1 (Figs. 3.3; 7; Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo and Hebeisheng wenwu guanlisuo 1980: 117), and Guangzhou (Fig. 3.4; Guangzhoushi wenwu guanli weiyuanhui et al. 1991: 207–8), the heads of two rams face opposite ways. On the plaque from Shizishan, a rock-cut tomb holding the remains of either Liu Wu 劉戊 (r. 174–154 B.C.E.), the third, or Liu Yingke 劉郢客 (r. 178–174 B.C.E.), the second king of Chu, the animals face each other, their foreheads touching (Fig. 3.1; Shizishan Chu wang ling kaogu fajuedui 1998: 29). Since the curved horns decorated with embossed parallel lines fuse at the upper end of the plaque, there is no room for the depiction of a third creature—perhaps an eared raptor or another ram—as is visible on the plaques of the first kind.

Small holes arranged in pairs of two on each side of the rim indicate that these objects were fastened unto a piece of fabric or some other background. In the case of the finds from Dayunshan, the rim is wider and framed by strings of twisted gold threads on both sides. The broad strip is further decorated with nine elliptical shapes formed by strings of gold. Between them are groups of either three or four gold granules, arranged in a triangular or flower shape.

While hitherto no excavated parallels for these objects are known from the steppe, interestingly, a late Zhanguo-period grave excavated in Hebei yielded three almost identical gold plaques (Fig. 3.5; Hebeisheng wenwu yanjiusuo 1996: 723).<sup>29</sup> Tomb M30 is one of eight graves discovered at the Xinzhuangtou 辛莊頭 burial ground, which was located within the remains of the lower capital of the state of Yan. Probably holding the remains of a member of the Yan aristocracy, the disturbed burial still contained a high number of artifacts, among them more than a hundred figuratively decorated belt plaques, buttons, ornaments, sword handles, and earrings made of silver and gold. The types of objects as well as the motifs they are embellished with are clearly related to the material culture and figurative tradition of the Eurasian steppe and thus not only serve as proof for the intensifying exchange between the northern states and the mobile-pastoralist groups during the times of the Warring States but as another example of a conscious use of steppe objects and steppe influences (Kost forthcoming). The exact location *in situ* is unknown for the Xinzhuangtou gold plaques (Hebeisheng wenwu yanjiusuo 1996, esp. 685), but gold and silver objects found at different contemporaneous sites in the Northern Chinese Steppe, among them Xigoupan 西溝畔 in Inner Mongolia (Neimenggu wenwu gongzuodui and Yikezhaomeng wenwu gongzuozhan 1980) and Maijiayuan 馬家園 in Gansu province (Zaoqi Qin wenhua lianhe kaogudui and Zhangjiachuan Huizu zizhixian bowuguan 2009, 2010) were used to decorate objects such as scabbards or carriages. The archaeological evidence for the royal tombs, however, suggests that the usage of ornamental plaques was much more closely related to the body of the deceased. Zhao Mo, the king of Nanyue, for instance, was buried with a silken face cover to which eight of the gold plaques had been sewn (Guangzhoushi wenwu guanli weiyuanhui et al. 1991: 207–8; Lin 2012a: 284). Placed on top of the veil of his jade suit, the silken cloth

29. Very similar carved wooden saddle ornaments are known from Pazyryk (Rudenko 1970: pls. 115–16). See also Rawson (1998: 89), who sees the images on the plaques described above as associated with the iconographic development of Achaemenid lions.



Fig. 4.

Fig. 4. Differently shaped belt plaques excavated from sites in northern China. 1) Daodunzi, object number unknown, bronze, 5.5 × 3.7 cm; 2) Xichagou, object number unknown, bronze, dimensions unknown; 3) Lijiataozhi M22: 1, bronze, 5.8 × 4.9 cm; 4) Chifeng City, object number unknown, bronze, dimensions unknown; 5) Maoqinggou M5: 6.2, bronze, 10.7 × 6.1 cm.

Belt plaques excavated from Western Han-dynasty royal tombs. 6) Bojishan M3: 57, gold, 9.1 × 5.0 cm; 7) Mancheng M1: 4144, gilt bronze, 6.4 × 3.3 cm; 8) Guangzhou H51, gilt bronze, 7.7 × 3.8 cm; 9) Changsha, jade, 8.8 × 4.4 cm 10) Dayunshan M1K1⑥: 354-1 (above), 355-2 (below), gilt bronze, jade, 8.6 × 4.3 cm; 11) Guangzhou D 164 (above); D71 (below), gilt bronze, glass, iron, 10.0 × 5.0 cm; 12) Dayunshan M9: 96-1, gilt bronze, 8.7 × 4.5 cm; 14: 11; 12, gilt bronze, 9.0 × 5.0 cm; 13) Bao'anshan YBM: 17, gilt bronze, 10 × 5 cm; 14) Shizishan W1: 17 (left); W1: 239 (right), gold, 13.3 × 6.0 cm; 13.2 × 6.2 cm including re-construction drawing of belt plaques and belt adorned with cowries.

*Sources:* 1) modified after Zhongguo qingtongqi quanji bianji weiyuanhui 1995: 81 fig. 113; 2) modified after Sun 1960: 33 fig. 4; 3) modified after Zhongguo qingtongqi quanji bianji weiyuanhui 1995: 86 fig. 122; 4) China Archaeology and Art Digest 1997: 37 with Fig.; 5) Höllmann and Kossack 1992: pl. 5.13, image courtesy of T. O. Höffmann; 6) Li et al. 2007: 116 no. 61; 7) modified after Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo and Hebeisheng wenwu guanlisuo 1980: vol. 2, pl. 58.3; 8; 8) modified after Guangzhoushi wenwu guanli weiyuanhui et al. 1991: vol. 1, 20 fig. 13.2; 9) Kost 2014: pl. 16.1–2; 10) modified after Nanjing bowuguan and Xuyixian wenguan xinju 2013a: 50 fig. 84, 85; 11) modified after Guangzhoushi wenwu guanli weiyuanhui et al. 1991: vol. 2 color pl. 19; 12) modified after Nanjing bowuguan and Xuyixian wenguan xinju 2013b: 56 fig. 9.1; 13) modified after Henansheng wenwu yanjiusuo and Yongchengxian wenwu guanli weiyuanhui 1992: 136 fig. 6.4; 14) Lin 2012, 188–189 no. 82, image courtesy of Xuzhou bowuguan; reconstruction drawing modified after Zou and Wei 1998, 38 fig. 1.

with the attached ornaments functioned as an addition to the jade face cover, which occurs in many Han dynasty elite graves (see, e.g., the figures in Lin 2012c). Although recovered in a looting ditch in the front chamber of the grave and thus most likely not in the original location, the gold plaques found at Dayunshan were also attached to a single piece of red silk suggesting that they might have functioned in a similar way (Nanjing bowuguan and Xuyixian wenguan xinju 2013a: 39).

We can thus conclude that in the case of the leaf-shaped ornamental plaques, the transmission of steppe motifs initiated the emergence of new types of objects. The decoration of these objects clearly proves existing knowledge about the visual repertoire of the steppe as well as production techniques. These new objects occupied a prominent place in the burial, their integration into the recipient's world thus also causing a slight amplification in social practices.

#### *Transfer of Objects and Knowledge about Them*

The objects introduced in the following serve to show how detailed the knowledge about steppe objects and their usage must have been among the members of the royal family during the Western Han dynasty. Many of their tombs contain belt plaques, an object uncommon in the Central Plains in this period, where belt hooks made of bronze or precious metals and with stone inlays or damascening are far more common grave goods. In Western Han dynasty royal tombs hitherto excavated, however, belt plaques, mostly used in pairs and as both a decorative and functional device, form the biggest and most frequently occurring group of steppe and steppe-style objects (Fig. 4). In order to understand the significance of these objects, a more detailed explanation of how they looked and were used is important.

Belts and associated accessories generally play an important part in mobile-pastoralist groups and have a long history also among the mobile groups of the Northern Chinese

Steppe. The earliest example of an ornamented belt from this area was excavated at Zhoujiadi, Inner Mongolia, and dates to the eighth or seventh century B.C.E. (Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo Nei Menggu gongzuodui 1984: 418 fig. 2, pl. 6; So and Bunker 1995: 78 fig. 34). The earliest evidence for figuratively decorated belt plaques dates to the mid- to late Chunqiu period (771–476 B.C.E.) and comes from the site of Maoqinggou in the Ordos Region of Inner Mongolia (Tian and Guo 1986; Höllmann and Kossack 1992; Kost 2014: 186–88 for all graves containing belt plaques). The objects, however, are more common in later graves. For the period up to the late first century B.C.E., more than fifty sites are known for the Northern Chinese Steppe.<sup>30</sup> The vast majority of the objects uncovered were made of bronze and often refined by surface treatments such as tinning and gilding.

Mostly used in pairs, belt plaques occur in different shapes including rectangular (Figs. 4.1; 4.3), irregular (Fig. 4.5), and D (Fig. 4.2) and P/B shapes (Fig. 4.4). Holes and studs on the front of some objects (Figs. 4.2–3) suggest that they were used as fastening devices. Belt plaques lacking these features were probably attached to a belt and had a more decorative function.

Different types of borders often frame the figurative decoration, which comprises a specific repertoire of scenic depictions in which animals, either real or fantastic, form the main theme while humans are rarely depicted. Single animals or groups of animals, fights between different beasts, attacks on weaker animals by predators, and scenes of predation form part of the decoration.

In the Northern Chinese Steppe, these belt plaques had more than a purely decorative function. Correlations between specific motifs and the sex and age of the deceased have been pointed out (Kost 2014: 143–48). Belt plaques further seem to have been status markers, indicating different types of wealth (Wu Xiaolong 2004; Linduff 2008; Kost 2014: 149–66).

While belt plaques of the Northern Chinese Steppe display a wide variety of shapes, the objects found in the Central Plains (Figs. 4.6–14) are all rectangular and often fitted with a braided-pattern border. Almost all of the objects excavated from Western Han dynasty elite graves were found in pairs and served not only as decoration but also as fastening devices. This is especially clear for the belt plaques excavated at Dayunshan grave M9 (Fig. 4.12; Nanjing bowuguan and Xuyixian wenguan xinju 2013b: 55–56) and Shizishan (Fig. 4.14 above; Zou and Wei 1998) as well as at Bojishan 簸箕山, the grave of Liu Yi 劉蕤, marquis of Wanqu 宛胸 (Fig. 4.6; Xuzhou bowuguan 1997: 16–18). These were found together with a small needle that was probably used to fasten a thin thread fixed to the belt. Made of organic material, very few of the belts to which the belt plaques were fastened actually survive. Remains found at the sites of Shizishan (Fig. 4.14 below) and Dayunshan suggest that the belt plaques were located at the two ends of belts embellished with rows of cowries.

Several sites yielded objects for which we have excavated parallels in the Northern Chinese Steppe or further north in the Southern Ural Mountains; grave M14 at the mid- to late Western Han dynasty site of Daodunzi 倒墩子 in Ningxia, which held the mortal remains of a male, yielded three belt plaques: two openwork gilded bronze plaques decorated with the depiction of a dragon intertwined with two turtles (14:11, 14:12, gilt bronze, 9 × 5 cm; Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al. 1988: 343, 344 fig. 9.9, pl. 14.1) as well as a single bronze object that shows a predator attacking a ram (14:3, gilt bronze, 9.6 × 4.5 cm; *ibid.* 343, 344 fig. 9.12, pl. 15.1,2). A pair of gold belt plaques identical to the first kind were found in the tomb of Liu Fei's concubine, Lady Nao 淖, at Dayunshan grave M9 (Fig. 4.12;

30. For an overview see Kost 2014: 248 map 1. A vast number of objects are held in museums and private collections all over the world. See, e.g., Bunker 1997; So and Bunker 1995; Wagner and Butz 2007.

Nanjing bowuguan and Xuyixian wenguan xinju 2013b: 55–56); four additional artifacts come from the grave of the king of Nanyue (D 73-1, D 165, E 116-1, 2, gilt bronze, 8.1 × 4.3 cm; Guangzhoushi wenwu guanli weiyuanhui et al. 1991: 165, 224–25). The latter, however, also received four gilt bronze belt plaques of the second kind (Fig. 4.8; *ibid.* 21, 225). Differing only slightly in their stylistic execution, two gilt bronze plaques depicting an attack were found in a mid- to late Western Han pit grave at the site of Xiufengcun 鏞峰村, Sichuan (object number unknown, gilt bronze, 10.7 × 5.2 cm; Sichuansheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al. 2004: 49 figs. 7.13, 7.16). The identity of the tomb owner is unclear, but judging from the layout of the grave and the burial goods, he seems not to have been a member of the imperial family.

The two gold belt plaques excavated from the rock-cut tomb at Shizishan (Fig. 4.14) are similar to a belt plaque excavated from grave 2 in kurgan 17 at the site of Pokrovka 2 in the Southern Ural Mountains (Brosseder 2011: 358 fig. 5).<sup>31</sup> Further examples for almost identical belt plaques come from a first-century B.C.E. grave at Sandiancun 三店村 in Shaanxi province, which clearly did not belong to a member of the imperial family (object no. unknown, gilt bronze, 11.2 × 5.0 cm; Li and Zhu 1983: 23 fig. 1.1, pl. 7.2; see also So and Bunker 1995, 114 no. 64).

The finds just described are clear evidence for far-reaching exchange relations.<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, however, other artifacts distinctly reference northern belt plaques, but were most likely produced locally. The openwork jade belt plaques found in the grave of Cao Zhuan 曹嫫, a woman closely related to the kings of Changsha, may serve as an example (Fig. 4.9; Changshashi wenhuaju wenwuzu 1979: 4). For the pair of plaques found among the burial goods of Liu Fei at Dayunshan M1, the openwork jade-pieces were additionally fitted with a figuratively decorated frame made of gilded bronze (Fig. 4.10; Nanjing bowuguan and Xuyixian wenguan xinju 2013a: 49–50). Twenty-five undecorated belt plaques uncovered from the grave of the king of Nanyue were made of a combination of gilt bronze, iron, and blue glass (Fig. 4.11; Guangzhoushi wenwu guanli weiyuanhui et al. 1991: 211–13).

While derivatives—combinations of foreign details and traditional forms—have already been mentioned, the objects from Dayunshan grave M1 and Changsha are examples for an intertwining of Chinese motifs and new forms. Both depict a dragon-like being surrounded by scroll-patterns, which we frequently encounter in Chinese art. Especially striking, however, is the belt plaque uncovered from the rock-cut tomb of the Xiao king of Liang's wife at Bao'anshan, Henan province (Fig. 4.13; Henansheng wenwu yanjiusuo and Yongchengxian wenwu guanli weiyuanhui 1992: 135). Although the available image is of low quality, it is possible to identify two creatures, probably monkeys, on horseback (?), racing through a forest. Depictions of monkeys riding horses were already popular during the Han dynasty (Wang Zijin 2014) and are a visual pun for the expression 馬上封侯, which we can translate

31. Note that the grave only yielded a single belt plaque, which was probably used to fasten a quiver and has thus been cited as an example for the new function objects take when being incorporated into a different cultural setting (Brosseder 2011: 411; 413). For an English overview of the site including further literature see Brosseder 2011: 355–57 as well as n. 23, which points out disparities in related publications.

32. The fact that each of the belt plaques excavated at Shizishan bears a Chinese inscription detailing its weight naturally raises the question of whether the objects were produced in Chinese workshops in order to be exported to the steppe. Different opinions have been voiced on this matter (e.g., Rawson 2012: 24; Psarras 2000: n. 91), which will not be discussed here, since the question of who produced for whom is less important for the following discussion than the fact that the members of the Chinese elite chose to use artifacts that were clearly associated with the steppe.



Fig. 5. Steppe-style objects found associated with the imperial graves. 1) Rein guide excavated from the accompanying burial ground at Yangling, object number unknown, gilt bronze, D 1.2 cm; 2) Hill-shaped censer with high foot excavated from accompanying burial pit 1 at Maoling, object number unknown, gilt bronze, silver, H 58 cm.

Sources: 1) modified after Shaanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo 2001: 138 fig. 209; 2) modified Bunker et al. 2002: 34 fig. 50 (picture), image courtesy Masahiro Hashiguchi; Xianyang diqu wenguanhui and Maoling bowuguan 1982: 13 fig. 41 (drawing).

as “being conferred to the rank of marquis [while] on horseback [i.e., immediately],”<sup>33</sup> thus proving that in this case a typical Chinese motif was used to decorate what was meant to be one of the northern belt plaques.

That belt plaques were clearly associated with the mobile-pastoralist groups of the Northern Chinese Steppe becomes obvious in contemporary written sources. Several passages mention belts in connection with the northerners and by using terms that are different from those used for Chinese belts, such as *shibi* 師比, *sibi* 私鉞 (both *Zhanguo ce* 19: 670), *xubi* 胥紕 (SJ 110: 2897), and *xibi* 犀毗 (HS 94A: 3758). Sounding rather similar, we can assume that the terms are transcriptions of a foreign loan word. Passages in written sources further record Wendi of Han as having sent various gifts, among them a *xubi* (SJ 110: 2897) or a *xibi* (HS 94A: 3758) to the *Chanyu* Maodun.

The terms *beidai* 貝帶 (SJ 125: 3191; HS 93: 3721) and *judai* 具帶 (SJ 110: 2897; HS 94A: 3758) seem to refer specifically to the appearance of the belts. *Beidai* indicates a decoration with cowries, for which we only have archaeological evidence from the sites of Shizishan, Dayunshan, and Xiufengcun. However, single cowries also occur among the grave

33. Note that 馬上 here might also refer to a conversation between Han Gaodi and Lu Jia 陸賈 (SJ 97: 2699; HS 43: 2113), in which the emperor states that he gained the empire on horseback and not through his knowledge of the *Odes* and *Documents*.

goods of burials in the Northern Chinese Steppe, for instance at Daodunzi (Ningxia wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al. 1988: 351). The term *judai* is not entirely clear, but statements in later sources suggest that it refers to a belt decorated with jade ornaments. Although we do not have a full description of what the belts associated with the northerners looked like, the use of a specific terminology, which distinguished the objects clearly from their Chinese counterparts, suggests that Chinese chroniclers were aware of the difference in visual appearance.

We can thus summarize that the belt plaques described above fall into different categories. While identical objects can be interpreted as the result of a direct interaction with the mobile-pastoralist groups of the steppe, similar objects are first and foremost the result of the knowledge which the inhabitants of the Central Plains had gathered about their neighbors and their culturally specific objects. The close resemblance to belt plaques found in the Eastern Eurasian Steppe is evidence that the people who ordered or produced these belts must have seen relevant artifacts first-hand. These were visually clearly distinguishable from the material culture of the Han and inspired the creation of new types of objects, often also decorated with motifs uncommon in the Central Plains. The integration of these artifacts into the burial context, often by being placed in the central grave chamber and sometimes even associated with the body of the deceased, furthermore led to a diversification of burial practices.

### *Picturing the Steppe*

While the two objects introduced in the following are not directly derived from the steppe, they are additional examples of the existing knowledge about its inhabitants. Both artifacts were excavated from the graves at Mancheng, which held the remains of Liu Sheng, king of Zhongshan, and his wife. The oblong phalera made of partly gilded and silvered bronze was uncovered from grave M2 and is decorated with an intricate design consisting of the depiction of various animals amidst foliage (Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo and Hebeisheng wenwu guanlisuo 1980: 327–28). On the right side of the central portion of the plaque, however, is a depiction of an archer dressed in knee-length trousers and a belted jacket. He wears a “Phrygian cap” and is shown drawing his recurve bow. The same type of bow is often depicted on Scythian objects (Firsov and Zuravlev 2007: 277 figs. 1b, 281 fig. 3c, 288 fig. 16); an excavated example of a similar hat comes from the fifth- to fourth-century kurgan 3 at Verch-Kal’dzin 2 in Siberia (Molodin and Polos’mak 2007: 147 fig. 10).

A similar type of dress is depicted on the 12 cm high human-shaped bronze lamp excavated from grave M1. It is rendered in the shape of a male person, kneeling down with his right knee to the ground, the left hand on his left knee. The man’s right arm is raised upwards and supports a round vessel with a flat base that would have held the oil and the wick of the lamp. According to the excavators, his clothes are gathered at the back, thereby forming a kind of tail, which touches the ground (Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo and Hebeisheng wenwu guanlisuo 1980: 69–71).<sup>34</sup> Finds of similar garments from one of the fifth- to fourth-century Katanda barrows in the Russian part of the Altai (Rudenko 1970) as well as from Pazyryk kurgan 3 (Molodin and Polos’mak 2007: 145 fig. 7) suggest, however, that the rear part of the jacket was not gathered but simply tailored in an elongated fashion. Human-shaped lamps occur regularly as tomb offering during the times of the Han dynasty, most famously the Changxin palace lamp in the shape of a maidservant excavated at Mancheng grave M2 (Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo and Hebeisheng wenwu

34. A very similar piece, albeit without an inscription, is depicted in an online catalogue published by Sotheby’s (2000); it went on sale in London on 14 Nov 2000. Here, the manner of dress worn by the man with a peaked cap is described as “with the tail of a long stylised apron extending behind.” Another lamp of this kind was included in the exhibition “Sculpture and Ornament in Early Chinese Art” at Eskenazi, London, 11 June–13 July 1996 (Krahl 1996; Eskenazi 1996: catalogue cover; cat. no. 20).

guanlisuo 1980: 255; Rawson and Bunker 1999: 408). However, this one is exceptional, as it portrays a northern barbarian, clearly recognizable not only by his broad face but also by his clothes.

Another interesting feature of the lamp is an inscription incised onto its rim, which reads “御當戶錠一第然于。” The inscription seems to be incomplete, as one would expect that a day or an occasion would be mentioned after “然于。” However, we can tentatively translate it as “One *danghu*-lamp as a gift, light it . . .!”<sup>35</sup> The expression *danghu* 當戶 occurs as Grand *Danghu* 大當戶 in both *Shi ji* (e.g., 110: 2890) and *Han shu* (e.g., 94A: 3751), denoting the position of Grand Household Manager in the administrative system of the Xiongnu. While we do not know the exact responsibilities of the *Danghu*, they seem to have been of rather low status within the Xiongnu nobility and served probably as messengers and military advisors (Giele 2011: n. 156). An example is mentioned for the fourteenth year of the reign of emperor Wen (166 B.C.E.; SJ 110: 2901), when the Xiongnu are recorded to have entered Han territory in the southern part of modern-day Ningxia. This was only the beginning of several attacks on the commanderies of Yunzhong 雲中, Dai 代, and Liaodong 遼東, about which the emperor was disgruntled. After the emperor sent an envoy with a letter to the *Chanyu*—the leader of the Steppe confederation—the *Chanyu* “had a *Tang-hu* convey his excuses and again brought up the matter of marital alliance” (Giele 2011: 278).

Since the *Danghu* here is shown in a serving position, it seems tempting to postulate a direct connection between this depiction and the biography of Liu Sheng. The opinion has been voiced that the character *sheng* 勝 in the latter’s name—meaning “victorious” or “to defeat”—is connected to a victory the king achieved over the Xiongnu (Wilkinson 2012: 724). In the written sources, however, there is no evidence for Liu Sheng’s personal engagement in the armed conflicts. But the location of Liu Sheng’s kingdom in modern-day Hebei province—close to various sites associated with mobile-pastoralist groups—may well have provided opportunity for direct interaction.

Both objects are clear evidence that the depictions of the northerners are no creations of fantasy. Their accuracy can be confirmed through finds from excavated contexts, suggesting that the images were rendered based on first-hand information and perhaps as a result of personal interaction. That the existing knowledge also extended to the social structure of some of these groups is further obvious through the inscription on the Mancheng lamp.

#### SUMMARY

During the Western Han dynasty, the frequent exchange with the mobile-pastoralist groups of the Eastern Eurasian Steppe led to different strategies of integrating foreign influences that also sparked artistic creativity. Examples such as the *bi* disc with the depiction of dragon and phoenix and the round ornaments embellished with images of a bear show that in the course of this interaction, derivatives combining traditional forms with figurative decorations derived from the art of the steppe were created. While the decoration was new, the types of objects were already well known and established in the Chinese world. It is thus not surprising that they were used and integrated according to the recipient’s own cultural codes, for instance as zither-string anchors.

As demonstrated with the help of the leaf-shaped repoussé ornamental plaques, new types of objects were also created. Providing evidence for the existing knowledge about the art of the steppe, the artifacts must have been clearly discernible as “exotic” in the context in which

35. Note that *ding* 錠, which is often used as a classifier for metal ingots and can also have the meaning of “solder” (i.e., a metallic compound connecting and holding objects together), here probably should be read as *deng* 燈.



they were used. For the grave of Zhao Mo, their location *in situ* suggests that they were integrated into central parts of the burial, thus causing a slight change in social practices, which attests to the importance assigned to them.

This transfer of motifs might have been the result of mere visual impressions and reflect indirect relations with the north. Other finds, however, such as the Mancheng lamp and phalera, are evidence for the high levels of knowledge that were attained in the course of direct and regular interaction starting with the first *heqin* agreements. Both objects accurately depict clothing and weaponry of steppe inhabitants and even mention a position within the administrative system of the Xiongnu as it is recorded in Chinese written sources. Although not equally detailed, existing knowledge about northern objects is clearly visible for the belt plaques that are mentioned in written records in conjunction with the steppe inhabitants. By using a distinct terminology, partly also hinting at the visual appearance of the belts associated with the north, the artifacts are clearly distinguished from the belt hooks common in the Chinese sphere.

Archaeological finds of objects identical or highly similar to those found in the Northern Chinese Steppe can be interpreted as evidence for a direct interaction between certain areas. More interesting, however, are the belts that were clearly produced in the Central Plains. While it seems tempting to explain these as imitations of objects that were unattainable, burials such as those at Dayunshan and Guangzhou are evidence against this idea. Both graves yielded belt plaques identical to those objects found at the site of Daodunzi in Ningxia province as well as local productions that draw their inspiration from the steppe. We can thus conclude that the Western Han dynasty kings had access to northern belt plaques. They not only accepted and integrated isolated artifacts into their lives, but also used them as models for locally produced objects. Despite the usage of local materials and sometimes also motifs to manufacture belt plaques, these did not have a tradition and were thus clearly distinguishable from established types of objects. The integration of these new objects into the Chinese world, where they were sometimes also assigned a prominent place in funerary rituals, is thus evidence for the appropriation of the north and its artifacts.

In order to find out more about possible underlying influences and to approach an answer to the question why the Western Han dynasty kings were especially receptive to northern influences, the following section discusses the historical and social context which resulted in the creation of this group and influenced their status and thus also their individual needs and motivations.

## DISCUSSION

At the end of the third and the beginning of the second century B.C.E., two rather different entities came to face and interact with each other. On the one hand the Han dynasty, with the emperor at the pinnacle, on the other hand the steppe confederation of the Xiongnu under their leader Maodun. As different as both entities were, what they had in common was that they had been newly founded and that many of the things that eventually came to define them were still in flux. This is especially evident for the Han dynasty, which struggled for stability in the first years of its existence and faced many internal conflicts. Only after some kind of unity was achieved, did a more regular interaction between the two groups start.

We can assume that especially in the early years of the Han dynasty, as an overarching social identity was still emerging, the Han elite saw itself as being different from the mobile-pastoralist groups of the steppes. Although we should be careful not to ascribe an identical mindset to everyone, the official view of the people living in the north as displayed in written sources shows that the Han perceived themselves as a clearly separate group that was

both culturally and morally superior. Research from the cognitive sciences suggests that this is a natural phenomenon (Capozza and Brown 2000: esp. part III; Kramer et al. 2011: esp. part II). With the human mind working by inserting new information into already existing mental categories, the specific shape of the categories also influences the way information is processed and interpreted. Cognitive categorization thus shapes social perception and is “fundamental to the study of intergroup relations in that it is the basis upon which groups are identified in the first place” (Brewer 2003: 4). While cognitive categories aid group members in negotiating their social position, they also carry an in-group bias “accentuating what binds the group together and marking as strange what does not—or does so to a lesser extent” (Ulf 2009: 104). Stereotypes thus do not play an important role as long as a group does not feel threatened. Only in situations of increasing social pressure do stereotypes turn into prejudices, which in the most extreme cases may lead to “ingroup love . . . converting into outgroup hate” (Brewer 2003: 69–76, 83–87).

This point seems not to have been reached yet in the middle of the Western Han dynasty, a time when—despite the official view and the varying nature of their relationship—both Han and Xiongnu were no longer self-contained units. They were entangled, interacting frequently and on various levels. While we only know in more detail about the formal diplomatic relations installed in connection with the *heqin* agreements, we can assume that direct contacts also occurred between the population living in the outer regions of the Han empire and the inhabitants of the steppe. For the slightly earlier Warring States period, the existence of groups that acted as intermediaries between the state of Qin and the mobile groups further to the west has been postulated based on an analysis of the elite burials excavated at Majiayuan, Gansu province (Wu Xiaolong 2013: 134–35). Statements from written sources (SJ 129: 3260) further corroborate this opinion and we can assume that during the Western Han dynasty merchants and middlemen were additional mediators who played an active part in the transmission of objects and information.

From the beginning of the second century on, *heqin* agreements not only regulated the interaction between both parties but also served as stabilizing measures, intended to reduce and eventually end clashes between Han and Xiongnu. Until the open aggression starting from 135/134 B.C.E., the relation between both groups can be described as a “middle ground” situation. Coined by Richard White in 1991, the concept of the middle ground, which describes a scenario in which different cultures come into direct and frequent contact with each other, has received much attention over the past years (e.g., Gosden 2004; Malkin 2002, 2011; Ulf 2009; White 2006; B. K. Miller 2015). An important characteristic of these exchange relations is the “inability by either side to commandeer enough force to compel the other to change” (White 2006: 10). As a result, power relations in the middle ground often “fluctuate between the use of force and the avoidance of force” (Ulf 2009: 98). This nicely circumscribes the early phase of contact between Han and Xiongnu, for which written sources speak of occasional open aggression on the part of the Xiongnu and retaliation measures of the Han, but also of renewed *heqin* treaties between both parties.

In the middle ground as described by White, the need for cooperation and mutual rapprochement lead each side to adopt aspects of the culturally specific behavior of the other, thereby opening up new channels of communication. The steppe and steppe-style objects found in the elite graves can be interpreted in this sense. So far, however, these artifacts are mainly evidenced for the burials of the kings. Traces of their presence and usage at the imperial court are subtle and hitherto visible only through a gilded bronze rein guide uncovered from the burial ground associated with the mausoleum precinct of Han Jingdi at Yangling 陽陵 (Fig. 5.1; Shaanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo 2001: 138) as well as through a hill-shaped

censer (Fig. 5.2; Xianyang diqu wenguanhui and Maoling bowuguan 1982: 3) decorated with a steppe motif uncovered from one of the accompanying graves at Maoling, where Han Wudi is entombed. Based on the archaeological material hitherto available, we can thus state that the use of steppe and steppe-style objects is mainly proven for the tombs of the kings. In order to better understand the social and individual needs of the members of this group that affected the reception and creative use of steppe influences, we have to take another look at the historical context and the events that had an impact on their lives.

The installation of the kingdoms at the beginning of the Han dynasty saw the creation of a new social group. Mainly based on kinship ties, the group of kings was initially further supplemented by artificially created kin. Both *Shi ji* (SJ 93: 11) and *Han shu* (34: 61) also mention “kings of a different surname” (*yixing wang* 異姓王), the most famous among these certainly the king of Nanyue, Zhao Mo. Even though they participated in the overarching kinship network of the Liu family, the kings were a subgroup. Subsumed under the official label *zhuhouwang*, their position within Han society seemed clearly defined. In practice, however, the rights, influences, and privileges of the kings were in a constant state of flux. Both the harshness and the extent of the measures taken against them are interesting, and we can only assume that the kings’ initial response to the open use of power was a refusal to cooperate. The story of Lu Wan 盧綰 (SJ 93: 2638), who pretended to be ill when summoned to the capital in 195 B.C.E., might be seen as example for a more passive and thus subtle opposition, which eventually culminated in the strenuous opposition evidenced through the Revolt of the Seven Kingdoms.

The increasing social pressure probably had the effect described above: existing stereotypes were reinforced and differences between groups became more visible. In a situation of chronic perceived threat, out-group negativity becomes coupled with in-group positivity, with increases in one resulting in increases in the other (Gonsalkorale and Hippel 2011: 165). It thus seems logical that, despite their kinship ties, the reprisals against the kings made them view the emperor and the people closely associated with him in a different way. We can also assume that this caused a stronger identification of the kings with their immediate peers and a loosening of the ties to the imperial court. An event recorded in the *Han shu* (53: 2422–25) seems to illustrate this idea; it tells of the visit of Liu Sheng, king of Zhongshan, to his younger brother Emperor Wu in 138 B.C.E.. In the course of the audience, Liu Sheng started to cry and, when asked for the reason, explained that his sorrow was due to the way the imperial officials treated the kings and that he also regretted the far too distant relationship to his brother. According to the written sources, the emperor was touched by this display of affection. He reacted by giving gifts and by reducing the number of officials in the kingdoms, thus clearly showing that he was appreciative of his brother’s remarks and willing to reaffirm the family ties.

Whether Liu Sheng’s collapse was calculated or had a totally different aim than the one he achieved, the remarks in the *Han shu* imply that during the reign of Han Wudi, the relations between emperor and kings needed strengthening. The same must have been the case during the earlier reigns of the emperors Wen and Jing. Although these are often interpreted as having initiated “a sense of continuity and permanence” (Loewe 1986a: 138) in the empire, for the kings they brought further changes. While the individual intentions of both emperors have been interpreted quite differently (A. R. Miller 2011), the measures they initiated must have created the need for the kings to quickly adapt to the changes in their social framework, which probably resulted in high levels of stress and insecurity among this group. Its members then had to search for new strategies of reacting to these developments. In a situation like this, foreign objects acquired a new significance. They were not only viewed as being

“exotic” and thus desirable but offered the possibility for the construction of new social values and thus for actively influencing the context within which the kings moved. Steppe and steppe-style objects were thus not only valued for their own sake but were consciously (re) produced and integrated into the world of the Han.

Bearing in mind that some of the mobile groups of the steppe, for instance the Xiongnu, were partly more successful in facing the imperial court than the kings themselves, the opinion that the kings accepted and used objects to signify that they wanted to be “like” their mounted neighbors and thus to install some kind of counterculture is absolutely valid. However, at the same time, the objects also served as a means for the kings to position themselves among their peers and thus as a way to find and secure their place in an environment that they experienced as unstable.

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