ONE

A Pair of Steppe Earrings

THE EARRINGS SHOWN IN PLATE 1A were buried with a woman who died in the second century BC.[1] She was a member of the elite in one of the cultures possibly belonging to the Xiongnu political alliance, which, at its greatest extent, controlled a large empire to the north of China.[2] Made of worked gold with inlays of semiprecious stones and oval pieces of openwork carved jade, the earrings showcase the arts and aesthetics of the many cultures of the empires of both the Xiongnu and the Chinese. The relationship between the Xiongnu and the Chinese, long neighbors in East Asia, is central to understanding the early history of the eastern Silk Road but is often simply characterized as one of conflict. These earrings tell a more complex story—of diplomatic endeavors, trade, intermarriages, and technical and cultural dialogues. They come from a time when these cultures were renegotiating their interrelationships and territories. That process was one of the catalysts for the expansion of long-distance Eurasian trade, the Silk Road. The earrings also reflect the story of the encounter between the peoples—and other objects or "things"—along the ecological boundary of Inner and Outer Eurasia, stretching across the length of the Silk Road.[3] But we must not for-

For places mentioned in this chapter see Map 2 in the color maps insert.

1. I am greatly indebted to Sergey Miniaev for his detailed comments on this chapter and for so generously sharing his extensive knowledge. Thanks are also owing to Karen Rubinson, whose perceptive suggestions have helped me greatly. All mistakes, misunderstandings, and omissions are my own.

2. For sake of brevity I will use *Xiongnu* hereafter, but to designate the political alliance rather than a homogeneous culture. I use the term *Chinese* in the same way; see discussion and references below.

3. A boundary that David Christian describes as "the dynamo of Inner Eurasian history" (1998: xxi).

get that the earrings were possibly also the valued possession of an individual. Seeing them through her eyes is not possible, but as historians of material culture we strive to understand something of the world in which she lived, a world that shaped her perceptions of and reactions to the objects around her.

THE XIONGNU AND THE STEPPE

Most of the largely nomadic pastoralists who lived in northern Eurasia had no need for a written culture.[4] Their histories were therefore told by their largely settled neighbors to their south: outsiders to their society, who tended to interpret it by the norms of their own.[5] There were no professional anthropologists in these early societies trying to understand other peoples from their own viewpoint.[6] Moreover, the pastoralists often make an appearance in these histories at times that they are seen as a threat to the settled. Archaeology is thus very important for providing an alternative viewpoint to understand such cultures and their complexities. It has, for example, disproved the long-propounded idea that early pastoralists did not practice agriculture: the discovery of domesticated wheat and millet at the site of Begash in Kazakhstan, for example, has led Michael Frachetti to conclude that "pastoralists of the steppe had access to domesticated grains already by 2300 BC" and that "they were likely essential to the diffusion of wheat into China, as well as millet into SW Asia and Europe in the mid-third millennium BC."[7] It has also uncovered cities: not all the occupants of the steppe lived in tents, nor did any spend their lives constantly on the move. In other words, this land was home to a great range of cultures and lifestyles, but ones that were necessarily shaped by their environment.

4. I use these terms advisedly—there was no simple dichotomy between the settled and the nomadic (peoples sometimes characterized as the civilized and the barbaric). The range of lifestyles, very much dictated by ecology for much of history, was on a continuum, with pastoralist cultures practicing agriculture to a greater or lesser degree. For an example, see Chang et al. (2003).

5. As Paul Goldin points out on the Chinese view of the Xiongnu, "The Chinese conceived of their northern neighbours as mutatis mutandis, identical to themselves . . . greedy and primitive only because they had not benefitted from the transformative influence of sage teachers" (2011: 220).

6. Although individuals may have attempted it.

7. Frachetti (2011). On the spread of millet, see N. Miller, Spengler, and Frachetti (2016); Frachetti et al. (2010).

There is evidence that from the earliest times the cultures that occupied the lands of China had contacts with and were influenced by the steppe. This is seen in religion, as in the adoption of oracle bone divination, as well as in the introduction of domesticated wheat, the use of horse-drawn chariots as found in late Shang (Yin)-period (ca. 1600–ca. 1046 BC) burials, animal-head daggers with looped handles, and bronze mirrors. Jessica Rawson has noted the presence in early China of carnelian beads produced in Mesopotamia and has suggested they were transported by steppe peoples.[8] As Gideon Shelach-Lavi concludes, "We should not underestimate the role of the steppe peoples in the transmission of cultural influences to the 'Chinese' societies," which "selectively endorsed those features that suited the elites as well as the 'Chinese' societies' sedentary way of life."[9]

However, this situation was to change in the second half of the first millennium BC, when a dichotomy started to emerge in Chinese writings between what the histories characterized as a settled, civilized "Chinese" culture and that of their steppe neighbors. Largely on the basis of archaeological sources, Nicola Di Cosmo and others argue that, before the rise of the Xiongnu as a nomadic force of mounted warriors in the late first millennium BC, the Chinese had not encountered such a threat.[10] Their northern neighbors up to then had largely been agriculturalists with written language who fought on foot. Others have countered this view, pointing out that the cultures of China must have encountered some semipastoralist and seminomadic peoples.[11] But the confederation of tribes known as the Xiongnu possibly changed the perception of the elite in the various states that ruled central China at the time. Previously that elite seems to have held that all men under heaven were of a nature capable of being civilized, if subjected to civilizing forces. We see a change to a more dichotomous view, in which the Xiongnu became "the other," a people with a "heaven-endowed nature" essentially different from that of the Chinese.[12]

8. Rawson (2010).

9. Shelach-Lavi (2014: 23–26). The point that both the transmitters and the receivers of culture and technology played a role is discussed further below. The receivers have to be receptive to the new culture and technology, but their receptiveness can be encouraged in various ways by the transmitters. This also has parallels with the point in chapter 7 about Western collectors of Islamic manuscripts in the twentieth century and the roles played by the booksellers of the Muslim world.

10. Di Cosmo (2002). For dating, see notes below.

11. Shelach–Lavi (2014). See also Chang (2008).

12. To quote Sima Qian, discussed in Goldin (2011: 228–29).

Chinese histories show an escalation in this view of the "other," undoubtedly promoted by the need to demonize peoples who had become a major threat but also, as Paul Goldin points out, in response to the concept of "Chinese" formulated by the Qin Empire (221–206 BC)—the first rulers of a united China: "As there is no Self without an Other, calling oneself Chinese meant calling someone else non-Chinese; the new China had to invent an irreconcilable opponent, and the Xiongnu were in the right place at the right time."[13] As Sergey Miniaev notes, the early histories use a variety of names for their northern neighbors, and the first mention of the Xiongnu in the *Shiji*, the first history of China, by Sima Qian, of an encounter in 318 BC is probably a later interpolation or was being used "as a collective designation, common in this time, for stock-breeding tribes, being devoid of a particular ethnocultural meaning."[14] Tamara Chin notes that Sima Qian avoids "anthropological rhetoric" and does not embed the Chinese conquest "in a narrative of cultural or moral superiority."[15] That rhetoric, she argues, came post-Qin with the expansion of China under the Han emperor Wu (r. 141–87 BC). By the time of the next history, *Hanshu*, composed in the first century AD, it was firmly embedded.[16]

Other settled cultures also have to name or label the "other" to tell their story, and we inevitably learn more about the settled cultures from these histories than about the "other." The fifth-century BC historian Herodotus used the term *Scythian*; the Achaemenids in Iran termed their steppe neighbors the Saka. Early Chinese histories use several terms for the peoples the Chinese encountered to their north. This has given rise to numerous discussions about the origins and ethnicity of the peoples so labeled. In the case of the Xiongnu, these have especially concentrated on a possible identification with the peoples that historians and archaeologists have called the Huns.[17]

13. Goldin (2011: 235). As he and others (Pines 2012a: 34) also point out, this characterization of the other is exemplified more concretely with the attempts to build walls to demarcate the boundary between the two, the so-called "Great Wall."

14. Vasil'ev (1961); Miniaev (2015: 323).

15. Chin (2010: 320).

16. See chapter 10 on the Chinese labeling of peoples on their southwestern borders as "other" and their exploitation of these peoples as slaves.

17. For an early and influential discussion identifying the Xiongnu with the Huns, see Bernshtam (1951), and see Frumkin (1970) for a summary of scholarship based on archaeology in the Soviet period. For a more recent summary, see La Vaissière (2014), who, like Bernshtam, argues for an identification of the Xiongnu with the Huns—as well as with the Hephthalites (see chapter 5). For a recent history of the "Huns" that concurs with this view,

However, many scholars remain skeptical; as Goldin notes, “The semantic domain of the term ‘Xiongnu’ was political: there is no reason to assume that it ever denoted a specific ethnic group—and, indeed, plenty of reason not to. . . . Excavations in areas that came to be dominated by the Xiongnu have uncovered a wealth of distinct cultures.”[18]

The Chinese histories tell of settled and pastoralist peoples and mounted warriors living both northeast of and within the area enclosed by the great northward curve of the Yellow River, known now as the Ordos.[19] Many scholars have proposed that it was the encounter with these peoples in the late fourth century that led a ruler of the Zhao (403–222 BC)—a kingdom in what is now northern China that bordered their territory—to change his army from an infantry to a cavalry force.[20] The horse up until then had been used to pull chariots or as a pack animal. Despite breeding programs, central China never succeeded in raising sufficient stock to equip its armies.[21] The adoption of horseback riding also necessitated a change in clothing and weaponry. Over the next millennium the horse became an essential part of life in northern China, not just for the military, and was celebrated in art and literature (see chapter 6).

The Zhao was the last kingdom of what is now known as the Warring States period (ca. 475–221 BC) to succumb to the army of the Qin, who declared a united empire of China in 221 BC. Chinese histories tell how around 209 BC, following the Qin’s successful expansion into the northern and western Ordos, the various pastoralist tribes on the borders of China were united under a leader called Modu; the histories refer to these tribes as the Xiongnu.[22] Under Modu’s alliance they expanded, bringing other tribes to the north—in what is now Mongolia—into their confederation.

see Kim (2016). But some scholars strongly disagree with the identification of the Xiongnu as Huns: Miniaev, for example, argues that “written sources and archaeological data contradict this” (pers. comm., October 8, 2017; see also his 2015 article).

18. Goldin (2011: 227) and Di Cosmo (1994). The same can be said for the Huns.

19. Ordos is a later Mongolian name. The area now lies within the provinces of Ningxia, Gansu, and Shaanxi and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Regions in China.

20. Di Cosmo (2002: 134–37) discusses the 307 BC debate at the Zhao court and argues against this view.

21. For references to early programs of breeding in China, see Erkes (1940). The dependency on the steppe for the supply of military ponies continued; see chapter 6. India had similar issues; see chapter 3.

22. Di Cosmo (1999: 892–93); Kim (2016: 20–23). Miniaev takes issue with the oft-cited interpretation that the Xiongnu moved into the Ordos at this time, arguing that the area was still occupied by “tribes of Loufang and Baiyang” (2015: 326).

They moved westwards toward the Tarim, pushing out the peoples whom the Chinese called the Yuezhi and asserting their rule in some of the oasis kingdoms of the Tarim.[23] To the south they had easy victories over the forces of the newly founded Chinese Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220), expelling them from territories the Qin had previously taken.[24] The Han responded with an envoy sent to broker a peace treaty. Like many such treaties from this time onwards between the Chinese and their neighbors, this included a marriage alliance (*heqin*) between a Chinese princess and the foreign ruler.[25] Both sides accepted the equal status of their respective empires and a border in part demarcated by the walls built by the Han and their predecessors; further, the Chinese agreed to provide the alliance with regular gifts of goods, including silk and grain. The Chinese historians record the words of the Xiongnu ruler: "According to former treaties Han emperors always sent a princess, provided agreed quantities of silks, coarse silk wadding and foodstuffs, thus establishing harmony and a close relationship [i.e., *heqin*]. For our part, we refrained from making trouble on the border."[26] Hyun Jin Kim characterizes this as Han China becoming a tributary state of the Xiongnu alliance.[27]

The balance turned again with the Han emperor Wu, who embarked on a successful expansion policy northeastward into what is now Korea, westward into the Tarim basin, and southward to defeat the Nan Yue kingdom (see chapter 2). His plan to defeat the Xiongnu alliance was to find allies among the Yuezhi—themselves previously displaced from the Tarim according to the Chinese histories. The strategy was that the Yuezhi would attack from the west, while Chinese forces would attack from the southeast. However, the envoy sent to negotiate this, Zhang Qian, was singularly unsuccessful (although, having been captured by a member of the Xiongnu alliance on his way out and having been resident there with a local wife, he must have gained very useful intelligence).[28] The Han went ahead anyway, and although

23. On the Yuezhi as both farmers and herders, see Chang et al. (2003).

24. The battle took place at Baideng—to the east of the Ordos. The Chinese forces were led by the emperor Gaozu (r. 202–195), who only narrowly escaped capture.

25. For discussion of the *heqin*, see Psarras (2003: 132–42). Many of the so-called princesses sent in such marriage alliances were not in the direct imperial line. The system continued in later periods. For an account of marriages that did involve genuine imperial princesses sent to marry Turkic Uygur *kaghan*s in the Tang period, see "The Princess's Tale" in Whitfield (2015b).

26. Quoted in Kroll (2010: 113).

27. See Kim (2016: 22) and his map on 26.

28. The intelligence on goods and potential markets gained by Zhang Qian is usually

they were successful the battles were costly and ultimately of limited value, as it was not possible to hold onto the steppe land. This was accepted by both sides in 54/3 BC in another peace treaty between one ruler of the now-divided Xiongnu and the Chinese, precipitated by the breakdown in the Xiongnu alliance. The positions of power were now reversed, with the southern Xiongnu ruler accepting the lower status. Yuri Pines argues that this encounter, because of the pastoralists' strength and refusal to accept the settled way of life in China, "became the single most significant event in the political, cultural and ethnic history of the Chinese."[29]

Across Eurasia and during the Silk Road period, this encounter was by no means unique to the Xiongnu and the Chinese. Nor was there a single model of interaction. The nature of the relationships was complex, although often simplified by the historians of the settled into one of dichotomy and conflict. The Romans themselves struggled with incursions along their borders and, like the Chinese, built a network of defensive walls and forts.[30] In Greek histories the northern equestrian nomads were the archetype of the "other." Labeled as Scythians, their image as other continued to be perpetuated from Herodotus into Byzantine histories.[31] Further east, the Persian Achaemenids (550–330 BC) were to be defeated by a group of pastoralists moving from their northeast who established the Parthian Empire (247 BC–AD 224). The Parthians successfully adopted a new settled lifestyle while retaining their military prowess, threatening even the borders of Rome.[32]

So are these earrings Xiongnu or Chinese, or does it even make sense to try to label them in this way? To answer this, we need to explore some of the complexity hidden by the labels *Xiongnu* and *Chinese* and the aspects of their

given as a factor in the Han expansion west and the growth of trade—one of the factors in the start of the Silk Road (but certainly not the only one—see chapter 2).

29. Pines (2012b: 34).

30. Under the Roman emperor Hadrian (r. 117–38), walls were built throughout the empire, including northern Europe. Edward Luttwak discusses the point of such defenses and challenges the arguments that their regular breaching by enemy forces proves their failure, arguing instead that "they were intended to serve not as total barriers but rather as the one fixed element in a mobile strategy of imperial defense" (1976: 63). For an insightful discussion of the Chinese "Great Wall," see Waldron (1990).

31. And beyond: Reynolds quotes the 1483 work of the chronicler Jacobo Filippo Foresti da Bergamo: "The Bactrians and Parthians descended from the Scythians, as did Attila the Great. . . . Our Lombards, Hungarians, Castellani, and Goths are all descended from the Scythians. . . . The Turks too . . . came from Scythia. Indeed the nation of Scythians traces its origins back to Magog" (2012: 53).

32. For Parthian history, see Colledge (1986).

relationship that are revealed by the tombs—at Xigoupan—in which the earrings were found.

THE XIGOUPAN TOMBS

Xigoupan lies at the northeastern edge of the Ordos, where the Yellow River starts to turn south. It is roughly at the same latitude as Beijing to its east.[33] The tombs were excavated in 1979. Unfortunately, the archaeological reports are not detailed, and drawings of most of the graves and details of the inventory are missing. The tombs are dispersed, suggesting they might belong to different burial grounds and have widely varying dates. The earliest tombs excavated here date to around 300 BC or possibly earlier, but later tombs and a settlement have also been discovered that date from the second century BC, the period of the Xiongnu confederation.[34] The archaeologists date to the second century nine of the tombs, four of which have not been robbed.[35] Among these, tomb M4 stands out because of the richness of its grave goods. The earrings are associated with this tomb.

M4 lies in the south of the site less than a kilometer away from a site possibly identified as a settlement.[36] Tomb drawings are missing, but it is described as a pit burial with a single supine female corpse with her head to the northeast. Gold objects were the most plentiful among the grave goods, but goods also included ornaments made of silver, bronze, jade, stone, and glass, among them necklaces of amber, agate, crystal, and lapis; dancers, tigers, and dragons fashioned from stone; bronze three-winged arrowheads; and bronze horses. The earrings themselves form part of a more elaborate head decoration placed on the head of the corpse (figure 1).[37]

33. Although the capital of China for most of its history from the Qin onwards was located much further south along the Yellow River (Chang'an [Xian] and Luoyang).

34. Miniaev (2015) points out issues with the archaeology records and the dating of these tombs. He argues that M3 is earlier and M9 much later and that these tombs belonged to separate graveyards.

35. Xigoupan (1980: 7: 1–10) and Tian and Guo (1986).

36. As Psarras (2003: 77) points out, the published literature makes this claim on the presence of surface finds including pottery shards, an ax, a hoe, an awl, knives, fragments of armor, and stone beads. This is hardly conclusive as evidence of a settlement.

37. For the headdress, see Tian and Guo (1986: pl. 4) and A. Kessler (1993: 62).

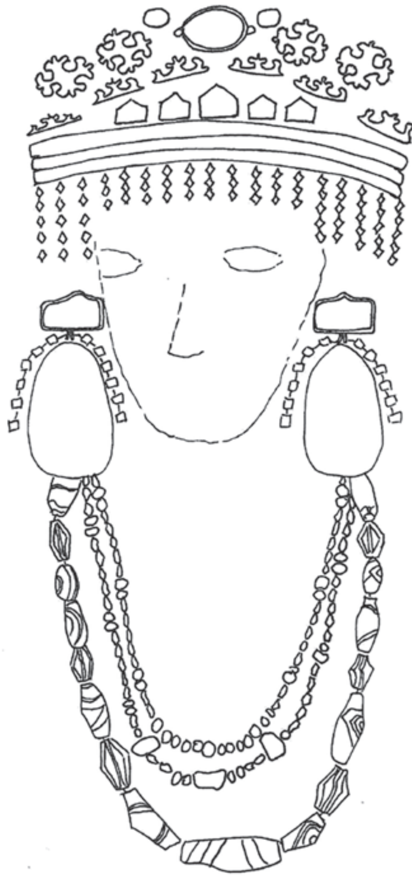

FIGURE 1. A reconstruction of the headdress that includes the steppe earrings. After Tian and Guo (1986: pl. 4).

The earrings were made from two ovoid openwork carved jade plaques.[38] The plaques are not mirror images of each other, but both show sinuous creatures, one with its head in profile and the other face on (figure 2).[39] They are enclosed within a thin gold border decorated with granulation. A loop on the top attaches them to gold plaques, also with granulation around their borders and with inlaid stone moose. Sets of inlaid gold squares joined with fine

38. The earrings are shown in A. Kessler (1993: 62, fig. 35), So and Bunker (1995: 24), and Whitfield (2009: 57, cat. 27). They are not always shown in the same combination.

39. They are usually both identified as dragons. See discussion below.

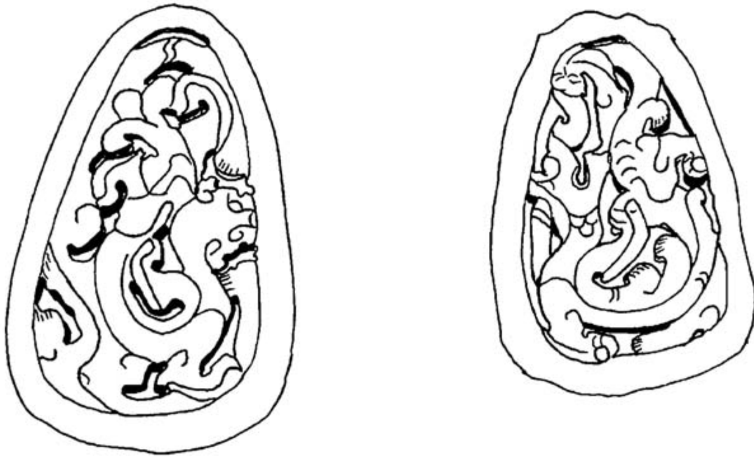

FIGURE 2. The designs on the jade plaques from which the steppe earrings were made. After A. Kessler (1993: 62, fig. 35).

chains hang to either side. Most of the inlays are lost, but those that have been found include mother-of-pearl, quartz, agate, amber, and glass.[40]

The gold for the inlaid stones and the moose has been hammered into shape and decorated with beads of gold. Hammering is the simplest method of working gold and is found in both steppe and settled populations well before this time. Granulation—whereby beads of gold are joined onto a surface for decoration—is a more developed technique but is also found along the steppe and in the bordering settled cultures, such as those of the Greeks and the Chinese, well before this period.[41] Zhixin Sun has suggested a possible route into China through maritime links with South Asia, based on gold decorative items with granulation found in the tomb of King Zhao Mo (r. 137–122 BC) of Nan Yue, a kingdom on the coast of what is now southern China and northern Vietnam.[42] There is evidence of Nan Yue's maritime links with South Asia—and further west (see chapter 2). However, granu-

40. As far as I know, the origin of the glass has not been explored; see chapter 2.

41. True granulation does not use metallic solders but either heats the gold surface and the granule sufficiently to enable bonding or uses nonmetallic solders, such as copper salts. Granulation is found on earrings dating from the third millennium BC found in a grave at Ashur on the Tigris (P. Harper 1995: 55).

42. Bunker, Watt, and Sun (2002: 114). Sun's argument suggests that granulation is found in the Harappan culture of the Indus, but there is no evidence of this. See Wolters (1998) for the history and variations of the technique.

FIGURE 3. The design on the belt plaque from grave M2.

lation was used in ancient cultures of Egypt and Mesopotamia and is also found on the steppe before this period, so there are many possible routes of diffusion.[43]

M2, like M4, contained gold and silver objects, including a belt plaque (see figure 3) and remains of a horse, a sheep, and a dog skull. The other second-century tombs at the site are not so richly endowed. Their grave goods consist of weapons, tools, and horse tack and decorations, along with animal bones. The presence of surface finds and agricultural implements might suggest a settlement and thus indicate a seminomadic society that also practiced agriculture. The richness of the grave goods in M2 and M4 indicates elite graves, while the lack of such riches in other graves suggests sharp social differentiation.[44] As Di Cosmo notes, "The complexity of this later nomadic society is nowhere more visible than at [this] site."[45] The form, materials, and motifs on these earrings and other tomb objects are part of this complexity.

43. For Akkadian-period (2334–2154 BC) earrings with granulation found in Ashur on the Tigris, see P. Harper (1995: cat. 35a–d).

44. Although, as Linduff (2008: 181–82) points out, the data from twelve tombs can hardly been taken as representative.

45. Di Cosmo (2002: 85). Although note his comments about the weakness of the evidence for a settlement.

MIRRORS AND BELT PLAQUES: TRADE AND EXCHANGE

The state of scholarship in the field of interactions between and identities of the cultures of the steppe and China is well illustrated by a brief consideration of two types of object found in tombs across the ecological divide—the mirror and the belt plaque. The former has long been associated with the Chinese and the latter with the steppe, but this has recently been challenged, and more complex models have been proposed.

Mirrors were long assumed by most to have arisen independently in the central China Shang (Yin) culture. This assumption has been subjected to careful research, and many scholars now argue that the mirror came to China from Central Asia.[46] In this revised scenario, Li Zhang (Jaang) has proposed two early and consecutive routes of influence between the steppe and central China.[47] The first had its intermediary in the Qijia culture (ca. 2200–1700 BC) of the Hexi corridor in present-day Northwest China—an important section on the later "Silk Road." Mirrors arrived here from the Bactrian-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC) in northern Central Asia, going north to the Altai and then south along the Ejin River or Etsin-gol to its source in the Qilian Mountains, which form the southern border of the Hexi corridor. From here the fashion and technology were transferred to the Erlitou culture (ca. 1900–1500 BC), which thrived around present-day Luoyang, just south of the Yellow River in central China.

A new route of influence emerged around the middle or end of the Erlitou culture, which, Li argues, was to supplant the Ejin River route and is called the Northern Zone. This comprised the Ordos region and surrounding areas to the east and south. It was separated from the Ejin River route by a mountain range, the Helan, and Li Zhang further argues that connections between central China and the Hexi corridor, home of the cultures that later gave rise to the Zhou (1046–256 BC), were not very active at this time.[48] She sees interaction with central China from across the length of the steppe through the

46. "The problem of the geographical-cultural origin of the form of the 'Chinese' mirror must remained unsolved for the present, but it clearly lies outside of or on the peripheral areas of China" (Rubinson 1985: 48). See also Juliano (1985).

47. Li Jaang (2011).

48. She cites a scientific analysis of the many jades found in the tomb of the Yin elite woman and general Fu Hao (Jing et al. 2007), which concludes that the jade was possibly not sourced from Khotan, as was long assumed. Khotan was reached through the Hexi corridor,

Northern Zone. This interaction is shown by objects that appeared in tombs in this area but also by objects found in central China—namely the bronzes of the Shang. Shang burials, meanwhile, also held objects from the steppe. Mirrors, however, disappeared from central China, only reappearing—but in a different style and again probably introduced from the steppe—in the eleventh century in the Zhou culture that was to succeed the Shang. So we see, not a single transmission, or one route, but changing spheres of influence and diffusion. If we accept this, we also see clear cultural importation from the steppe into central China.

The belt plaque found in tomb M2 is a typical accouterment found in graves across the steppe from the Black Sea to the Ordos and the subject of much continuing scholarly debate (figure 3). The belt made of plaques was particular to no one people of the steppe and, as well as being a practical item of clothing, was widely used as an indicator of social status and much more besides.[49] The plaque in M2 is gold and shows a design of a beast of prey attacking another animal, in this case a tiger attacking a wild boar. This theme of animal predation is found in the Scythic-Siberian culture, which spread across the steppe and thrived into the first millennium AD.[50] It is usually wrought in gold belt plaques, sword scabbards, buckles, and other portable objects.[51] But animal predation is not a theme unique to the steppe. It appears in Egypt in the late fourth millennium BC and then in West Asia a millennium later; the lid of a silver cosmetic box from the Royal Cemetery at Ur (ca. 2650–2550 BC) (present-day southern Iraq) shows a lion savaging a ram.[52] From the first millennium BC it is depicted by the empires bordering the steppe in a variety of settings and media: for example, shown in the ninth century BC on an obelisk at the Assyrian city of Nimrud; in gold and silver among the Ziwiye treasure from around 700 BC, on the border of present-day Iran and Iraq; in stone reliefs at the Achaemenid capital of Persepolis

passing through the proto-Zhou culture, and she suggests that such a route was not likely at the time (Li Jaang 2011: 42). For the Northern Zone, see Di Cosmo (1999: 885, 893).

49. Pohl (2002); Schopphoff (2009)—as a sign of power, rank, adulthood, spiritual status, etc. Brosseder (2011: 350, see fig. 1 for a distribution map). Also see chapter 2 for belt plaques found in Nan Yue in South China.

50. Miniaev (2016) dates this as the first to second century AD on the basis of analysis of bronzes from Dyrestuy cemetery.

51. Jacobson (1995: 25), who also groups the Yuezhi under this Scythic-Siberian culture (see chapter 2).

52. University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, B16744a/b. See A. Cohen (2010: 108, fig. 48).

from the sixth century BC; and in the fourth century BC on a mosaic at the House of Dionysus, in Pella, Greece, painted in Macedonian tombs, and carved on an Etruscan sarcophagus.[53] To see a simple line of transmission is all too tempting. As Ada Cohen notes in her discussion of this theme in the art of Alexander the Great (r. 336–323 BC), "There is an unavoidable impulse to postulate intercultural influence in order to explain its presence in the Greek world."[54] But as Cohen also notes, writers from the time of the French essayist Michel de Montaigne (1533–92) have noticed the universality of the appeal of this theme in human societies, and it could be argued with equal force that it emerged in different places at different times.[55] What might be more interesting, she suggests, would be to explore the meanings and depictions of the theme in different cultures and see if and how they overlapped.[56]

How much the Xiongnu were influenced by the Scythic-Siberian culture that stretched across the steppe to their west is uncertain. Some scholars see the Xiongnu as the continuation of this culture, while others see the Xiongnu as distinct, albeit having absorbed some influences.[57] Whatever the case, the Xiongnu also used belt plaques, as shown by those in the Xigoupan and many other tombs. They were part of steppe attire, used both to hold the short upper tunic of the horseman—or woman—in place and as portable storage, to hold daggers and other essential implements. In classical China, the traditional dress was a long gown, unsuitable for riding and not needing such a belt.[58] Yet we see steppe-style belt plaques in central China from this time, as in the grave of the king of the Chu state, Liu Wu (r. 174–154 BC), at Shizhishan near Xuzhou in eastern China, and in the tomb of King Zhao

53. See A. Cohen (2010: 93–101) for examples.

54. See A. Cohen (2010: 108, 93–118) for discussion of the theme.

55. See A. Cohen (2010: 110) for Montaigne. She also notes Jacobson's argument that the direction of influence was the other way, citing the Hellenistic elements in a fourth-century winged griffin (A. Cohen 2010: 319, 160n; Jacobson 1999: 62–3).

56. A. Cohen (2010) also discusses the theme of the hunt, in tandem with the animal predation theme. See chapter 8 for further discussion. For an insightful discussion about possible diffusion of a very distinctive representation of the animal predation theme, see Nathalie Monnet's presentation at the Symposium "Cave Temples of Dunhuang: History, Art, and Materiality," May 20, 2016, session 2, "Dunhuang: East and West," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBNgfAeJy6E.

57. Pulleybank (2000a: 53). Also see A. Cohen (2010: 17–18) for a discussion of similarities in their political systems.

58. Some centuries later, the so-called foreigner's dress of a short tunic secured with a belt over baggy trousers became a fashion statement among both men and women in China. See Shen Congwen (2012) for a history of Chinese dress.

Mo of Nan Yue in southern China (see chapter 2). Those in the tomb of Liu Wu are in gold. They are identical to gilded bronze pieces found in a burial in Pokrovka 2 cemetery on the Ural River, north of the Caspian in Russia; to belt plaques from a Han-period tomb outside Xian in central China; and to two others in gilded bronze now in a New York collection.[59] Emma Bunker discusses these and suggests a possible origin in North China. She further argues that the design has been adapted to fit Chinese taste in that "the vigor of the attack scene is almost lost in the manipulation of shapes into pleasing patterns."[60]

The belt plaques found in Liu Wu's tomb near Xuzhou and those from Xigoupan have Chinese characters engraved on the back, giving their weight and details of their subject matter. This supports the argument that they were produced in Chinese workshops or at least by Chinese craftsmen.[61] In addition, the reverse of a Xigoupan M2 plaque shows the impression of a textile, suggesting that it was made by the lost-wax lost-textile technique.[62] In her study of these objects, Katheryn Linduff suggests that this "was a Chinese invention that was aimed particularly at the efficient production of objects for the foreign [steppe] market."[63] Other items from these tombs of the Xiongnu period show mercury gilding, and Bunker concludes that these were also made in Chinese workshops.[64] If this is indeed the case, then we see a steppe object and motif—the belt plaque with the motif of animal predation—being adopted within central China and also adapted for production for a market outside China. Evidence suggests that the production of artifacts for the steppe market probably began in the kingdoms of fourth- to

59. Discussed in Bunker, Watt, and Sun (2002: 101) and Brosseder (2011).

60. Bunker, Watt, and Sun (2002: 101). But see comments from the Russian archaeologists of Xiongnu sites at Noin-Ula on the Xiongnu "schematization" of Scythic-Siberian animal subjects to geometric compositions (Davydova and Miniaev 2008: 22).

61. Di Cosmo (2002: 85). For images, see Brosseder (2011: 357) and Linduff (2008: 176). However, Psarras (2003: 104) has challenged this argument, suggesting the possibility of a different form of casting for the belt plaques and pointing out that the Chinese characters were added after casting.

62. On discussion of the M2 plaque and this technique, see Bunker, Watt, and Sun (2002: 20, 27–28 and figs. 42, 43) and Bunker (1988).

63. Linduff (2009: 94).

64. Bunker (1988: 29) notes that there is no evidence that the Xiongnu knew the technique of mercury gilding (also referred to as fire or chemical gilding) but that it was developed in China in the fourth century BC by alchemists seeking to make gold. It was also found to be used in Greece around the same time.

third-century China, before its unification.[65] Other finds demonstrate the further movement of these items, whether by trade, gift, or plunder.

The discovery of these belt plaques shows not only that artisans in the kingdoms of China were producing items for the steppe market but that some Chinese had also acquired a taste for these items, even if in some cases the theme was modified.[66] Their lavishness and their presence in elite tombs, as instanced by the gold and glass plaques of the king of Nan Yue (see chapter 2) and the massive gold plaques of the king of Chu, suggests they were a mark of wealth and power. Military leadership undoubtedly remained a mark of the Xiongnu elite, but this elite was now also involved in trade as an alternative form of wealth and status.[67] In Di Cosmo's words:

> The emphatic accumulation of precious objects reflects a "network mode" of elite representation. Nomadic elites became increasingly involved in long-distance contacts, and drew legitimacy and power from their connections with other elites. Exchange of prestige items, as well as trade and tribute, became the source of stored wealth that demonstrated and consolidated a lineage's enduring power. Foreign connections and representations of one's elite status in terms that would be readily recognized outside one's community marked a transition, among certain groups, to a symbolic system resembling the "network" rather than the "corporate" mode.[68]

The Xiongnu did not acquire objects only from their Chinese neighbors. Textiles from burials in Noin-Ula, another Xiongnu-period site in southern Mongolia, included Chinese and locally made felts but also other textiles that were almost certainly made in Central or West Asia.[69] A Greek silver medallion was also discovered in Noin-Ula, recycled as a platera, and a Roman glass bowl in Gol Mod 2, also in the Xiongnu area in what is now Mongolia.[70] These are generally dated later than the Ordos tombs, from the late first century BC to the first century AD. They are different from the pit

65. Proposed by Bunker (1983), and discussed further by Linduff (2009), in relation to ceramic molds for belt plaques found in tombs in Xian.

66. Of course, it is possible that the people in central China with a taste for these had steppe ancestry and that some peoples in southern China developed a taste for this "foreign" style. It can be argued that *Chinese* is as much a term denoting a political alliance as is *Xiongnu* and that it incorporates as much, if not more, diversity.

67. Di Cosmo (2002: 85). See also Di Cosmo (2013).

68. Di Cosmo (2013: 43).

69. See chapter 8 for reference to the Chinese silk.

70. Erdenebaatar et al. (2011: 311–13).

burials at Xigoupan and other Ordos sites in that they consist of a deeply buried wooden burial chamber accessed by a ramp. They include peripheral burial pits that belong to people who followed the elite occupant of the main chamber into death.[71]

The earrings are part of this story: they might also have been made in Chinese or steppe workshops. Alternatively, the jade plaques could have been fashioned by Chinese artisans well accustomed to working with this material—either in China or on the steppe—and then sold or given as gifts to the Xiongnu, whose craftsmen then incorporated them into this elaborate headdress. Jade and dragons are both often associated with the cultures of central China, but, as with most subjects in this book, the story is not a simple one.

JADE AND DRAGONS

Several different minerals are often termed *yu* (玉), the Chinese word for jade, the most valued in early China being nephrite found locally in the Yangzi River delta in eastern China.[72] But some pieces identified as "jade" are not nephrite but serpentine and marble.[73] The stone was worked from Neolithic times into copies of weapons and tools but also into forms that clearly had a ritual meaning and are found in a mortuary context. These included the *bi*, a flat disc with a circular hole in the center.[74] Few of the jades found in burials had any wear, supporting this ritual use. However, since little jade survives outside burials, we cannot be certain how much was produced for other contexts and has long been lost.[75]

Jade is a hard stone and has to be worked by abrading with sand.[76] The fine

71. Possible reasons for this development are discussed in Di Cosmo (2013: 44–45). Brosseder (2011: 247–80) suggests that the cause is the split of the Northern and Southern Xiongnu in AD 49.

72. Nephrite is a dense form of actinolite or, sometimes, tremolite. The other jade mineral, jadeite, was later sourced from Southwest China and present-day Myanmar.

73. Glass was also used, possibly to emulate jade—see the belt plaques of the king of Nan Yue, chapter 2.

74. The *bi* is also sometimes made of glass (see chapter 2).

75. Rawson (1992: 61) points out the paucity of ritual jades listed in classical texts and found in burials, suggesting that it might not have been considered appropriate to bury them. She notes the presence in tombs of jade pendant sets, belt ornaments, and body shrouds in addition to the ritual objects.

76. It is 6 (nephrite) or 6.5 (jadeite) on the Moh scale.

work of these early jades attests to high levels of skill and investment of time: these were expensive and valued objects. There is still considerable uncertainty about the sources of jade used in China, but for nephrite they certainly might have included Lake Baikal in Siberia and Khotan in the Tarim basin in eastern Central Asia (see below and chapter 6). It is possible, therefore, that some jade was imported two thousand miles from Khotan.[77] This, and the skill and time required to work it, probably made it as valuable to the early kings in China as lapis was to the Egyptian pharaohs. Jade ranges in color from white to black, with the lightest jade having translucent qualities. The aesthetic appreciation of different colored jades is reflected by the vocabulary developed to describe them: mutton fat, chicken bone, orange peel, nightingale, egg, ivory, duck bone, antelope, fish belly, shrimp, chrysanthemum, rose madder, and many more.[78]

Nephrite jades also include a dark green stone found in Mongolia and eastern Siberia near Lake Baikal. Bunker discusses an openwork plaque, probably carved using stone from eastern Siberia, and argues that this piece was probably created on the steppe.[79] The most likely method of creating jade ornaments, because of the stone's hardness, was abrasion with quartz sand, crushed sandstone, or crushed loess, the main part of which is quartz.[80] Metal tools started to be used before the time our piece was made. The design of the dark-green plaque is almost identical to that on bronze belt plaques discovered in Ivolga (near Ulan-Ude) and eastern Siberia. It also resembles gold plaques, inlaid rather than openwork, excavated from a tomb in Sidorovka, near Omsk in western Siberia. This last site is dated to the late third to second century BC, whereas the bronze and nephrite objects are slightly later. Communities of Chinese craftsmen were known to have worked at Ivolga, so it is also possible that this dark-green plaque was made by them.[81]

One of the sinuous animals on the nephrite, bronze, and gold belt plaques is of a type now often associated with the Xiongnu, described as a dragon with a horned lupine head and proposed as an antecedent to the elongated dragon found in Han-period China.[82] The dragon is seen in the arts of Central Asia

77. See Wang Binghua (1993: 167).

78. The use of food terminology perhaps also reflects the importance of cuisine in the culture.

79. Bunker, Watt, and Sun (2002: 134, cat. 106).

80. Ward (2008: 304).

81. Bunker, Watt, and Sun (2002: 134, cat. 106).

82. Bunker, Watt, and Sun (2002: 133).

from the late third/early second millennium, but it is, as Sara Kuehn points out in her study of the dragon in eastern Christian and Islamic contexts, "one of the most ancient iconographies of mankind."[83] She argues that, as well as being used in Xiongnu-period art, it is a motif of the Yuezhi who founded the Kushan Empire (see chapter 3). The dragon in profile on the earrings (figure 2) shows some features of the lupine style, with its long nose and horn. In the jade, the carving, and the depiction of the dragon the piece is also similar to a piece found in the Xiongnu graves of Noin-Ula, considerably further north on the Selenga River in present-day Mongolia.[84] The identity of the animal on the second plaque—shown face on—is less clearly a dragon: the small ears are more tiger-like (figure 2). Dragons and tigers are often found together, as in the Ivolga belt plaque, mentioned above, but sometimes an animal with a long sinuous body and such a head is described as a dragon with a tiger head or, in Bunker's terminology, a "feline dragon."[85] The tiger shown on the belt plaque from tomb 2 at Xigoupan (figure 3) shows something of this sinuousness, with its body twisted around in almost a full circle.

Little scientific testing on the jades has been carried out, and most identifications of its source are based on the style. But this is always open to revision. Some scholars, for example, have long concurred that many of the 755 "jade" carvings in the twelfth-century BC tomb of Fu Hao on the Yellow River near Anyang are made from nephrite from Khotan.[86] Fu Hao was a woman in the Shang elite, married to the king and buried around 1200 BC. But scientific testing on the "jades" in her tomb suggests that a variety of jade-like stones were used, such as a marble-type nephrite "Anyang jade," sassurite mined in the mountains of Henan in central China. There are few nephrite pieces, and their origin is uncertain.[87] This would seem to be supported by the argument, mentioned above in relation to the diffusion of mirrors, that the Hexi corridor route between the steppe and China was not very active at this time, having been replaced by the Northern Zone route. However, it must be said that jade from Khotan could also have traveled

83. Kuehn (2011: 4).

84. Illustrated in Borovka (1928: 72C) and with a line drawing in Yetts (1926: 181).

85. Bunker, Watt, and Sun (2002: 135). She describes a similar motif used on a different piece as a "coiled feline" (25, fig. 24). Such pieces could as validly be described as representing "tigers with a dragon-like body." We do not know how, if at all, they were labeled in their time.

86. Wang Binghua (1993: 167).

87. Jing Zhichun et al. (1997: 376–81).

north, on routes across the Taklamakan and the Tianshan to the steppe and then to China.

A few centuries later, an early Chinese text, *Guanzi*, attributed to Guan Zhong (ca. 720–645 BC), refers to the Yuezhi as a people who supplied jade to the Chinese. The Yuezhi lived in the Hexi corridor and would have been ideally placed to control the trade. This suggests that the route had opened up again. By the time of our earrings, however, the Yuezhi had been driven out by the Xiongnu, thus giving the Xiongnu control of this important route—and of the jade supply into China. This was a good reason for the Chinese Qin and then the Han to try to seize control of the route. After the Han successes, it seems there was a plentiful supply of Khotan jade in China, exemplified by Han burial suits.[88] The Han also protected the routes by building walls to the north of the Ordos and from Wuwei to the northwest of Dunhuang—the Hexi corridor.[89]

WOMEN ON THE STEPPE

The fact that the most richly endowed tomb excavated so far in the Xigoupan complex is that of a woman calls for comment. The comparable treatment of men and women in death is not unique to Xigoupan. Kathryn Linduff discusses the cemetery at Daodunzi in the southwestern Ordos. On the basis of Chinese coin finds, it can be dated from the end of the second century to the first century BC, and twenty-seven graves have been excavated here, nine of which are of women and seven of men. The tombs include pit burials, as at Xigoupan with supine bodies facing northwest, but also catacomb tombs, and the female burials include chambers for the remains of sacrificed animals: cattle, sheep, and horses. Belt plaques, knives, coins, and cowrie shells are found in both male and female burials, whereas beads and gold earrings are only in female tombs. None are as richly endowed as Xigoupan, and Linduff concludes that these were intercultural families, less powerful than those represented at Xigoupan, but where men and women were treated equally in death. She concludes that "no essentialized view of the

88. For a Han burial suit from Nan Yue in southern China, see J. Lin (2012).

89. It has been suggested that one of the primary functions of defensive walls—from Rome to China—was to defend roads. This was the view taken by Aurel Stein (1921: 18) when he surveyed the Chinese Han walls at Dunhuang, a point noted by Psarras (2003: 63).

Xiongnu is, therefore, adequate, to explain the complex nature of their identity as expressed in burial customs found even at the one site of Daodunzi. Although the Chinese records give us a single view, archaeological research gives us a rich and more nuanced view of the Xiongnu, or whoever these peoples were, including a window on how one's age and sex affected the solemn ritual of burial."[90]

In fact, richly endowed tombs for women are found elsewhere from the second millennium. The tomb of Fu Hao, mentioned above, is an obvious example. The fact that she is buried with many steppe accouterments has led some to argue that she was from the steppe herself: marriage is always part of the exchange that goes on between neighboring peoples, whether formally for diplomatic purposes, as in the Xiongnu-Chinese *heqin* treaties; as part of the plunder of war, with captured women becoming sexual partners, free or otherwise (see chapter 10); or just as a result of the intermixing of neighboring populations.[91]

Another female burial that has led to discussion about the role of women on the steppe is at Tillya Tepe, on the borders of present-day Afghanistan and Turkmenistan and dating to the middle of the first century AD. Scholars have argued that these are burials of Yuezhi peoples. A battle-ax and Siberian daggers were found in this woman's grave, and she has been described as a "woman warrior." Karen Rubinson offers an interesting discussion of this attribution in her article on gender and cultural identity. She briefly traces the discussion on the status of women on the steppe and points out that military equipment is found in many female tombs. However, she follows others in making an important point, quoting Feldore McHugh's study of mortuary practices—namely that a "danger lies in attempting to make a direct connection between particular objects placed in the grave and a function that they might have performed during life as used by the deceased."[92] McHugh gives an example of a culture where a spear and a battle-ax in the grave represent the status of an unmarried male rather than a warrior. Rubinson follows this to argue that some of the objects in the Tillya Tepe burials were intended to indicate cultural identity rather than the role of the tomb occupant—an

90. Linduff (2008: 194).

91. Sergey Miniaev (2015) argues that the steppe accouterments belonged to her attendants.

92. Rubinson (2008: 53), quoting McHugh (1999: 14).

identity that displayed the transition by the Yuezhi in their pastoralist role to a more settled lifestyle.[93]

Tomb objects, apart from indicating the actual wealth and status of the occupant in his or her lifetime, might also reflect aspirations, just like the possessions of a living person. Of course, there is the question of whether the deceased had any choice in the objects or whether this was decided by others on the occupant's death. Then there is the inclusion of what might be considered "exotic" or "foreign" objects in tombs, such as the Hellenistic glass bowl discussed in chapter 2 or the Bactrian ewer discussed in chapter 5.

Many unanswered questions remain about these earrings. Was their original recipient the woman buried in tomb M4 at Xigoupan, or had they been passed from one owner to another and finally put in her tomb as a sign of her status? When were they worn, if at all? Where were they made and by whom? We can say that they were almost certainly made for possession by an elite woman living on the northern steppe borders of what is now China. And we can also say that, whether made by Chinese or steppe craftsmen—or both—they represent elements of both of these cultures and their rich interaction during this period.

So where does this leave us? What we can assume, given the earrings' materials and their complexity, is that they were an indication of wealth and status. But apart from this, as with many archaeological artifacts, we are in a state of uncertainty. We cannot be certain where they were made or who made them, and whether they were made as a whole or in parts. We do not know whether they were made for trade, gift, or ritual and whether they were acquired by purchase, plunder, or some other means. Nor do we know whether the peoples of the Xigoupan burials saw these artifacts as part of their own culture or considered them somehow foreign.

RECENT HISTORY

The earrings remained buried until their discovery in 1979 and were then discussed in the 1980 excavation report. The burial site is in modern-day China: they were excavated by a Chinese archaeological team and became part of the

93. She identifies some objects, such as glass in one of the graves, as "represent[ing] the exotic and the rare" and thus as reflecting the elite status of the individual (Rubinson 2008: 57).

cultural collections of China. There are no peoples claiming descent from the Xigoupan, or even the Xiongnu, who might argue that these objects belong to their cultural patrimony. Across the border, Russian archaeologists similarly excavate and take ownership of steppe objects that are found in modern-day Russia.

The earrings became part of the collections of the Ordos Museum, although on display in the Inner Mongolian Provincial Museum, established in Hohhot in 1957. They became part of the growing number of objects sent by China to exhibitions abroad from the 1980s. As Chinese museums were reopened following the Cultural Revolution, foreign curators were able to gain access to many objects excavated since the 1950s but previously not very accessible. They took full advantage. The earrings were first loaned abroad to an exhibition on objects from Inner Mongolia that opened in Los Angeles in March 1994.[94] They traveled with the exhibition to New York, Nashville, and Victoria until September 1995 and then to Alberta in 1997.[95] The exhibition was headlined as "Genghis Khan," presumably as a means of attracting visitors by a familiar name. Although the authors were clear about the very varied provenance and dating of the objects included, it is inevitable that the complexities of the many cultures represented by these objects and their tenuous links to Genghis Khan would not be noticed by many visitors. But the exhibition provided an opportunity for scholars to see a range of objects, previously unexhibited in North America, that reflected this complexity and, most especially, the influence of steppe cultures on China.

The art of the steppe, which had been richly represented in museums and in scholarship under the USSR, started to receive more attention in North America around this time.[96] New York's Asia Society Gallery 1970 exhibition displayed material that came from Siberia but was held in US collections. This was followed by a loan exhibition from USSR museums in

94. A. Kessler (1993: 62). *Genghis Khan: Treasures from Inner Mongolia*, exhibited at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County (March 6–August 14, 1994). I have not been able to find any prior exhibition history.

95. The exhibition then traveled to the American Museum of Natural History, New York (September 10–November 27, 1994), the Tennessee State Museum, Nashville (December 17, 1994–March 5, 1995), the Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria (March 25–September 10, 1995), and the Royal Alberta Museum (March 22–July 6, 1997). See A. Kessler (1993).

96. See Jacobson (1995) for a summary of the interest in and scholarship on Scythian art (20–26).

1975 held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.[97] Two more exhibitions concentrating on these collections were held in 1999–2000. The first, *Scythian Gold: Treasures from Ancient Ukraine*, toured North America and then went to Paris. The second, *The Golden Deer of Eurasia: Scythian and Sarmatian Treasures from the Russian Steppes*, opened at the Metropolitan Museum in 2000.[98] By this time the USSR had broken up, and many of the museums it had previously represented were no longer under Russian control. The former exhibition concentrated on items from one former Soviet state, Ukraine, independent since 1990. The latter, organized with the Russians, showcased items in Russian museums.[99]

While these exhibitions concentrated on the western Eurasian steppe, attention also turned to the eastern lands with a major catalog and an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum, both showcasing private collections in North America rather than collections held in China.[100] However, while Scythian culture was the focus of the earlier exhibitions, the cultures of the Xiongnu have yet to be the named focus of a major exhibition in North America.[101]

Between 2002 and 2012 all of the provincial museums in China were

97. Bunker, Chatwin, and Farkas (1970); Piotrovsky (1973–74); P. Harper et al. (1975).

98. Reeder and Jacobson (1999); Aruz et al. (2000).

99. Some of these items had been excavated in lands, such as Ukraine, that were by now independent, and this did not go without notice. An article in the *Ukrainian Weekly,* for example, criticized the MMA show as being driven by politics rather than scholarship: “It seems that the only purpose of the Russian-inspired show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art was to take the shine off the Ukrainian exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. It is a sad example of an august museum fawning to the interests of a fading political star” (Fedorko 2000). The tension continues: in late 2016 a Dutch court ruled on objects still being held in Amsterdam following the takeover of Crimea by Russia during the course of a 2014 exhibition, *Crimea: Gold and Secrets from the Black Sea*, organized with Ukraine. The court held that the objects belonged to Ukraine and not to the loaning museums in Crimea (Allard Pierson Museum, “The Crimea Exhibition,” press release, August 20, 2014, www.allardpiersonmuseum.nl/en/press/press.html).

100. The Arthur M. Sackler Collection and the Eugene V. Thaw Collection respectively: the latter was gifted to the Metropolitan Museum (Bunker 1997; Bunker, Watt, and Sun 2002).

101. The Beijing World Art Museum had an exhibition, *Huns and the Central Plains: Collision and Mergence of the Two Civilizations*, in 2010. An exhibition in Korea, *Xiongnu, the Great Empire of the Steppes* (National Museum of Korea, 2013), concentrated on recent archaeological finds from one site in Mongolia. A small exhibition *The Huns* was organized as part of the 2005 Europalia festival in Belgium, showcasing finds from Russian collections (Nikolaev 2005).

rebuilt, with vast modern buildings replacing the old sites.[102] The new Inner Mongolian Provincial Museum, opened in 2007, is ten times the size of the original. The earrings are on display. By this time the cultures of the steppe from the late first millennium BC were starting to be incorporated into the "Silk Road" label.[103] The earrings duly traveled to Brussels in 2008 for an exhibition on the Silk Road, which included this steppe element.[104]

Excavations and scholarship on the Xiongnu continue to reveal new evidence and findings about the complexity of cultures under their empire, but it remains to be seen whether these earrings will be displayed as part of any future exhibitions showcasing this complexity or whether they will continue to occupy a cultural hinterland.

102. Gledhill and Donner (2017: 120). As the authors also show, this has been accompanied by an enormous growth in museums, including private ones: from 14 in 1949 to 1,215 in 2005 to 4,510 in 2015 (119).

103. Routes across the steppe had been included as part of the 1988 UNESCO project "Integral Study of the Silk Roads: Roads of Dialogue," probably in part as a result of the 1957 report of the Japanese National Commission to UNESCO (Japanese National Commission 1957; Whitfield 2018b).

104. Whitfield (2009: 57, cat. 27).