

One phase of Silk Road's influence on Japan

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Japan received various influences from the Silk Road. The most famous is the Shosoin treasures about eight century A.D.; glass vases, a silver pot with hunting scene design, lapis lazuli objects and exotic designs of fighting animal scenes.

The beginning of these influences goes back to much earlier. About the end of the 4th century or the early period of the 5th century, the gilt belt plaques appeared for the first time on the tombs in Japan. These plaques have the design of the dragon and phoenix and are probably been influenced by the Scythian origins.

In the next stage, the golden colored decoration, for example, gilt crowns, gold earrings, gold fingers-rings, gilt shoes and gilt horse harnesses became popular for the funerary offerings.

Recently the most gorgeous objects were discovered in the Fukinoki tomb in Nara. This tomb has a corridor-chamber and a sarcophagus from about the third quarter of the 6th century A.D. Outside the sarcophagus, there were various horse harnesses, a saddle with a grasping bar, stirrups of capped type, trappings, iron scales armor for human, arrows heads and potteries were found. Inside the sarcophagus, we found two human skeletons and funerary objects; a gilt-bronze crown, a belt, two pairs of gilt-bronze, earrings, a shoulder cover of glass-beads, five irons swords, four bronze mirrors and so on.

A gilt bronze crown has two stylized tree attendants having birds and boats figures perched on the top of the branches. This crown is very similar to the gold one found from the Tillya Tepe, Bactria, North Afghanistan by the Soviet Mission.

Two pairs of shoes are gigantic in size about 42cm long, and have hexagon stippled patterns and hanged with many gold pendants discs.

The most conspicuous object is the horse-saddle. Its pommel horn cantle are decorated with the gilt-bronze open work designs; elephants, dragons, phoenix, lion, tiger, bird, Makara, demon and palmette inside the hexagonal frame-work. These motifs were imported through the Silk Road.