

# Legacy of the Ancestors: Revitalization of the ‘Scythian Animal Style’ in Altaian Arts and Crafts

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## Abstract

This study examines the so-called ‘Scythian animal style’, which has experienced a revival, particularly in contemporary Altaian arts and crafts, where it serves as a symbolic expression of ethnic identity and the Altaians' identification with the ancient Pazyryk culture of the Iron Age. The animal motifs from the Pazyryk culture, originating in the Altai region, are widely incorporated by Altaian artisans today and are used to represent and promote Altaian culture. The paper focuses on the role of this art style in Altaian crafts, exploring its interpretation and the reasons for its use from the Altaians' perspective. Alongside professional literature, the

study draws primarily on data gathered during the author's field research conducted in 2018 and 2019 in the Altai Republic, Russian Federation. The theoretical framework of the study is grounded in ethnosymbolism.

### Keywords

Scythian animal style, Pazyryk, Altaians, ethnic identity, arts and crafts, revitalization

## Introduction

Even more than 2,000 years after its birth, the ‘Scythian animal style’ arouses unfailing interest among scientists. Countless studies and books have been devoted to its research and interpretations.<sup>1</sup> However, it fascinates not only scientists, but also the inhabitants of the present-day Altai Republic, where many Altaians<sup>2</sup> proudly subscribe to the legacy of the ancient nomads. During our recent field research of 2018 and 2019, we found out that this art style is currently widely used especially in Altaian arts and crafts, and in general is becoming one of the important means of expressing the ethnic identity of the contemporary Altaians. Our study analyses the role, application and reasons for the revival of the ‘Scythian animal style’ in contemporary Altaian arts and crafts.

The results of our research concerning the role and application of the animal style (especially Pazyryk culture) in the contemporary arts and crafts of the Altaians are presented using several selected examples in the second part of the study. We also deal with the reasons that led Altaian artisans to use this style in their work, focusing on their own interpretation and argumentation. To put the issue into context, this core section is preceded by a brief overview of the brief history of ‘Scythian animal style’ and a summary of findings from culturally important Pazyryk *kurgans* focused especially on tattoo motifs as outstanding visual sources of inspiration for contemporary Altaian arts and crafts. In conclusion, this study outlines and summarizes the possible reasons for the former distinctive artistic style to be revitalized and how it relates to the identity of the Altaians. The study is theoretically framed by ethnosymbolism.

<sup>1</sup> Recent synthetic works include, for example, an extensive monograph on the exhibition at the British Museum by Simpson, St. John and Svetlana Pankova, S. *Scythians: Warriors of Ancient Siberia*. London: Thames & Hudson – The British Museum, 2017, or Koreniako, V. A. *Iskusstvo narodov Tsentralnoy Azii i zverinnyy stil'*. Moscow: Vostochnaya literatura, RAN, 2002, classic archaeological works include the translation summary by Rudenko, S. I. *Frozen Tombs of Siberia: The Pazyryk Burials of Iron Age Horsemen*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970, or one of the first interpretive studies by Hančar, Franz. “The Eurasian Animal Style and the Altai Complex.” *Artibus Asiae* 15, no.1/2 (1952): 171-194, and many other works.

<sup>2</sup> In this article, Altaians are understood as a Turkic ethnic group of indigenous Siberian people living mainly in the Altai Republic in the present-day Russian Federation.

## Ethnosymbolism and ethnic identity

In the second half of the 20th century, DNA analysis began to become one of the possible sources on which to build not only personal but also ethnic identity. Commercially marketed DNA tests can show a person's genetic ancestry, although interpretation of the results is problematic, but a cultural construct has developed that genetic ancestry can form a scientifically unquestionable basis for the construction of individual or ethnic identity. These analyses are based on the assumption of an irrefutable association of a population with a particular territory;<sup>3</sup> in other words, in the case of ethnic identity, biocultural continuity associated with a particular territory is implicitly assumed. In anthropology and ethnology, attention has been paid to the study of meanings (symbols and signs) since the 1960s within the framework of symbolic and interpretive anthropology (C. Geertz, M. Douglas, V. Turner, A. Gell, and others).<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of our study, ethnosymbolism provides a suitable interpretive framework. Representatives of this movement (J. Armstrong, A. Smith, J. Hutchinson) argued against theories understanding nations as a modern product, i.e. that 'nations do not have navels', as they were invented mainly in the 19th and 20th centuries.<sup>5</sup> Representatives of ethnosymbolism argue that it is impossible to understand nationalism and the formation of nations without taking into account its ethnic basis, i.e. the effect and meaning of myths, symbols, traditions, cultural values. Anthony Smith has long held the view that contemporary nationalism has its roots in stable historical ethnies, which have become the source of ethnosymbols. As much as he admits that modern nations are inventions, there are cultural continuities with ethnies without which this invention and creation of nations could not have occurred.<sup>6</sup>

The Altaians currently form a minority population in the Altai Republic (Altaians – 33.9%, Russians – 56.6%).<sup>7</sup> In minority ethnic populations, we often encounter the need for (self)identifying signs, symbols or attributes to a greater extent than in the case of large nations.<sup>8</sup> For example, one can see it clearly in the style of Altai villages, which differ from Russian ones by the traditional Altai dwelling (*ail*), or at the time of festivities when Altaians dress in their costumes). The identification of the Altaians with the Pazyryk culture can be

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<sup>3</sup> See, e.g. the Parthenon Marbles debate, see JENKINS, *Keeping Their Marbles*.

<sup>4</sup> ORTNER, *Theory in Anthropology*.

<sup>5</sup> GELLNER, *Nations and Nationalism*.

<sup>6</sup> SMITH, *National Identity*. c. d.

<sup>7</sup> Respublika Altai. Pasport regiona 2001-2020. [online] Pravitel'stvo Respubliki Altai. [cited 16 February 2021]. Available from: <https://www.altai-republic.ru/about-the-region/pasport/>

<sup>8</sup> ŠATAVA, *Jazyk a identita*.

understood primarily as a means of achieving identification on the part of others, which is an important part of self-identification. Identity (in anthropological discourse) means to be *identical (with oneself)*, as well as to be *different*.<sup>9</sup> In this context, it is worth mentioning that the ethnocultural identity of the Altaians has many layers, from belonging to patronymics, to subdivision of the lineage, to the lineage, to clan territory, to a subethnic group, through belonging to local communities, to the current administrative unit, ending with the national component of ethnic identity – Altaian.<sup>10</sup> The ancestors of the present-day Altaians were most often referred to by the Russian administration as Oirats or Kalmyks (due to the fact that the ancestors of the Altaians were vassals of the Dzhungar Khanate (17th – mid-18th centuries). After the renaming of the Oirat Autonomous Region to the Gorno-Altai Autonomous Region in 1948, the inhabitants of Altai began to be called ‘Altaians’ after the name of one of the dominant ethnic groups ‘Altai-Kizhi’ – ‘People of Altai’.<sup>11</sup> The formation of a nation may rely on such attributes as its own collective name, a myth of common origin, a collective historical memory, or perhaps some distinguishing elements of a common culture that make it distinctive compared to other cultures.<sup>12</sup> These attributes can be demonstrated in the material discussed in this study. Although contemporary Altaians do not refer to a single myth<sup>13</sup> when interpreting their ethnogenesis, Pazyryk cultural symbols are used in contemporary craft production, which means not only the revitalization of the animal style, but also one of the ways of forming and maintaining ethnic identity through the use of ‘Scythian’ ethnosymbols associated with one of the ethnies on which contemporary ethnic processes of Altaian ethnic identity formation and affirmation are based.

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<sup>9</sup> ERIKSEN, Ethnicity and Nationalism, 105.

<sup>10</sup> TIUKHTENEVA, Lichnost' i obshestvo.

<sup>11</sup> TADINA, “Oirat” kak simvol gosudarstvennosti.

<sup>12</sup> SMITH, National Identity.

<sup>13</sup> Origin myths usually refer to the origin of a particular Altaian clan and often include reminiscences from the mythology of ancient Turkic tribes, especially the figure of the wolf as the ancestor of all Turkic peoples (Potapov, *Mify altae-sajanskikh narodov*).

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g. the Parthenon Marbles debate, see Jenkins, *Keeping Their Marbles*.

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<sup>15</sup> ORTNER, Theory in Anthropology.

<sup>16</sup> GELLNER, Nations and Nationalism.

<sup>17</sup> SMITH, National Identity. c. d.

<sup>18</sup> Respublika Altai. Pasport regiona 2001-2020. [online] Pravitel'stvo Respubliki Altai. [cited 16 February 2021]. Available from: <https://www.altai-republic.ru/about-the-region/pasport/>

<sup>19</sup> ŠATAVA, Jazyk a identita.

<sup>20</sup> ERIKSEN, Ethnicity and Nationalism, 105.

<sup>21</sup> TIUKHTENEVA, Lichnost' i obshestvo.

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## Archaeology and animal style

The Scythians is a collective name for a group of nomadic Iranian ethnic groups living from the middle of the eighth century BC to around the end of this millennium (depending on the region) in large areas along the Black Sea coast, from the mouth of the Danube to the Don. The term *Scythians*, whose culture was already described by Herodotus, historically covers various groups with similar customs and lifestyles (the Persians referred to these nomads as the *Saka* people, they called themselves *Skolotoi*).

‘Another characteristic common to all Scythian tribes is their distinctive decorative art. From about the seventh to the fourth century BC, this was dominated by the so-called “Scythian Animal Style”, a unique semiotic system that expressed various ideas – religious, mythological and aesthetic – exclusively through zoomorphic or animal-form imagery’.<sup>25</sup>

According to the international team that prepared an exhibition for the British Museum in London a few years ago using the collections of the St. Petersburg Hermitage Museum, this style developed in Central Asia by 900 BC and retained to the end a very distinctive ‘visual language’ based on three main motifs: 1) a feline predator, 2) a bird of prey, 3) a herbivore

<sup>22</sup> TADINA, “Oirot” kak simvol gosudarstvennosti.

<sup>23</sup> SMITH, National Identity.

<sup>24</sup> Origin myths usually refer to the origin of a particular Altaian clan and often include reminiscences from the mythology of ancient Turkic tribes, especially the figure of the wolf as the ancestor of all Turkic peoples (Potapov, *Mify altae-sajanskikh narodov*).

<sup>25</sup> SIMPSON and PANKOVA, *Scythians*, 20.

with hooves and antlers.<sup>26</sup> There are also local and stylistic differences in the theriomorphic style, which have been well documented by archaeological research and findings since 1763 when the first underground tomb, Litoi Kurgan, was excavated.<sup>27</sup>

The use of the 'Scythian animal style' can be traced back to the period between the beginning of the first millennium BC and the end in the fourth century AD.<sup>28</sup> Scenes featuring both real animals and mythical creatures tend to have a thoughtful composition and deep symbolism – depicting three layers (*vertical planes*) of the world: an upper or heavenly plane (with birds), a central plane of the mortal world (with ungulates) and below, the underworld and water with predators, fish, snakes and all kinds of fantastic beasts, denoting not only death but also birth and reproduction.<sup>29</sup> Together, all the motifs represent the eternal struggle between life and death as well as the unity of the world. The unique style, in which beasts, griffins or curled up deer appear,<sup>30</sup> was applied to a number of cult and prestigious artifacts as well as objects of everyday use made of various materials (including iron, bronze and gold).

Due to the nature of the nomadic way of life, the Scythian culture spread over a vast area. The Scythians also made expeditions and campaigns to Central Europe, penetrating as far as the northern Balkans (Sigynns), in Hungary they are credited with the Vekerzug culture and others. Scythian and related tribes briefly influenced the Illyrians, Thracians and other ethnic groups. It is the Pazyryk culture, named after the Pazyryk site in the Altai region, that is associated with the beginnings of the Scythian boom in the Iron Age (sixth to third centuries BC) as these nomads from the Altai region probably maintained active contacts with advanced civilizations in Persia or in eastern Mongolia and China, as evidenced, for example, by the findings of related 'Scythian art' in the animal style in the Ordos culture and its bronzes of the same era. These are probably the easternmost remnants of the activities of these ancient inhabitants of the Eurasian steppes.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> RUDENKO, Frozen Tombs of Siberia.

<sup>28</sup> ANDREEVA (2018) offers in her Ph.D. dissertation a very thorough overview on this topic/dates. While she uses the term *Animal-Style Art* ('There is however no uniformly accepted definition and classification criteria of animal-style art', ANDREEVA 2018:2), we will prefer to use the term 'Pazyryk animal style' with regard to the Pazyryk culture in the territory of the Altai Republic and also with regard to the use of this term by Altaian scholars, see e.g. TADINA, N. A., and T. S. IABYSHTAEV. 'Pazyryksky stil' simvol'noi atributiki Respubliki Altai v konekste kartiny mira altaitsev'.

<sup>29</sup> SIMPSON and Pankova, *Scythians*.

<sup>30</sup> JACOBSON-TEPFER 2015; Bunker, Chatwin, Farkas 1970

<sup>31</sup> LEBEDYNSKI, *Les nomades*.

## Pazyryk tattoos as an example of inspiration

A notable and very influential example of the animal style, which is reproduced and serves among other things as a source of inspiration for Altaian artisans, is the tattoo, a distinctive form of art evidenced with findings over 2,300 years old.<sup>32</sup> In Pazyryk itself, where S. I. Rudenko conducted his research, not only various artefacts with zoomorphic motifs have been preserved in permafrost and in exposed tumuli (*kurgans*), but also tattoos on the bodies of mummies.<sup>33</sup> They also depicted fantastic species of animals.<sup>34</sup> In 1947, Rudenko made a great discovery in one of the tumuli there: In the burial chamber hung with felt curtains, the embalmed bodies of a man and a woman lay in a coffin. The coffin was carved from a larch trunk and decorated with leather carved silhouettes of deer. The man's arms and part of his leg were covered with fantastic tattoos depicting real and mythical animals, including griffins, rams, birds, snakes and deer. The casket also contained a blanket.<sup>35</sup> Shortly after that, the magazine *Sovetskaia etnografia* (1949) published a text devoted to the tattooing of a man in his fifties who, in addition to embellished arms, shoulders and right calf, also sported a dotted – and probably ‘healing’ – tattoo around his lumbar spine, also known to Siberian shamans.<sup>36</sup> What exactly did the rider, whose patterns could, according to ethnological analogies, prove nobility and the warrior's abilities, wear on his body? The researchers counted seventeen motifs created under his skin with needles and soot. Some animals can be identified. On his right shin, there is a large fish, probably the European conger, complemented on the inner calf by four ibices running from the ankle to the knee.

‘There is a mountain sheep on his right arm and a donkey-like animal nearby. Apart from these, all the remaining animals are of fantastic species: three deer with griffin beaks and enormous antlers, the ends of which form griffin heads, and five cats of various shapes, in one

<sup>32</sup> We are certainly aware of other numerous ‘animal style’ findings-items at Pazyryk kurgans (leather covers, decorated stockings, copper pendants, carved wooden kitten, numerous saddle covers etc., but the identified tattoos are by far the most elaborated and most detailed representatives of this style, as depicted in classical Rudenko tome (1947, 1970): see tattoo motifs at pages 109, 111, 247, 251, 253, 260 and/or 262–266.

<sup>33</sup> RUDENKO, *Frozen Tombs of Siberia*.

<sup>34</sup> The possible symbolism of the animal style in tattoos from the period of the Pazyryk culture is thoroughly discussed, for example, by K. Iwe or S. A. Jatsenko in the book Della Casa, Philippe, and Constanze Witt, eds. *Tattoos and Body Modifications in Antiquity*. Zürich: Chronos Verlag, 2013. An excellent overview of tattooed mummies in the Altai-Sayan Mountains, including pictures, is provided by S. Pankova in his recent book on the archaeology of tattooing: Krutak, Lars, and Aaron Deter-Wolf, eds. *Ancient Ink. The Archaeology of Tattooing*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> BAHN, *The Story of Archaeology*.

<sup>36</sup> RUDENKO, *Tatuirovka aziatskikh eskimosov*.



case with wings but always with an emphasis on clawed legs, open maw, spiral tail, sometimes with a griffin's head like a bunch at the end'.<sup>37</sup>

They all were made with elaborate details. The running hooved animals are turned vertically, only the beasts are situated horizontally as if they were hunting them, but there is no fight depicted anywhere on the skin. While ancient authors did write about tattoos of the Scythians, Dacians and Sarmatians, unfortunately they do not inform about the deeper meaning they had for the described 'barbarians'. We can only assume whether the tattoos served as magical protection, totem symbols or as a sign of vitality or dignity. They also might have been supposed to give people 'the characteristics of the animals depicted: strength, nimbleness and agility'.<sup>38</sup> Modern examinations of bodies from a number of other sites (Pazyryk, Ak-Alakha-3, Verkh-Kaldzhin 2, Olon-Kurin-Gol-10) have shown that most of them were tattooed. Researchers from the University of Ghent, Belgium, also created a computerized '3D reconstruction of a tattoo found on the body of the man from the second kurgan in Pazyryk'.<sup>39</sup>

The Siberian Ice Maiden, also known as the Princess of Ukok, was tattooed with similar images, such as a deer on her wrist. In 1993, the team of scientist N. Polosmakova discovered another grave with preserved 2,500-year-old remains on the Ukok Plateau on the border with China. The archaeologists carefully uncovered the mounds, revealing a pristine frozen tomb that concealed the tattooed body of a woman of about twenty-five years of age in a coffin made of a tree trunk, cloth, leather objects and wooden trays with slices of meat.<sup>40</sup> The only tattooed parts of her body were her arms, including a thumb. There are also animal style motifs present. On the left shoulder stands a mythical animal: the already familiar deer with a griffin's beak and antlers with griffin heads, a ram chased by a snow leopard and more deer on her wrists and fingers. This girl, also examined in Moscow, later became the subject of emotive political controversy. The Altaians, who regarded her as the mythical leader of the once powerful people, chose her as a symbol of their revival, a 'great-grandmother', and demanded her return home to Ukok.<sup>41</sup> Genetic analyses have paradoxically shown, however,

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<sup>37</sup> HANČAR, *The Eurasian Animal Style*, 189.

<sup>38</sup> SMIRNOV, *Skify*, 167.

<sup>39</sup> BOURGEOIS et al., *Saving the Frozen Scythian*, 461.

<sup>40</sup> BAHN, *Tombs, graves and mummies*.

<sup>41</sup> The Princess of Ukok now rests at the National Museum of the Altai Republic in Gorno-Altai. There are many newspaper articles about the dispute over the return of the Princess of Ukok between Altaians and Russian archaeologists, see e.g. [https://moya-planeta.ru/news/view/vopros\\_o\\_zahoronanii\\_mumii\\_princessy\\_ukoka\\_vyzval\\_spory\\_6566](https://moya-planeta.ru/news/view/vopros_o_zahoronanii_mumii_princessy_ukoka_vyzval_spory_6566), <https://smotrim.ru/article/1807459>, <https://smotrim.ru/article/1807994>

that the so-called Princess was most likely unrelated to today's Altaians; it also had a European appearance. Russian archaeologists later met with the natives' disagreement with further research into the kurgans.<sup>42</sup> In contemporary tattoo studios (around the world), the so-called *tribal style* is often linked to these Pazyryk culture genuine tattoos.

## **Origins of interest in the 'Scythian animal style' and its application in the contemporary arts and crafts of the Altaians**

While numerous professional works by archaeologists, historians and art historians have been devoted to the phenomenon of the 'Scythian animal style', only a few of them examine its current 'afterlife' in connection with the revitalization of Altaian culture and related manifestations of ethnic identity. The motifs of the animal style, originating from the Pazyryk kurgans in the territory of the modern-day Altai Republic, are currently widely used in Altaian arts, becoming a very important means of self-identification of the Altaians.

Increased interest in Pazyryk motifs began to be manifested in the 1990s in the creation of the region's brand, when it gradually gained ethnopolitical significance.<sup>43</sup> In connection with the ongoing political and social changes, the Altai Republic is beginning to focus on the revitalization of Altaian culture, including traditional arts and crafts. The importance of traditional crafts and arts as part of the historical and cultural heritage of the region was enshrined in the 1994 Act on the Historical and Cultural Heritage of the Altai Republic. In the 1990s, this act sparked an effort by peoples in the post-Soviet era to search for their ethnic identity. They built mainly on the most distinctive ethnosymbols of 'their' culture, the animal style was important source of ethnosymbols for the Altai people, not surprisingly because of the famous archaeological finds in their homeland. This act also sparked an interest in the renewal and development of Altaian crafts, which was reflected in the gradual emergence of many craft centres and workshops. In connection with this, various national programmes are being created to support traditional crafts, in which socio-economic aspects also play a role.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> PLETS et al., *Mezhdunarodnoe znachenie repatriatsii*. Pazyryk tattoos have received especially great attention in Euro-American, so-called Western, society. To this day, it is copied, modified and tattooed as the so-called "Neo-Pazyryk style" (KRUTAK and DETER-WOLF, *Ancient Ink*). After all, in other parts of the world, historical or native tattoos have become part of the expression of self-awareness of ancient roots in contemporary cultures, especially in Polynesia, which gave the tattoo its present name.

<sup>43</sup> TADINA and IABYSHTAEV, *Pazyryksky stil'*.

<sup>44</sup> MOSKVINA and OKTIABRSKAIA, *Khudozhestvennye promysly*.

The motifs of the aesthetically attractive 'Scythian (Pazyryk) animal style' are currently very popular among artisans of various specializations (leather embossing, metalworking, felt products, jewellery making). They are most popular, however, in the artistic processing of metal and leather. These motifs are mainly used to decorate the metal and leather parts of the horse harness. In the case of metal, these are mainly bits and decorative components of the bridle in the form of small relief sculptures created using the lost-wax casting technique, or wrought and engraved metal ornaments, which most often decorate the pommels of the saddle or stirrups. The most common material for the production of these decorative elements of the bridle and saddle is brass, whose golden colour evokes so-called 'Scythian gold'.<sup>45</sup> Some artisans, engaged in the artistic processing of metal, also make jewellery in the 'Scythian (Pazyryk) animal style'.

Created in 2013-2015 by Altaian artisans of the Ongudaisky District together with their American colleagues, the so-called 'Altaian Golden Saddle' – '*Altai altyn eer*' – can be described as the most important example of craftsmanship with the use of Pazyryk animal motifs.<sup>46</sup> The western-style saddle is richly decorated with animal motifs from Pazyryk kurgans using the techniques of stamping and engraving into the skin on the sides and the rear and front pommels of the saddle. The saddle is also decorated with metal plates with wrought and engraved ornaments. The motifs were chosen to match the shape of the individual parts of the saddle and thus form an aesthetically harmonious whole. The saddle is now on display at the Altaian Centre for Folk Arts and Crafts in the village of Kupchegen, Ongudaisky District. In connection with the application of the 'Scythian (Pazyryk) animal style' in the artistic processing of metal by local artisans, mention should also be made of the stirrup monument on the Kür-Kechü landmark in the Ongudaisky District.<sup>47</sup> The iron stirrup, over two metres high, is decorated in the upper part with two wolf heads, the artistic elaboration of which displays an obvious inspiration drawn from the 'Scythian (Pazyryk) animal style'. The wolf is known to have played an important role in the mythology of the ancient Turkic (and Mongol) ethnic groups, in which it acts as their ancestor. This work may then be viewed as a kind of connection between the legacy of Scythian and Turkic cultures.

Altaian artisans themselves consider this style unique and attractive, which, according to them, is rarely used. When presenting their products abroad, they are met with admiration

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<sup>45</sup> Silver is also used in decorating the saddle. The saddles decorated with silver are intended, however, for high-end and more affluent customers.

<sup>46</sup> Authors of the saddle: E. Bainov, A. Kukhaev, A. Babaev, E. Ideev, S. Kunanakov, V. Kukhaev, Lisa and Loren Skyhorse.

<sup>47</sup> Author of the stirrup: E. Ideev.

and interest. They carefully studied animal style motifs, reproducing them either in exact copies or using them as a source of inspiration to apply their own invention. Many of today's products in this style have an exhibition purpose. Artisans take part in various competitions, often achieving the first ranks with their products.<sup>48</sup> Still, they do not only make them for exhibitions or competitions, they are also intended for off-the-shelf sale. Among those interested in products with animal motifs from Altaian kurgans are not only customers from abroad, but also the Altaians themselves.<sup>49</sup> According to N. A. Tadina and T. Iabyshtaev, however, the Pazyryk animal style in Altaian society is associated with ancient kurgans, and although it is very attractive, it is still used only to a limited extent:

‘It is used in stage costumes, stylized folk costumes, on the facades of government buildings, but not in everyday clothing or apartment buildings. This can be viewed as the observance of the boundary between the earthly and the afterlife world, the violation of which is perceived as a bad omen (*yra*)’.<sup>50</sup>

In this context, it should be mentioned that during our research we did not record a single case of the use of horse harnesses with Pazyryk motifs in the daily life of the Altaians. This type of product serves only as a representative gift in the event of a significant life anniversary, etc., or is used during various major national holidays and festivities.<sup>51</sup> Mention should also be made that we encountered several cases in our research where products with Pazyryk animal motifs were incorporated into the everyday life of the Altaians. One example is a wrought-iron stair railing depicting Pazyryk beasts<sup>52</sup> in the house of a young Altaian family, or a jewel (pendant) in the form of a copy of a golden panther from the Siberian collection of Peter I, worn on the neck by an elderly Altaian woman.<sup>53</sup> Although the described phenomenon is not very widespread thus far, the given examples indicate the gradual changes that are taking place in Altaian society and its worldview.

<sup>48</sup> Field research data 2018, informant: A. B., man, Ongudaisky District. In accordance with research ethics and the protection of personal data, the names of the informants are anonymised.

<sup>49</sup> Field research data 2018, informant: I. E., man, Ongudaisky District.

<sup>50</sup> TADINA and IABYSHTAEV, *Pazyryksky stil'*, 167.

<sup>51</sup> Field research data 2018, informant: E. D., man, Ongudaisky District.

<sup>52</sup> Author of the railing: E. Ideev.

<sup>53</sup> Field research data 2018, Ongudaisky District, and 2019, Gorno Altaisk.

## **Pazyryk animal style as a legacy of ancestors – interpretation and argumentation**

The attractiveness of the Pazyryk animal style is not the only reason why this style is used in Altaian arts and crafts. Artisans using the Pazyryk animal motifs consider the bearers of this culture to be their ancestors and their work a continuation of their legacy. The main arguments include the activities of representatives of Pazyryk culture and contemporary Altaians in the same area:

‘Altai is my homeland, and those who lived in this territory in any distant past are my ancestors.’<sup>54</sup> ‘I definitely consider the people of the Pazyryk culture to be my ancestors, because they lived in the Altai. We the Altaians have great respect for our country and our ancestors who lived here’.<sup>55</sup>

As many researchers also point out, the Altaian nature is determined by the connection between the Altai and the people who inhabit it. Migration, DNA or anthropological differences are not signs of kinship, but Altai as a geographical and revered area and homeland is.<sup>56</sup>

Another argument is certain identical features that are seen in the material or decoration of utility objects made by the Pazyryk and Altaians:

‘If you look at museum objects dating from the nineteenth century, you will find similarities with the products of the Pazyryk culture on many Altaian products. This mainly applies to felt and leather objects, for example, the technique, ornaments and colours used are similar’.<sup>57</sup>

In the 1960s, N. I. Kaplan dealt with the topic of the continuity of style in the Altai Republic, finding certain general analogies concerning the circle of themes, such as images of horses, deer or hunting scenes on household products, which are common for both ancient and contemporary (1960s) Altaian applied art. She sees other analogies, i.e. proofs of continuity, especially in some materials (felt), their processing techniques (application), colour and also in the construction of ornaments.<sup>58</sup> V. A. Koreniako, who examined in detail the style of the peoples of Central Asia in his research, called her comparative analysis, however, rather

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<sup>54</sup> Field research data 2018. Informant: A. B., man, Ongudaisky District

<sup>55</sup> Field research data 2018. Informant: A. K., woman, Ust-Kansky District.

<sup>56</sup> PLETS et al., *Mezhdunarodnoe znachenie repatriatsii, similarly Brož, Substance, Conduct, and History and HALEMBA, The Telengits.*

<sup>57</sup> Field research data 2019. Informant: S. N., woman, Ust-Kansky District.

<sup>58</sup> KAPLAN, *Ocherki po narodnomu iskusstvu.*

cursory,<sup>59</sup> which we dare to agree with. With the hitherto insufficient study of Altaian ornament in the professional literature and the related lack of comparative material, it is very difficult to trace the continuity between two epochs that are thousands of years apart, during which many ethnocultural changes have taken place.

Regarding the genetic relationship of the Altaians with the people of the Pazyryk culture, there is a strong questioning and non-acceptance among the Altaians concerning the results of the genetic analyses performed by Russian scientists:

‘Some Russian scientists told us very rudely that the Princess of Ukok is not related to us according to genetics, which I found very disrespectful to us and even suspicious. She and her people lived here in Altai, and I don't believe there's isn't any trace of them left in our genes’.<sup>60</sup>

Another claimed: ‘I'm convinced that those genetic analyses are false. I don't believe them. I think it was clearly purposeful to shut us up, so to speak’.<sup>61</sup> The above comments mainly reflect the public statement by the Institute of Archaeology of the Russian Academy of Sciences that present-day Altaians have no right to interfere in archaeological research since they have no biological connection (based on mitochondrial DNA analysis) with the Princess of Ukok. They perceive the claims made by the scientists as a denial of their connection with the Pazyryk culture and their claim to the legacy of their ancestors.<sup>62</sup>

For the sake of completeness, it is worth mentioning that according to the analyses of the so-called single-nucleotide polymorphisms, which can tell us much more about the origin of the population than analyses of mitochondrial DNA and Y chromosomes, the gene pool of present-day Altaians contains a component of European origin representing the oldest population substrate in southern Siberia and may be related to the migration of steppe peoples of the so-called Yamnaya culture to the Sayan and Altai Mountains in the Bronze Age. While this component of European origin is detectable in many populations of southern, central and northern Siberia, among the southern Siberian ethnic groups that have the same components of ancestral populations (Altaians, Tuvans, Buryats), it is the Altaians who have the highest share.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>59</sup> KORENIAKO, *Iskusstvo narodov*.

<sup>60</sup> Field research data 2019. Informant: L. V., woman, Gorno-Altajsk.

<sup>61</sup> Field research data 2018. Informant: A. B., man, Ongudaisky District.

<sup>62</sup> PLETS et al., *Mezhdunarodnoe znachenie repatriatsii*. The statement was based on the aforementioned dispute over the return of the Princess of Ukok to the Altai Republic. For more on this topic: Plets et al. 2004.

<sup>63</sup> PUGACH et al. *The Complex Admixture History*. The authors would like to thank Prof. Viktor Černý of the Institute of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Sciences for consultations on genetic analyses.

## Conclusion

The aim of the study is therefore to analyse the role, application and reasons for the revival of the 'Scythian (Pazyryk) animal style' in contemporary Altaian arts and crafts. In conclusion, we would like to highlight one of the significant findings obtained during the field research. It implies a gradual penetration of the animal style into everyday life on everyday objects, although in Altaian society this animalistic style is associated with the ancient kurgans – that is, with an afterworld that is to be avoided. In our view, this can be seen as one example of ethnic processes as interpreted in ethnosymbolism, i.e. that the formation of ethnic identity is built on different ethnies and their symbolism.

The Pazyryk animal style is currently basically understood as 'Altaian'. If we focus on the arguments given by the Altaians themselves regarding the use of this style in contemporary arts and crafts (and not only in it), they often state that the representatives of the Pazyryk culture are their ancestors, without any doubt. As already mentioned, the famous Princess of Ukok had a European appearance, and from the genetic tests of the Pazyryk mummies to date, it is not possible to unequivocally deduce a kinship with the modern Altaians. Most Altaians do not agree with the conclusions of the genetic analyses and question them. The territorial aspect is of considerable importance for the Altaians, i.e. the strong attachment to and respect for the homeland. The people play an important role here, through the prism of the Altaians – respect for the ancestors who lived and died in this country in the past, no matter how long ago. Regarding the continuity of the style in the Altai region, the emphasis is put on certain identical features in the material, processing technique, ornament and colours used. The comparison and argumentation in this case is mainly based on museum objects dating from the nineteenth century. Undoubtedly, its visual attractiveness also plays an important role in the use of this style in the arts and crafts.

The animal style can currently be considered a kind of 'brand' of the Altai Republic, it is reproduced and ably used to present the Altaian culture. Local artisans and artists play a key role in this regard, acting as its successors, preservers and promoters.

The Pazyryk culture and its animal style thus becomes a kind of unifying element for the various levels of identity mentioned and acts as something that is common to the Altaians in general. In connection with the revitalization of the Altaian culture, the strengthening of national traditions and the emphasis on cultural peculiarities, this unifying 'element' appears to be very strategic, also with regard to the popularization and promotion of the 'national culture' abroad.



## Figure captions

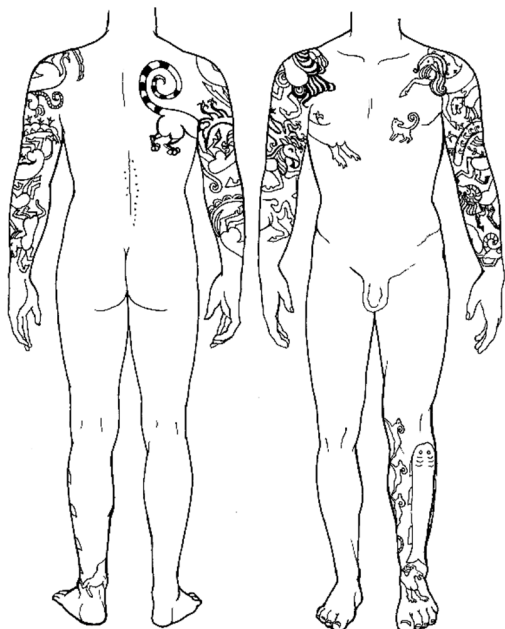


Fig. 1

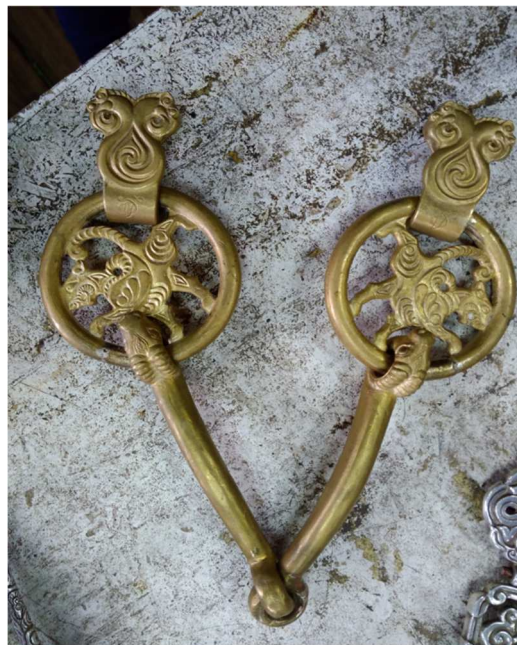


Fig. 2

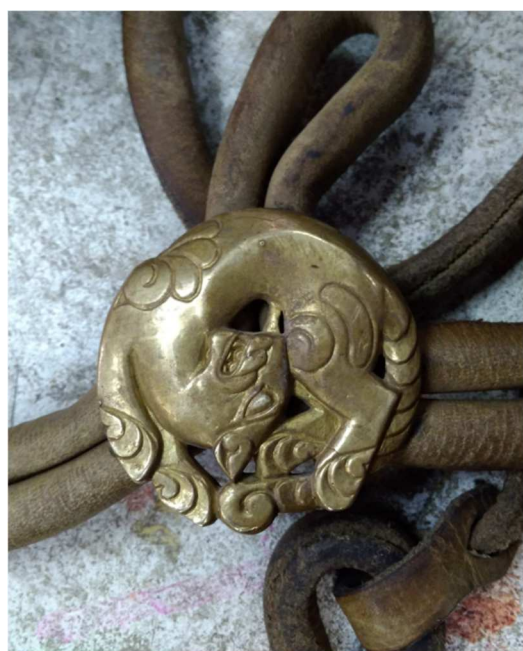


Fig. 3



Fig. 4





Fig. 5



Fig. 6

Photo captions:

1. Tattoos with animal motifs on the body of a mummy from Pazyryk (Rudenko 1970, redrawn by M. Rychlík)
2. Bit. Author: Arzhan Kukhaev.
3. Bridle decoration. Author: Arzhan Kukhaev.
4. Altai Golden Saddle with Pazyryk animal motifs.
5. Railing with images of a panther and a deer. Author: E. Ideev.
6. Design of earrings. Author: E. Ideev.

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