

# **A New Perspective on the Analysis of Koguryo Wall Paintings Iconography**

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## A New Perspective on the Analysis of Koguryo Wall Paintings Iconography

In this article I formulate some assumptions on the origin of Koguryo wall paintings and on the influences that possibly determined part of its iconography, as trying to analyze various finds not belonging to the Central Plain Arts (*zhongyuan*, the cradle of Chinese Civilization). First of all, I consider some similarities in represented themes between several Asian petroglyphs traditions and early Koguryo wall paintings, which share common scenes of hunting, dancing, geometrical motifs, etc. When analyzing some other traditions of wall paintings such as Chinese, Central Asia but also Egyptian and European ones, I find particularly interesting the case of Italian Etruscan Art (a civilization flourished between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> centuries B.C.) as this civilization left numerous tombs containing wall paintings (In particular, those discovered in Tarquinia, near Rome, built up between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.) which, ichnographically, show interesting similarities to the Koguryo ones.

**Keywords:** Wall Paintings, Rock Art, Iconography, Koguryo, Etruscan Art.

# A New Perspective on the Analysis of Koguryo Wall Paintings Iconography

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## I. Introduction

Starting with the discoveries at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Chinese scholar Li Yuncong and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> by the French archaeologist Chavannes, many studies on Koguryo wall paintings that were initially led by Japanese researchers focused their attention on the relationship between these paintings and those produced in the Central Plain, the very core of Chinese civilization. This tendency often quashed the potential of a comparative study on Koguryo wall paintings and often disregarded the influence that Koguryo arts received from non-Han cultures through territories beyond the Yellow River — thus ignoring the big international receptiveness that the kingdom had at that time. In this article we will attempt an experimental yet interesting hypothesis about the origins of wall paintings in Asia. While considering the enormous geographical and chronological gaps between them, we will try to extend the spectrum of research on the iconography of Koguryo wall paintings, including in our analysis petroglyphs and other iconographical phenomena not necessarily ascribable to the tradition of

the Central Plain. This attempt is encouraged by the hope that the effort will allow us to better understand Koguryo culture and possibly lead to a deeper understanding of its arts.

We do not absolutely intend here to deny the connection between the wall paintings of Koguryo and those discovered in the territory of modern China, especially those unearthed in the Liaoning province (in the ancient cities of Chaoyang and Liaoyang) or in Inner Mongolia (Helinge'er). Even while admitting the significant Chinese influence on Koguryo wall paintings, we want to propose that the shift of the center of the Han parietal art's production from the Central Plain into peripheral regions of the Empire — often seen as a consequence of the political turbulence that characterized the second half of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 A.D.) and the resultant migration east and west of people seeking more stable political conditions (Liu Wei, 2005, p. 117) — may simply be interpreted as a revival or maturation of a local ancient artistic genre rooted in the usage of the stone: that of rock art.

At the same time we want to consider the idea that some themes depicted in Koguryo tombs hide further and more ancient origins than the Chinese ones. We will analyze some examples taken from different civilizations, mainly from Egyptian and Etruscan relics because these two civilizations present significant examples of ancient wall paintings in a funerary context. The iconographical images of wall paintings — vehicles of ancient religious thought travelling to places far from their origins — were adapted to local tastes and different artistic sensibilities. Here they most likely became the expression of the autochthonous thinking and character of the people who produced them. Even if the meaning changed partially or completely over time, some iconographic elements remained unaltered, as they were a visual expression of a religious theme or of a holy sentiment. The survival of these motifs through time was possible as Art — originally or, as Price (1989) says, before industrialism — was a religious phenomenon and not considered an act of Creativity or Innovation, but rather an act of creation where the

artist himself had no importance.

Finally it is in stone — as a symbolic, religious material largely used in ancient arts since prehistory but also used nowadays in regions as such Xinjiang and Mongolia — or better in motifs expressed by or on stone that I find the origins of Koguryo iconography; therefore our analysis will begin with stone.

## II. Petroglyphs and the Origins of Mural Paintings

### 1. Rock Paintings and Mural Paintings

In many areas of the world it was believed — and is still believed by some — that spirits like human beings or fantastic creatures, lived in rock-made worlds (Eliade, 1974). Nothing appears more powerful, noble, and long-lasting as stone: stone goes beyond human frailty and its lack of movement, its dimensions and strange shapes charm, scare, and finally attract us. Its majesty, hardness, appearance and colors convinced ancient men that it didn't belong to the profane world to which they belonged and that it could bring them to other, supernatural dimensions (Eliade, 1996). Stone worship is also historically connectable with the Korean Peninsula as through the myth of Dangun [檀君] and his descent upon the Taebaek mountains [太白山] and the cave-myth of Ungnyeo [熊女]. The image of a cave and of stone worship is also reported in ancient Chinese historical sources that refer to Koguryo and particularly in the references to the worship of a Cave God<sup>1</sup>, which may also remind us the Amaterasu myth in Japan.

To a stone cult, petroglyphs represent a symbol of eternity contrasting with human transience, and they are considered as runes of sorts cast

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<sup>1</sup> “In the East of that country there is a big cave, that they call ‘Land God’ [其國東有大穴，號祕神]” (*Sanguozhi*, Weishu, XXX, Dongyizhuan, 30, Koguryo).

after magical rites of passage and endowed with apotropaic power. They are interpreted as “permeable membranes which separate, but link together an external world with an inner one” (Clottes & Lewis Williams, 1998). Rock art represents the first form of arts in prehistory and even though it is unquestionable that most of its production belongs in the Neolithic period, it is also true that a relevant portion was produced during later periods and even during the Proto-Three Kingdoms Period and the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) in the case of China’s Gansu province: therefore it is relatively late. The presence of petroglyphs is registered in almost every region of the world, and a significant concentration has been found in Chinese territories: mainly in Heilongjiang, Qinghai, Xinjiang, Tibet, Guangxi and Sichuan provinces. The most relevant quantity of artwork in China has been found in northern territories, particularly in Mongolia; they can be considered the artistic expression of nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples distinct from those under the Yellow River who led the formation of Chinese traditional culture.

In the Korean peninsula the recurring geometrical drawings found in the sites of Ulju Cheonjeon-ri and Goryeong Yangjeon-dong stand out, as well as those of Ulsan Bangudae (whose production partially continues until the Bronze Age and even up to the Three Kingdom Period), where zoomorphic figures are prevalent. Among these have been discovered gravid animals and representations of internal organs, the so-called “Siberian x-ray style” (Kim & An, 2003, p.32) that can be associated with fecundity or rebirth rituals. It is important to consider that many of these representations are visible also in later Korean bronze artworks as a proof of iconographical continuity between artistic phenomena and sensitivities that were not substituted or annihilated through time but instead carried a magical value, dictated by the age-old tradition of which they were the product.

Generally speaking, these drawings in stone, rather than a product of a mere aesthetic sensitivity, seem to testify to the birth of worship

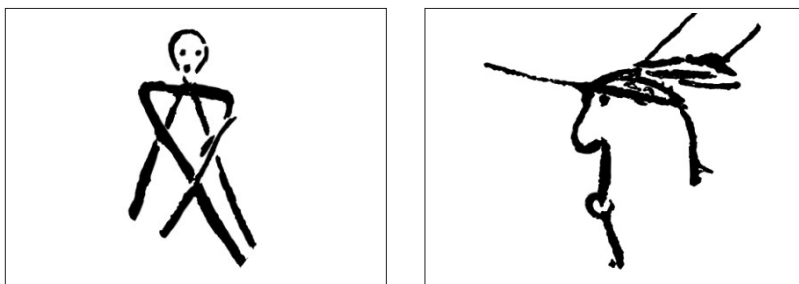
rituals of people whose economy was often based on hunting. These rituals canonized and sanctified the most important moments in human life, and above all stigmatized the hardest and most unconceivable ones — birth and death. Man has always sought an answer to the mystery of death; trying to exorcize an event seen as inexorable and dreadful led to imagining a continuation of a similar life after death. The first place it was imagined that a dead person could keep living was in the tomb, to which were soon associated some precise eschatological meanings that led to the conceptualization of a new world where the dead could gather together and live a new existence. As the receptacle of the corpse and the soul of a dead man, the tomb was initially a pit excavated in the ground, but gradually started to assume peculiar architectonical connotations that would finally become the identification symbols of several ancient civilization and cultures. The vertical structure typical of the pit tomb was gradually replaced by a horizontal one during the Qin and Han dynasties, allowing a significant enlargement of the burial space and reorganization of the funerary environment. This new architectonical feature allowed a recovery of the tradition of rock art, embellished by coeval tastes and beliefs and much more refined pictorial techniques that led to the birth of a new artistic tradition: wall paintings.

Among the archaeological discoveries of relevance during the 1970s was a tomb that was probably constructed in the second millennium B.C.<sup>2</sup> Researchers found a stone coffin inside, with internal slabs decorated by rough drawings similar to those typical of the art rocks — so it can be considered a product of a transitional period where a rock drawing was transferred from a cave or from an outer environment to inside a tomb, to accompany the dead corpse. It can also be considered evidence of a ‘proto wall painting’ inside a funerary environment. Similarly, Japanese archaeology has shown some interesting examples,

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<sup>2</sup> Images of this tomb have been published in *Koguryo Yeongu*, 16 (Picture no. 9), 2003.

as that of Gorōyama Kofun (6<sup>th</sup> century) in Fukuoka, where again the phenomenon of transplantation of a ‘rock-art-like’ painting into a funerary location is visible.

Of particular importance during the reign of Koguryo was the value and symbolic significance attributed to stone. The kingdom inherited in its territory the north-eastern megalithic culture, well testified by dolmens remains, and soon gave proof of an extraordinary architectural ability through the construction of royal palaces — in order to build them they even renounced eating<sup>3</sup> — with massive defensive walls and tombs. Even among archaeological finds it is possible to discover evidence that a sort of continuity existed between art rock production and wall paintings. An interesting example could be that of some tiles discovered in the remains of the royal palace of Guoneicheng (Guknae-seong, the second capital city of Koguryo) in Ji’an, Jilin province, which show representations of a human figure and a horse — perhaps a unicorn or *qilin* — delineated simply by few lines drawn on the clay.

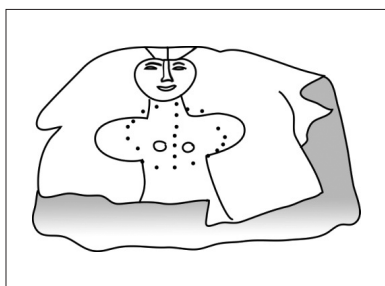


Pic. 1. Fragments of decorated tiles with carvings [刻划纹瓦] found in the ancient site of Guoneicheng (Guknae-seong) between the 3rd and 5th centuries.

<sup>3</sup> “There is not much land to cultivate and their efforts are not sufficient to fulfill their needs. Nevertheless they do not renounce to build up beautiful palaces [少田業，力作不足以自資，故其俗節於飲食，而好修宮室]” (*Houhanshu*, LIIIV, Dongyizhuan, LXXV, Koguryo).



Also important is the discovery of a carved rock statue of a woman (length 1.03m, width 0.54m, depth 0.9m, see Pic. 2-a) in the cemetery of Yushan (one of the main six clusters of Koguryo tombs, in the Ji'an area), nine meters from the tomb JYM3319 and about one km from the remains of the royal palace. Various hypotheses have been formulated on that find and opinions of scholars vary on whether the figure has any relationship to other tombs in the area, as it is made with a different type of stone. This figure's singularity and uniqueness is important as in the Yalu area no other rock figure similar to this had been found until now, which is strange, considering the importance of rock-sculpture in that period in the rest of Asia. Still we cannot ignore the fact that this statue stands in a tomb cluster and that inevitably means that the statue should have a relation with the surrounding tombs. It has been suggested that the statue was built to protect the tomb, that it represents a feminine deity or that it could have been the object of worship at the center of a religious area similar to that found in the JTM992 tomb, (Sun Ren Jie , 2009, pp. 274-275). It could then be a sun divinity or, as stated by Kim Il-gweon (2003, pp. 79-104), a board for the traditional Korean board game, the *Yut-nori*, similar to others unearthed in South Korea. While considering the validity of these opinions, it is interesting to compare this work to another type of stone art in the steppes, that of the 'stone-men.'



Pic. 2. (a) Feminine statue closed to JYM3319



(b) Fivizzano, Archaeological Museum of Florence

The presence of small holes on the upper part of the statue may indicate a religious practice still present in Xinjiang and Mongolia that consists of hitting these stones with a small hammer during a prayer. The practice of building similar statues also corresponds to a Turkish tradition described in the *Suishu*, wherein the statues have the semblance of the dead person to whom they were dedicated.<sup>4</sup> *De facto* the same iconographical structure is visible in many other world sites: also Fivizzano (see Pic. 2-b), Pontevicchio, and other Italian and Corsican locations (the production ends around the VI century BC) show examples similar to those in Asia.<sup>5</sup> That some of these finds are in the Lunigiana region is particularly interesting, as this region was an old settlement area of the Etruscans, the creators of some of the most important tombs decorated with the world's best-known wall paintings. Masculine and feminine figures are both represented: the men hold daggers (the favorite weapon for nomadic populations) and in the stone monuments found in Ji'an the women show their breasts. These Italian figures have been interpreted as maternal deities; a similar interpretation was done for those of Koguryo where the stone could apparently symbolize Yuhwa, the mother of Jumong (the founder of Koguryo). Some Japanese *haniwa*, although made of clay, may also represent a continuation of this tradition.

Hayashi Toshio's research on Stone men of Eurasia shows a general categorization of these 'stone men'. Among the six categories listed in his research, the final one is characterized by female representations with well-defined breasts holding, generally but not necessarily, small objects in their hands (Hayashi, 2005, pp. 8-19). In the Yushan' case the arms are not represented, but the association with these stone sculptures is confirmed by the typical representation of a woman limited to her bust and breast. A divinity or deceased person, this statue is a possible proof

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<sup>4</sup> *Suishu*, v. 84, Beidizhuan.

<sup>5</sup> Some examples are available on the official site: <http://www.statuestele.org/ing/1/1/home-page.htm>.

of the connection between stone art and wall paintings — not only because of its physical proximity to Yushan wall painted tombs, but also because it could constitute a portrayal of a dead man. It also could be the image of the spouse of the tomb occupant offering a cup and nurturing the dead person. At the same time it could be proof of how wall paintings as a new genre came throughout the steppe and the Silk Road along with other non-Chinese types of beliefs and arts. We will discuss more about this point in following sections, but first I will analyze some themes belonging to Rock Arts tradition and then inherited by the wall paintings.

## 2. Some Examples of Themes of the Rock Arts Inherited by Wall Paintings

The relationship between rock art and wall paintings is exemplified by the iconographical continuity that is evident between these two artistic traditions, especially in the northernmost regions of Asia. Among many recurring themes one finds animals, real or imaginary, hunting or fishing scenes, sheep-breeding, journeys on horseback, dancing, as well as zoophilia, sex scenes (associable with fecundity rituals), and occasional fighting scenes.

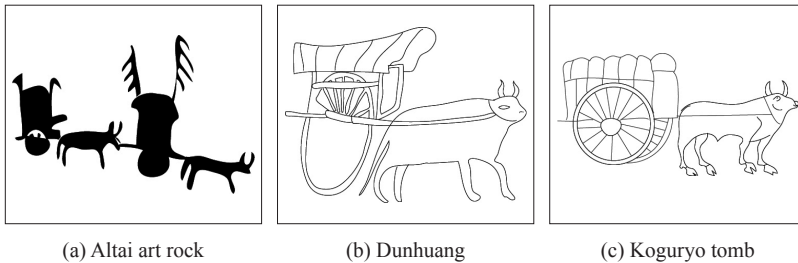
In Ulsan Bangudae, the most famous site of rock arts in South Korea, the majority of the figures represent animals; of particular relevance are those with shells, cetaceans, and turtles. Animals are often present on those rocks depicting hunting scenes, and the same phenomenon appears in wall paintings in Korea and also modern Chinese territories, mostly in the northern regions (for example the Helinge'er tomb in Inner Mongolia or those in Jiayuguan Jiuquan and Dunhuang in the Gansu province) where nomadic cultures had a longer and deeper tradition. The presence of this type of theme is particularly rare in the wall paintings of Xi'an and Luoyang (the primary example at Xi'an University of Technology, Late Eastern Han, 25 A.D. – 220 A.D.).<sup>6</sup> However,

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<sup>6</sup> Xi'an Cultural Relics Protection and Restoration Center (2006, May).

hunting scenes are often depicted in Koguryo's tombs (mostly in the first phase of the wall production, which is generally considered to be made between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries) and hunting can be considered one of the most typical and appreciated themes of Geoguryeo arts.<sup>7</sup>

The northern regions could be the origin of another theme connected to horses and hunting — the cart. The cart theme recurs in rock art of the Mongolian territory from the Neolithic and its prevalence could indicate the presence of a semi-nomadic population ethnically related to later Yemaek, as noted by Jeong-bae Kim (2000, p.347). Carts were often pulled by two horses and used presumably more for the local economy than for war purposes, which is why we sometimes find them pulled by oxen in wall paintings. We cannot forget that the introduction of carts in ancient economy led to rapid growth as happened in Silla under Kings Beopheung [법흥] (?-540) and Jinheung [진흥] (534-576).

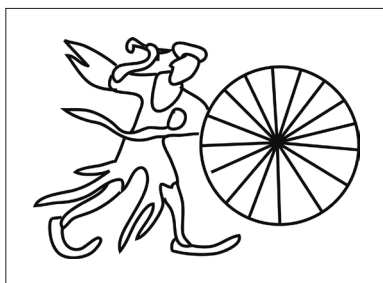


Pic. 3. Some Examples of Carts Images

The cart was undoubtedly a main symbol of wealth in ancient societies as well as that of hunting; it became one of the most important elements in

<sup>7</sup> We find it in the following tombs: the Dancers tomb [무용총], in Anak no.1[안악1호묘], Deogheung-ri [덕흥리묘], Yagsu-ri [약수리묘], Gamsin [감신총]; the Big Tomb of Yonggang [용강대묘], Dongam-ri [동암리무덤], Daeon-ri no .1 [대안리1호묘]; Hunting Tomb [사냥총], Changchuan no. 1[장천1호묘]; Three Chambers Tomb [삼실총], Maxiangou no. 1[마선구1호묘], Tonggou no. 12 [통구12호무덤].

the iconography of Chinese wall paintings as well as in those of Koguryo. Carts were represented independently or within more complex parade scenes often led by the deceased person himself. Part of this motif is the wheel, sometimes present in scenes with acrobatic games (as in Helinge'er or in Yaksuri tombs). It is interesting that in the latest period of wall production when human figures disappear from iconography, we still can find traces of the cart theme. An illustrative example is the wall paintings of the tomb Wukui no. 5 in Ji'an, one of the latest tombs of Koguryo, where we find a God of the wheel (see the following picture) represented along with other mythological figures inside the tomb. The wheel itself, as a part of the cart, has a social value because it represents the ultimate symbol of opulence, but it also has perhaps a symbolic and religious meaning, as it embodies the idea of the cycle of life and death — the same idea that would successively mature in the Buddhist concept of reincarnation.



Pic. 4. Ceiling of the Tomb of Wukui no. 5.

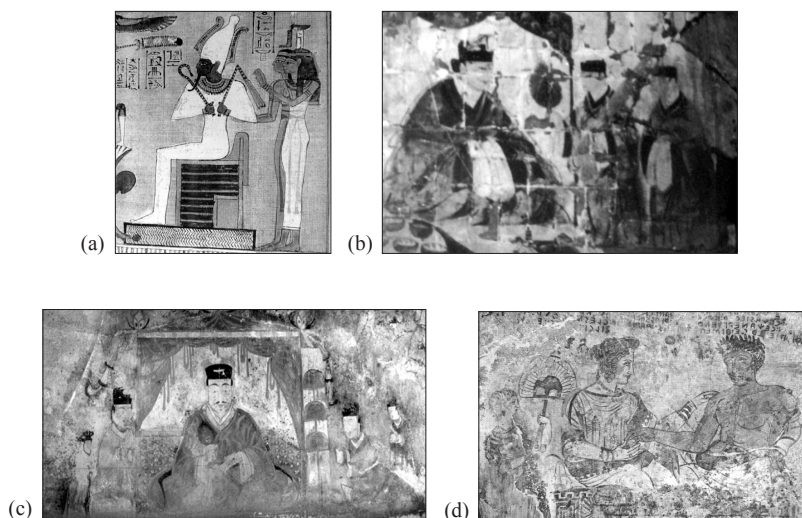
Another amazing example of the continuity between wall paintings and the rupestal tradition is the motif of horsemen on harnessed horses, sometimes represented fighting each other or against enemies. This type of representation provides us a lot of information on the weaponry of that time. We find similar examples on rocks of Altai and Yinshan mountains, as well within Koguryo (i.e. Tonggou no.12, Three Chamber Tomb, Stable's tomb) and Dunhuang paintings.

### III. Themes Not Belonging to Central Plain's Tradition

The Northern regions were not only the ones where the art rock tradition reached its largest diffusion, but they were also the territories more opened to new artistic tendencies coming from abroad. These regions could get direct artistic inspiration from coeval arts or physical masterpieces from Mediterranean civilizations, perhaps especially after Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.) with his conquests brought into Inner and Central Asia Hellenistic culture. They became a very intense cultural crossroad and that was already clear to Emperor Wu of Han who ordered, during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., the first expedition led by Zhang Qian [張騫] to Xinjiang, which until that time was considered just as an exotic or even a magical place (Masanori Kawamata, 2006, pp. 17-23). The Western Han Dynasty — not just accidentally — overlaps in the Central Plain with the beginning of the production of Wall Painting Tombs, which have been already constructed in the West for centuries. Almost half in proportion of wall-painted tombs of the Han period were built in the Northern regions (including Liaoning). The importation of this genre meant also the importation of some themes which were enriched by the local iconographical tastes with a big contribution also by rock arts.

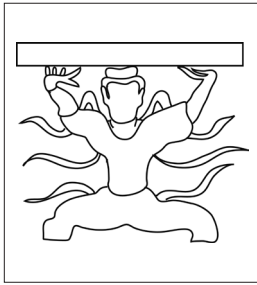
In this section we will discuss some examples of themes that I consider not autochthonous but much more probably imported through the Silk Road, and I will start this analysis considering the pattern of the scene of homage to a dead person. This theme (two servants paying homage to the dead person who is holding his noble emblem) is not a novelty introduced by Han arts, and we can find its very old antecessor already in the Egyptian tradition. Particularly interesting is the presence of the lotus — a symbolic or merely decorative element — that also appears in Anak tomb no.3, which was constructed before the official introduction of Buddhism in Koguryo territory and which belongs also to the scene of the deceased person as depicted in the Egyptian books of

Dead (Pic. 5-a). The same image is present in a famous Etruscan tomb (Pic. 5-d), where a servant holding a fan in his hand stands in front of the deceased couple, in this case. We can compare the following four images to understand how ichnographically similar they are.

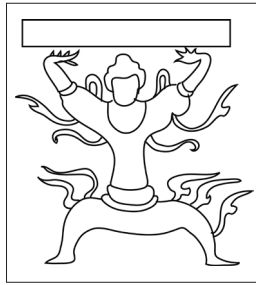


Pic. 5. (a) Particular of an Egyptian Book of Dead (Taylor, 2001, p. 115); (b) Particular of Tomb Zhucun in Luoyang (He & Li, 2009, p. 39); (c) Particular of the Main Chamber in Anak no. 3 (Hirayama, 2005, p. 76); (d) Wall Painting in the Tomb of Shields, Tarquinia (Bandinelli, 1973, p. 286)

But this is only one of several motifs that we find both in Koguryo and in other cultures far away from its territory. The next motif, that of a person/ creature who supports the roof of the tomb, for example — although already present in Chinese arts, as in the Mawangdui banner — is a very old theme found in Mediterranean arts. We also find mythological instances, as found in the Pillars of Hercules. We find it in the Three Rooms Tomb (Pic. 6 and Pic. 7) but also in Etruscan arts, for example in the tomb of the Typhoon (Pic. 8).



Pic. 6. Three Rooms Tomb, room 2



Pic. 7. Three Rooms Tombs, room 2



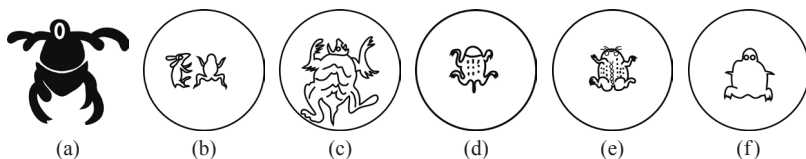
Pic. 8. Tarquinia, tomb of the Typhoon

It is easy to find in Koguryo tombs some elements that do not belong to Han iconography. It is risky to explain this phenomenon merely through Diffusionism, as great is the chronological and geographical gap between Koguryo and other cultures, but it is equally hard to justify this evidence simply as a cultural coincidence. We should not forget the considerable number of ‘big-nose men’ [高鼻人, people coming from Central Asia or from the Arabic world] depicted in the Koguryo wall paintings which, along with the presence of emissaries of Koguryo in Samarcanda, indicate the international relations that Koguryo had at that time and they are a further evidence of the intense involvement of Koguryo in the Silk Road exchanges till up to the Mediterranean Sea.

Particularly curious, in this connection, is the presence in the Maesan-ri tomb at the top of the depicted hunting scene the figure of a beetle (Pic. 9.a) replacing the classical toad symbolizing the moon (it is interesting to consider that any of these beetles has been found in East Asian Funerary context) — which suggests to us that Koguryo artists were in some way able to bypass canons of Chinese culture and get their artistic inspiration directly from other cultures. Even if the image (Pic. 9.a) could be considered a stylized version of a toad, the figure differs extremely from other examples of toads depicted in Koguryo wall paintings, as you can see in following examples, and it resembles much more to some examples of beetles which used to symbolize the sun in



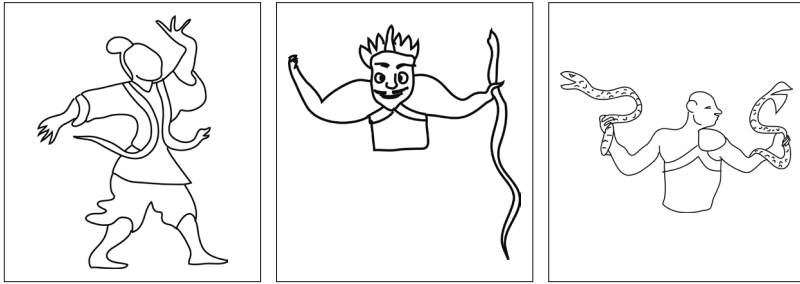
ancient Egyptian Art. We should remember here that even if we can't find any other example of beetles depicted in Korean funerary art, it is also true that beetle [비단벌레, 玉蟲] wings have been broadly used in ancient Korean and Japanese art as it could be proved by some Silla's weapons and artworks or by the famous *Tamamushi no zushi* [玉虫厨子] in Japan.



Pic. 9. (a) Beetle in the Tomb of the Hunting; (b) Toad, in the Tomb of Deoghwa-ri; (c) Toad in the Twin Columns Tomb; (d) Toad in the Deokheung-ri Tomb; (e) Toad in the Tomb of the Dancers; (f) Toad in the Tomb of Wuhui no. 5

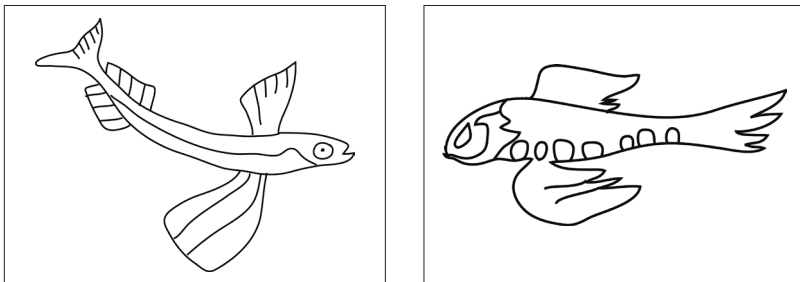
It is interesting to find in the wall paintings of Koguryo some motifs that have been broadly accepted as Taoist and therefore Chinese: motifs whose interpretation is by force associated with those described in the Classic of Mountains and Seas (*Shanhaijing*). One convincing example could be the one depicted in the Three Chamber Tomb and interpreted generally as Kuafu [夸父, a mythological figure in China described in the Book of Seas and Mountains as 'a creature with two yellow snakes at his head and two others in his hands'], but that could be just an exotic snake charmer whose presence is a depiction of an early passage of the Old Testament (Esodus, 7:8-12).<sup>8</sup> We find a similar example in a Liaoning tomb (Yingchengzi, probably built during the Wang Mang period, 9-23 A.D., or during the first Eastern Han period, 25-220 AD), but we again find this figure in Western culture, for example on Greek vases, in Sumer artworks or even better in the shape of a Blue Demon in an Etruscan tomb (Pic 10-c).

<sup>8</sup> About this, see for example Yi Eun-chang (1997, pp. 233-4).



Pic. 10. (a) Three Chambers Tomb (b) Yingchengzi no. 2, Main Room, Southern Wall (c) Tomb of the Blue Demon

A similar example of motifs present in Koguryo wall paintings, but also existing in other cultures, is that of Fuxi, as its motif is a very common one not only in Central Asia but is particularly similar to a Mediterranean iconography. Specifically it resembles that of the founder and mythical king of Athens, Cecrops (Κέκρωψ), whose name itself means a ‘face with a tail’ and who is also an underworld divinity who has the power to penetrate the earth and the rock and shift to another dimension. Another interesting image might be a flying fish, described in the Classic of Mountains and Seas, but it is already depicted outside Asia, for example on Greek frescos. It perhaps bears a precise eschatological meaning as it could symbolize the flight of the soul after death.

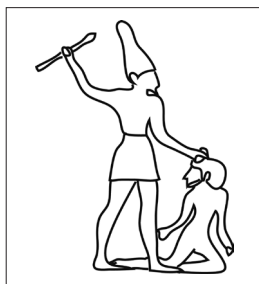


Pic. 11. (a) Cyclaid Art, Phylakopi, Particular of Wall Painting, National Museum, Athens. (b) Teokeung-ri, Antechamber, Eastern Wall.

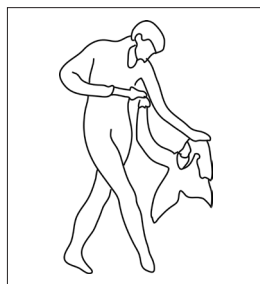
Particularly recurrent in ancient Arts is the scene of the ‘beheading of the enemy,’ which is also present in Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek and Italic arts. I will show here two interesting examples: the first one is the famous Narmer Palette (Pic. 13, XXXI BC, Egyptian Museum of Cairo), while the second one (Pic. 14) is taken from the Tomb of Francois in Tarquinia. These two examples are particularly surprising as their pattern is basically the same as the one found in Koguryo tomb of Tonggou no. 12: these paintings or sculpture, all made for funerary context, show a hero holding foe’s hair with one hand and brandishing a weapon with the other. I underline here that I have not found yet the same motif anywhere in Chinese arts.



Pic. 12. Tonggou no. 12

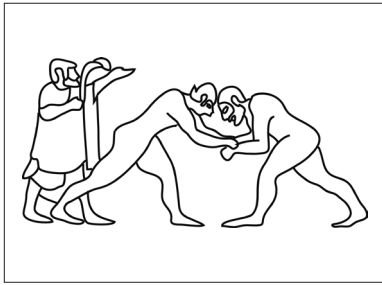


Pic. 13. Narmer Palette

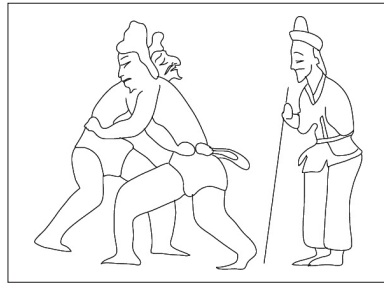


Pic. 14. Tomb of Francois,  
Tarquinia

Scenes of wrestling, dance, hunting, processions, the veneration of a dead man, and then the motifs of guardians of the doors — three, lotus, decorative ones — are all motifs present in the Etruscan tombs. Here I want to show the last comparison of the following scenes of fighting, as I find it particularly interesting. The type of wrestling depicted in Pic. 15 is different — corresponding in the first image to a Roman Greek fighting and in the second one to Turkish *yağlı güreş* — the figurative pattern is almost the same, with two warriors on a side and an old referee on the other side. In my opinion, ichnographically again they are too similar to be just be the product of a coincidence.



Pic. 15. (a) Tomb of Omens, Tarquinia



(b) Tomb of Wrestlers, Funerary Chamber, East Wall

## IV. Conclusion

Diffusionism is a risky theory to apply to Koguryo Arts, yet it is similarly risky to interpret Koguryo wall painting iconography by forcing it into a comparison with Chinese Arts. In this article we tried a different analysis of the origins of Koguryo wall tombs iconography and of some of their themes. We initially sought to divine a possible connection between them and the themes depicted on rocks starting from the Neolithic period; we then extended our analysis to the ancient world's arts. We noticed that similar themes existed even where neither Taoism nor Buddhism was practiced and where Chinese culture was not present at all. Particular attention was given to Mediterranean civilizations because these were earlier and farther from the Qin and Han Empires where wall painting production began in China. The presence of themes so similar to those of Koguryo, some of which are not present at all in Chinese arts, is a confirmation that our analysis on Koguryo culture and civilization should go beyond a comparison with Chinese culture. Furthermore, Koguryo represents an interesting case of cultural fusion where many different cultural matrixes were melded together to create new and brilliant tastes.

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