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Tattoos and Body Modifications in Antiquity

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edited by
Philippe Della Casa
Constanze Witt

Portrait of George Tihoti

Tihoti the tattooist came to Huahine from the Marquesas Islands and his personal tattoos as well as his tattoo designs in his practice are traditional designs from the Marquesan archipelago. This portrait shows him in his normal daily dress at that time, and with a pareo wrapped around his waist.

Photo by Phillip Hofstetter, California State University, East Bay.

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One More Culture with Ancient Tattoo Tradition in Southern Siberia: Tattoos on a Mummy from the Oglakhty Burial Ground, 3rd-4th century AD

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In 2003 tattoos on a mummy found at the Oglakhty cemetery (Minusinsk Hollow, early Tashtyk culture) were revealed in the State Hermitage Museum using reflected infrared rays. Several of the Oglakhty tattooed figures look alien for local culture but are analogous to images found in Xinjiang (China). Taking into account the parallels in funeral assemblages and specifics of tattoos as deeply traditional depictions, one may suppose that natives of Xinjiang were among the ancestors of the Tashtyk population of Southern Siberia. On the later stage of the Tashtyk culture similar figures are available on representations of Tashtyk warriors. Some analogies to the tattoos are seen in paintings of Tashtyk funeral masks. Keywords: Southern Siberia, Minusinsk Hollow, Oglakhty Cemetery, Mummy, Tattoo, Xinjiang

1. Introduction

A new series of ancient tattoos was discovered in 2003–04 in the course of an examination of mummies found in Southern Siberian tombs and kept now in the Department of Archaeology of Eastern Europe and Siberia at the State Hermitage museum. Four of the mummies were uncovered in graves dating to the late 4th–3rd centuries B.C. and belonging to the Pazyryk culture in the Altai Mountains, which was already famous for its tattoos (Rudenko 1953, fig. 80–83; Polosjmak 2000; 2001, 228–237). One more mummy was found in Khakasia (on the left bank of the Yenisei river), within the Minusinsk Hollow – a small steppe area in the northern periphery of the Central Asian region. It came from the Oglakhty burial ground of the 3rd–4th centuries A.D. which corresponds to the early stage of the Tashtyk archaeological culture (Fig. 1). The discovery and copying of Pazyryk tattoos proved to be possible only through a special procedure of taking photos in reflected infrared rays, because they are normally invisible on the mummy's brown skin. The skin had probably become so dark with exposure to air due to disturbance activities of ancient looters. The mummy from Oglakhty is lighter colored, however, it remained clothed until recently and so its tattoo was hidden. The Pazyryk tattoos have been entirely published (Barkova & Pankova 2005; 2006), whereas the Oglakhty skin pictures have thus far been touched upon only in brief preliminary publications (Kyzlasov & Pankova 2004; Pankova 2007). Thus, I will focus on them below.

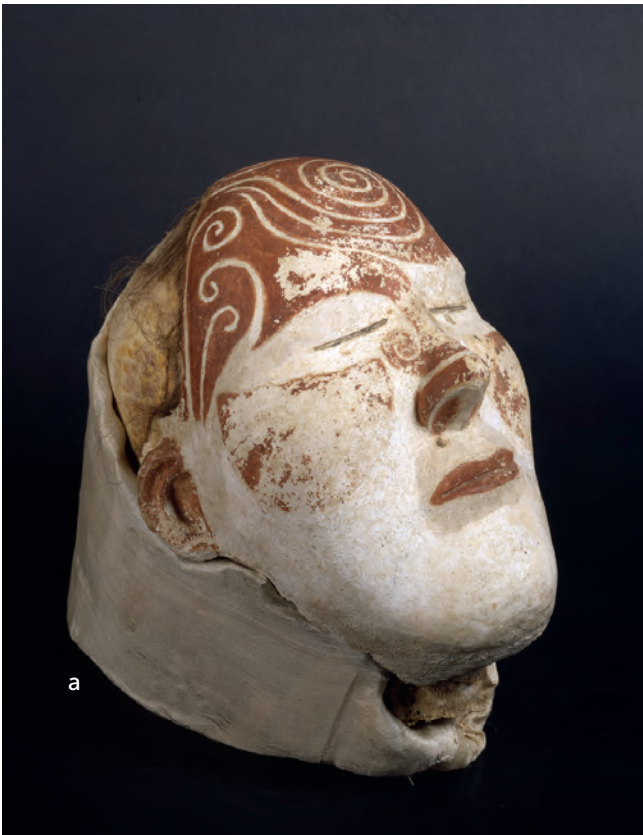
The tattoo from Oglakhty is still the only known tattoo from Tashtyk culture burials. However, the existence of such a tradition among the Minusinsk area inhabitants was long assumed by researchers, owing to findings of burial masks decorated with painted designs from their graves (Teploukhov 1929, 51). The covering of the faces of the dead

with gypsum masks painted with red, blue and black ornaments was a peculiar feature of the burial rites practiced by the local population from the turn of the Christian era



Figure 1. Tattoo findings in Central Asia and Southern Siberia
▲ – investigated burial sites with tattoos on mummies
■ – ancient settlement with its inhabitants tattooed according to written sources.

Figure 2. Burial masks on the mummies' heads from the Oglakhty burial ground, grave 4:
a female;
b male.



through the 6th–7th centuries A.D. (Vadetskaya 2007; 2009). Recently, thanks to the good state of preservation of the Oglakhty grave and mummy itself, as well as to the careful work of restorers, this assumption has been confirmed. The earliest excavations at the Oglakhty burial ground were carried out in 1903 by A. V. Adrianov (Report 1906, 128–131; Tallgren 1937). Three uncovered tombs proved to be well preserved, and the remains of four corpses were found, but only a part of a female mummy has survived until now (kept in the State Historical Museum, Moscow). In 1969, more tombs were investigated by an expedition of the Moscow State University, led by L. R. Kyzlasov. Tomb no. 4 had offered the best preservation and contained many intact organic objects due to the dry microclimate conditions in the hermetically closed burial chamber. Its wooden framework measuring 2.5 × 1.5 m was made of larch and pine-tree logs and wrapped in birch bark strips. The grave pit, located on a slope near a ravine, was filled with pressed earth and covered with sod bricks so that rain and meltwater had no chance to penetrate inside (Kyzlassow 1971).

There were remains of five dead in the grave, buried according to different rites. Two were dry mummies of a man and a woman with their skulls trepanned, and faces covered with gypsum masks (Fig. 2). The third was a skeleton of a child. There were also two human-sized clothed dummies

made of leather and filled with grass. Burnt human bones were laid inside their breasts. Among the buried persons' garments were fur jackets, trousers, headgear, gloves, a breast cover, a woolen skirt and leather boots. Other buried items included wooden dishes, models of bridles and weapons and things covered with silk fabrics (Kyzlassow 1971; Riboud & Loubo-Lesnichenko 1973; *British Museum* 1978, 94–96; Arbore-Popescu et al. 2001, 81–89, cat. 335–342; Kyzlasov & Pankova 2004, 61–63). The dating of Tashtyk burials of this type has been long ascribed to the first century B.C. or the first centuries A.D.; however, owing to new facts obtained in the recent decades, one can date the Oglakhty tomb to the 3rd–4th centuries A.D. The main arguments were provided by Chinese silks, the same as those found in Loulan (Xinjiang, China, called also Chinese Turkistan), dated by inscriptions and confirmed later by results of the “wiggles matching” examination of chamber logs (Lubo-Lesnichenko 1994, 61, 71, 194; Pankova et al. 2010). All the materials from tomb no. 4 are kept in the State Hermitage, being there on display and in the restoration laboratories.

2. Discovery of tattoos and their description

In 2003, when the restorers removed the clothing from the male mummy, they noticed faded drawings of blue figures on its skin (Fig. 3). Experts in forensic medicine who were

Figure 3. Male mummy from the Oglakhty burial ground, grave 4 with visible tattoos:
a front view;
b back view.



Figure 4. Tattoos on the shoulders, breast and arms of the Oglakhty mummy. Infrared photo.

Figure 5 (right). Tattoos on the scapulae and upper back of the Oglakhty mummy. Infrared photo.



called in to inspect the mummies have proposed some preliminary observations. In their opinion, any traces of artificial mummification are absent: internal organs had not been extracted (the lung is visible through the hole), and there are neither seams nor incisions on the skin. Natural mummification was quite possible in appropriate climatic conditions. However, the skull had been trepanned and the brain removed in consequence of special operations. The experts suggested using infrared rays for better revealing the skin drawings and also confirmed them as being tattoos.

The method of infrared photography is well known to experts of works of art, particularly paintings and drawings. It is successfully used, based on the presence of soot in the pigment composition, for detecting drawings and inscriptions, which can be erased or hidden under the layers of dirt and darkened oil, or pictorial layers following the original representations on canvas. This method was also used to reveal tattoos (Armelagos 1969, fig. 5). Microchemical and microscopic tests of the Oglakhty tattooed skin showed that the tattoo pigment contained soot and so the drawings could be examined by the described method. The tattooed areas of the skin absorb infrared light, while the clean skin reflects it intensely. Therefore, the dark skin of the mummies appears quite light in infrared photographs, and the tattoos stand out very distinctly. Thanks to photographs taken at the Hermitage Laboratory for scientific and technical expert evaluation (camera Kodak DCS 460 IR, infrared diapason ~1mkm), the barely visible tattoos became clearer, and new ones which had otherwise been invisible to the naked eye were revealed too (Fig. 3–6). (Kyzlasov & Pankova 2004, 64; Barkova & Pankova 2005, 48–49).

The dry and wrinkled skin of the mummy is irregular in color, varying from light and sandy to dark red-brown. The tattooed drawings visible on the shoulders, breast and arms differ from naturally pigmented areas because of their bluish tone. The color intensity of the most visible tattoos varies: some of them are quite distinctly visible while others can just barely be seen (Fig. 3). The face of the mummy is hidden under the gypsum mask (Fig. 2b), preventing infrared rays from penetrating, but it cannot be removed without destruction. Thus the question of facial tattoos on the buried person remains unsolved. The face of the second, female mummy is also covered by a mask. Its body is much less preserved than the male one and lacks soft tissues, and for this reason it was not subjected to infrared photography. However, taking into account the possibility that tattoos can "transfer" to bones after skin decomposition (Armelagos 1969, figs. 4, 5; and Shishlina, this volume), this should be verified for the female mummy.

All parts of the male mummy with its preserved skin were examined one at a time: the arms and hands, shoulders, breast, back, buttocks and legs above the knee. In the course of this procedure 13 figures were discovered, those on the back and right arm becoming visible only through the instrumentality of the infrared camera.

Two identical figures are visible on the shoulders, their lower parts destroyed because of the lost skin. The upper part of each figure is represented by two pairs of shoots: roundish inner shoots and lyre-shaped outer ones (Fig. 4, 8c). In each figure one of the inner shoots is solid, while the other (closer to the breast) has a lumen of clear skin. Preserved parts of the figures measure about 7.0 × 4.5 cm.



Two rosettes measuring 1.8×1.8 cm and consisting of four dots are symmetrically located on the breast, above the nipples and at a distance of 10.5 cm from each other (Fig. 4).

On each of the upper arms there are two comma figures measuring 1.5×1.5 cm. The skin is destroyed near the commas, so it seems possible that initially there were more of them on each of the arms (Fig. 4).

On the scapulae of the mummy, there are two large figures that seem to be identical, though the left figure is severely damaged. The other is barely visible to the naked eye, but its outlines are not legible (Fig. 3b). Its size is about 14.0×11.5 cm. Both figures are organized in three parts and have tentacle-like shoots. They could be similar to those on the shoulders (if the latter were also three-parted), and they probably presented the same images. The only difference is a round detail between the upper shoots, which is a little bit more faded than other parts of the figure. The skin is folded and partly broken, so the figures appear distorted. A reconstruction of their probable initial shape is shown in Fig. 7a.

On the upper back of the mummy there is a representation consisting of five parallel stripes opened in the center, probably going around the neck. The skin is distorted by deep folds and completely destroyed on the places where missing parts of the depiction could be located, viz. by the sides on the neck and on the upper breast (Figs. 5, 10b).

On the right arm near the elbow a special pointed figure of a curvilinear shape is depicted, with its sharpened end

facing up (8 cm in length). There is a small "hole" of clear skin on the figure, closer to the pointed end (Fig. 6a).

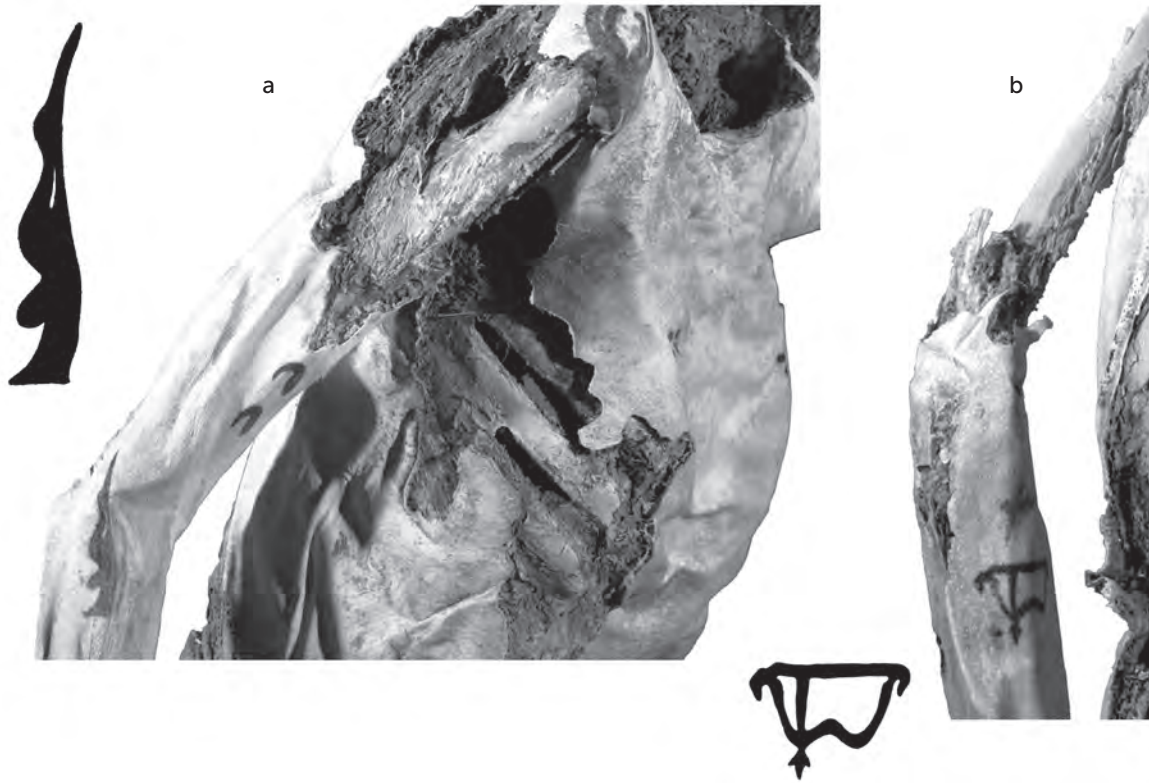
On the inner side of the left forearm there is a representation of a bow and arrow. The mummy is rigid, and the extremity cannot be easily moved, so the tattoo could only be photographed in oblique projection. Fortunately, the figure measuring 6 cm in length is well visible with the assistance of a mirror, and its drawn lines are quite clear (Fig. 6b).

An important peculiarity of the tattoo is the symmetrical location of its details; most of the figures, both simple and complicated, are paired. One figure (on the upper back) is in the center but is symmetrical by itself. Only the tattoos near the elbows have no paired pictures (actually, the skin on the outer side of the left elbow is destroyed, and formally we cannot exclude the possible presence of a drawing here). The symmetrical arrangement of the tattoo provides the entire composition with a special decorative effect.

3. Individual figures of the tattoo and their parallels

Among the revealed tattooed drawings, only one – the bow-and-arrow image – corresponds directly to the artifacts associated with the Tashtyk culture. These are the so-called "Scythian" bows and "tiered"-shaped arrowheads that were in use during the Tashtyk culture time (Pankova 2011, 121–122; Pankova, in print). The other tattoo figures, which represent more images of art rather than specific items, seem to be unique in relation to finds from early Tashtyk burials.

Figure 6. Tattoos at the right elbow and on the left forearm of the Oglakhty mummy. Infrared photo and drawings:
a view of the mummy from the right;
b view of the left arm from behind.



Some of these tattoo figures have parallels far beyond the boundaries of the Minusinsk Hollow while the others can be compared with images of the later stage of the Tashtyk culture. These are all discussed below.

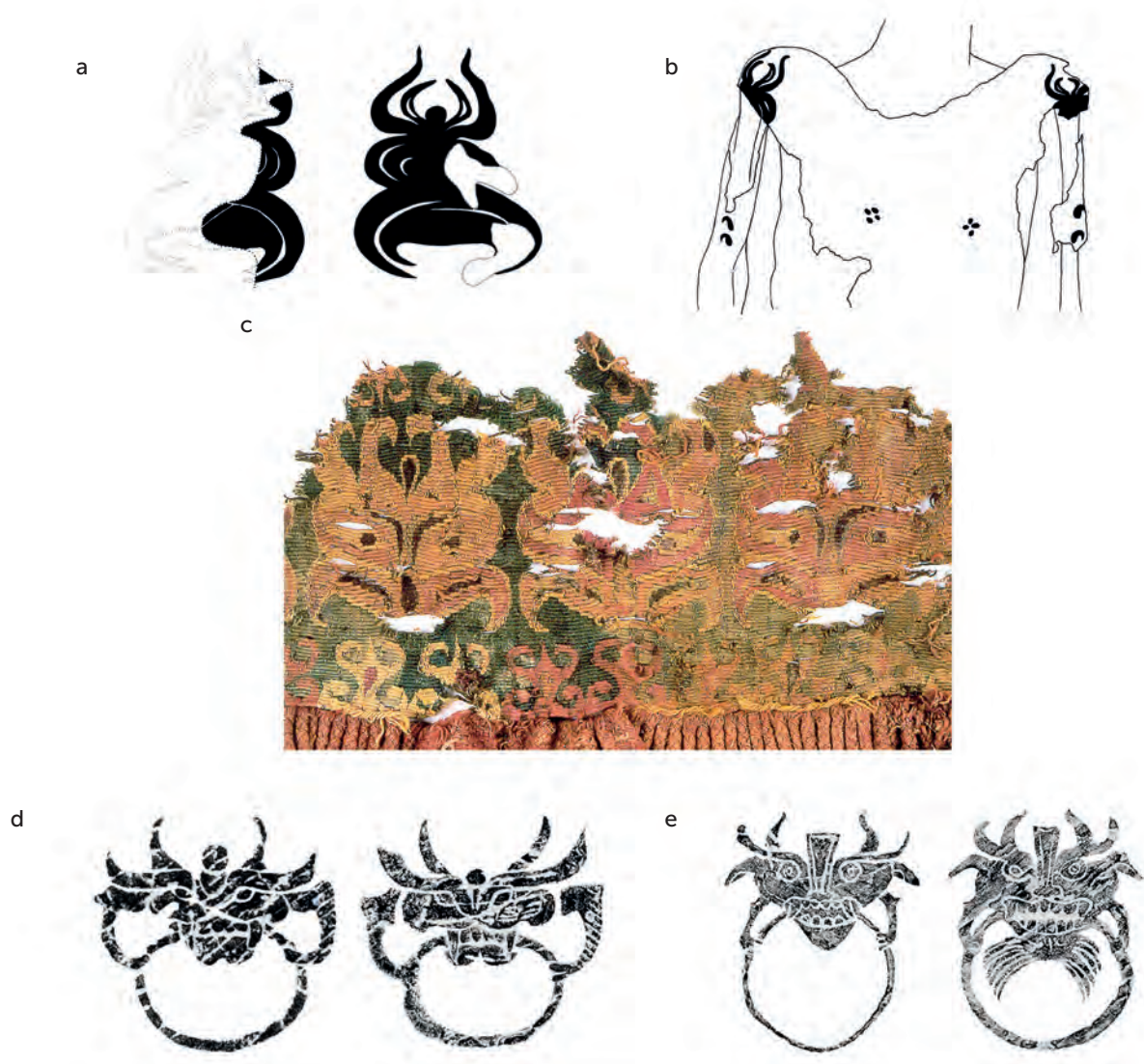
3.1 Enigmatic figures on the shoulders and scapulae

All of these four figures can be considered similar or even identical (Fig. 7a, b). The depiction on the right scapula, which is the best preserved, can serve as a model. The closest analogy to this mysterious figure is one represented in the tapestry design of a woolen textile that was once a part of a skirt. It originated from Grave 92 LS II M3 at Shanpula (Sampul) in Xinjiang, 30 km southeast of Khotan, which was a thriving oasis-state on the Southern Silk Route (Fig. 1). The region was inhabited by the people of Saka-related origin, speaking an Iranian dialect; they were herders and weavers, important in the trade economy of the region. The tomb at Shanpula dates approximately from 100 B.C. to c. 350 A.D. (Bunker 2001, 43, 45). The majority of woolen fabrics at Shanpula was locally manufactured (Bunker 2001, 33; Schorta 2001, 86, 114). On the abovementioned tapestry, there are three identical figures woven with threads of various colors. Similar to the tattoos from Oglakhty, they are organized in three parts, have two pairs of shoots with some round detail in their upper parts and a pair of shoots at the basis (Fig. 7c).

It is hard to imagine that such detailed similarities could be merely coincidental. Obviously, both the samples – our tattoos and the woven figures – go back to the same prototypes. Mysterious tattoos of “beasts”, reminiscent rather of some arthropods or bugs, appear to be unique. On the other hand, the woven representations with their clearly noticeable “eyes” are associated with mask images known in ancient cultures of Central Asia and China. This is the reason why the Shanpula depictions seem to be closer to some originals than the tattoo images. Probably, the masks on the textile trace back to representations of imaginary creatures related to the so-called *taotie*, which were considered as bearers of protective functions in neighboring China. They were often depicted as masks or heads with a pair of goggled eyes, a large mouth, curvilinear horns or ears, eyebrows, whiskers and strands of hair. In Han Dynasty times (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) these masks, sometimes in pairs, used to be located at the entrances of dwellings and tombs to protect them from evil forces. Their representations, known in many provinces of China, are various, but some specimens are similar to the images found in Shanpula and Oglakhty. Examples are masks originating from stone reliefs found in the Eastern Han tombs in the Sichuan province of China (Fig. 7d, e). Their upper parts resemble two pairs of shoots with protrusions in the center, presented in both Oglakhty

Figure 7. Tattooed figures on the shoulders and scapulae of the Oglakhty mummy and their analogies:

- a** paired figures on the scapulae (reconstruction);
- b** tattoos on the front part of the mummy (drawing after infrared photo);
- c** woolen tapestry from grave 92LS II M3 at Shanpula (after Shorta 2001);
- d, e** fantastic creature masks related to taotie of funeral reliefs, Sichuan province (after Finsterbusch 1971).



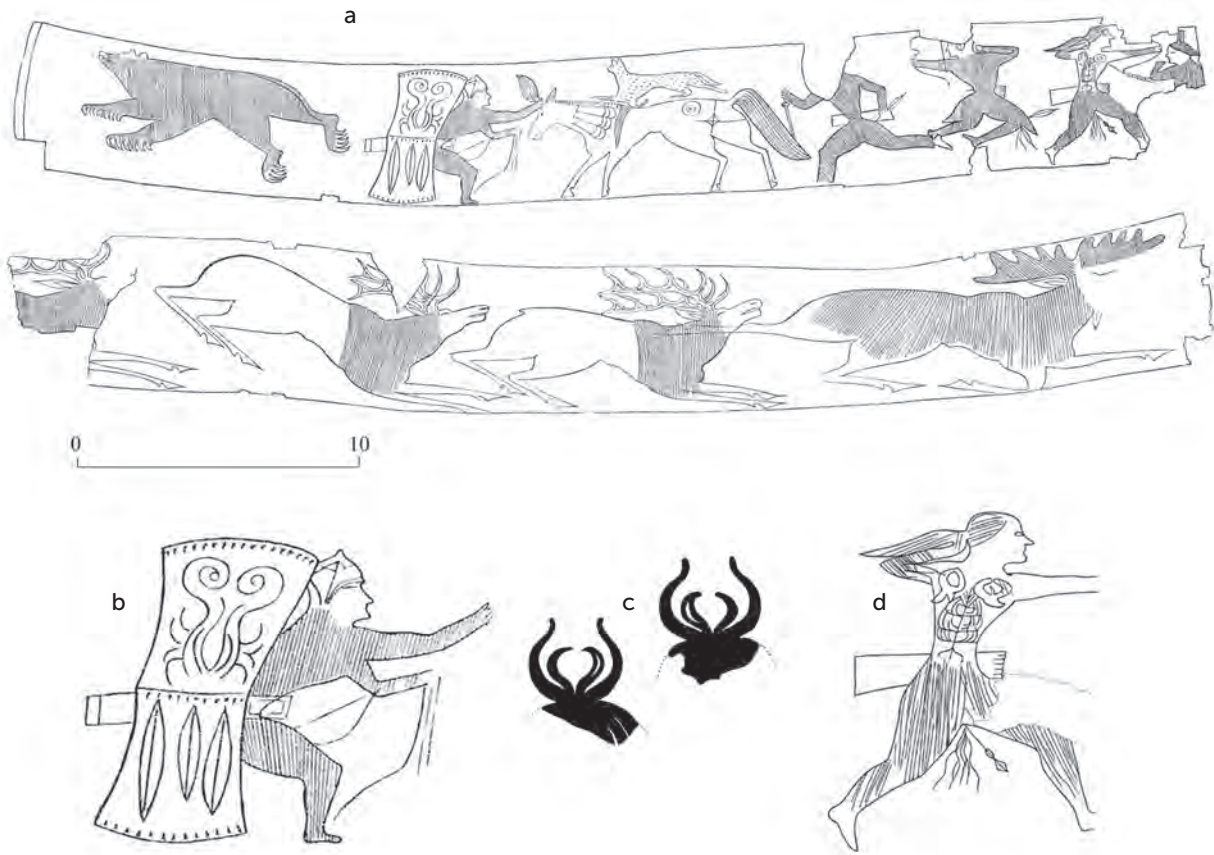
and Sampula depictions. The “faces” and extremities of these stone masks correspond to the middle parts of the tattooed and woven figures, while the rings correspond to their lower parts (Finsterbusch 1971, Taf. 28, Abb. 107–108; Taf. 35, Abb. 138–139).

It is no wonder that these traditional Chinese images appeared on the wool fabrics produced in Xinjiang. This region, situated close to China, was undoubtedly influenced by Chinese culture. There were many Chinese silks with similar fantastic face designs, found in Eastern Turkistan (Stein 1928, vol. III, Pl. XXXV, XXXVII, XL; Wang 2001, fig. 69; Zhao 2002, cat. 11, 28), though none of them are as similar to the tattooed figures as the Shanpula wool fabric. As for the Siberian figures, they can be compared to their probable Chinese originals solely through particular details, whereas the general impression of the tattoos is completely different: they do not look like masks! It therefore seems that the Oglakhty figures stand much further from the originals than their woven parallels, which is logical when taking into account the large distance between Minusinsk Hollow and China. It is doubt-

ful that the Tashtyk people were aware of their initial prototypes. More likely that the images originated from a “barbarian” culture, geographically close to “classical” China, where they had already existed in some modified forms.

How could these images reach such a remote Siberian region? How could they be turned into tattoos? Looking at the Oglakhty drawings, we cannot say whether similar body art appeared in Siberia with the foreigners who settled here, or whether the aboriginal Siberian population simply borrowed the images from imports and added them to their own tattoo tradition, assuming this tradition was already in existence. Could tattoo images be merely borrowed, or did the people have much more serious reasons to place them on their bodies? Information obtained from ethnographers points to a high degree of conservatism of tattoos in traditional societies, remaining unchanged over more than a century (Rudenko 1949, 152–153; Polosjmak 2000, 98–99). There were many reasons for people of archaic societies to be subjected to the painful procedure of tattooing, as well as other body transformations associated with the application

Figure 8. Representations of warriors with depictions similar to the Oglakhty tattoo:
a wooden plank from the Tepsey III barrow, tomb 1 (after Gryaznov 1979);
b, d enlarged figures of warriors from the plank;
c tattooed figures from the shoulders of the mummy (reconstruction).



of indelible signs (Mednikova 2007, 20–21, 110–150). Quite often the latter was connected with the rites accompanying the transition from one social or age group to another, or represents information which was of crucial importance for members of a tribe or a genus. Therefore tattoos were almost certainly not applied simply at their bearers' will. This could also be true for ancient tattoos, although convincing arguments for this are lacking. Thus in general the specificity of tattoos as "eternal" pictures suggests that in traditional societies they did not adopt random spectacular images, particularly those of alien population groups. However, in order to be accepted, this theory should first be verified in every particular case.

With regard to Oglakhty tattoos, it is important to note that, besides them, there are other pieces of evidence for contact between Southern Siberia and Xinjiang in the early Tashtyk period. There are common features in grave goods and burial customs of these regions, dating from the first half of the 1st millennium A.D. Some of Chinese polychrome silks from Oglakhty are entirely analogous to those found in Loulan and Niyä – trade centers in the east and south of the Tarim Basin (Riboud & Loubo-Lesnichenko 1973 Pl. 8A, 10A; Lubo-Lesnichenko 1994, 63, 194). They should be considered only as imports, while other artifacts identical to those found in Xinjiang could instead be elements of the

Tashtyk culture itself. These other artifacts include wooden wares, ornaments of household items, artistic images (also rock art), as well as details of clothing and accessories of funeral practices. For example, the fragment of a woolen skirt, consisting of horizontal bands found in the Oglakhty tomb no. 4, is similar to skirts recovered from sites in Xinjiang, specifically Subeshi, Zaghunluq (Chärchän) and Shanpula (Bunker 2001, 32; Mallory & Mair 2000, 220, pl. VI; Barber 1999, pl. 5b) (technique data should be yet compared). Fragments of wool and leather articles from the same Oglakhty burial can be reconstructed as a face cover – this detail of the funeral custom was peculiar to sites of the Tarim Basin, such as Niyä, Shanpula, Loulan, Astana, but in these places such face covers were made from silk and cotton (Riboud 1977; *Eastern Turkistan* 1995, 351–355; Mallory & Mair 2000, pl. IX; *Sampula* 2001, figs. 311, 438).

Due to the parallels between the artifacts from both regions, including tattoos, one can assume the ancient Xinjiang inhabitants to have been among the ancestors of the Tashtyk population, who transferred their traditions to Southern Siberia. They may have brought these images, derived from the distorted fantastic masks and found on the mummy skin. Thus, in the case of Oglakhty drawings, it is reasonable to consider tattoos as marks of some genetic connection. We should bear in mind that Xinjiang proper

Figure 9. "Antler" motifs of Tashtyk and Pazyryk cultures:
a tattooed figure of the Oglakhty mummy;
b harness decoration (leather, Pazyryk barrow № 3, after Rudenko 1953);
c, d plaques of saddle decoration (wood, Pazyryk barrow № 3, after Rudenko 1953).



was a region with ancient tattoo traditions. The earliest relevant information was given by the Buddhist monk Xuanzang in the 7th century A.D., who visited Qashqar and said that their inhabitants were tattooed (Mallory & Mair 2000, 70). Tattoos were discovered in the course of excavations of mummy burials from the 1st millennium B.C. to first centuries AD in different parts of Xinjiang (Fig. 1): at Qizilchoqa, Zaghunluq, Yanghai and Shanpula cemeteries (Wang 1999, ill. on p. 58, 89; Mallory & Mair 2000, 142, 189, 193, pl. VII–VIII; Li 2010 ill. on p. 10; *Sampula* 2001, fig. 449). Unfortunately, there is no more available information about tattoos in Xinjiang, although ancient mummies found there are very numerous and well preserved, owing to dry climate and hot desiccating sands. According to mummies on display in Xinjiang museums, published photographs and other information (e.g. Mallory & Mair 2000, 179–180), many of the unearthed mummies are kept clothed or have dark-brown skin. More than likely, that had the mummies been examined in the proper way, including infrared photographing, more tattoos may have been found.

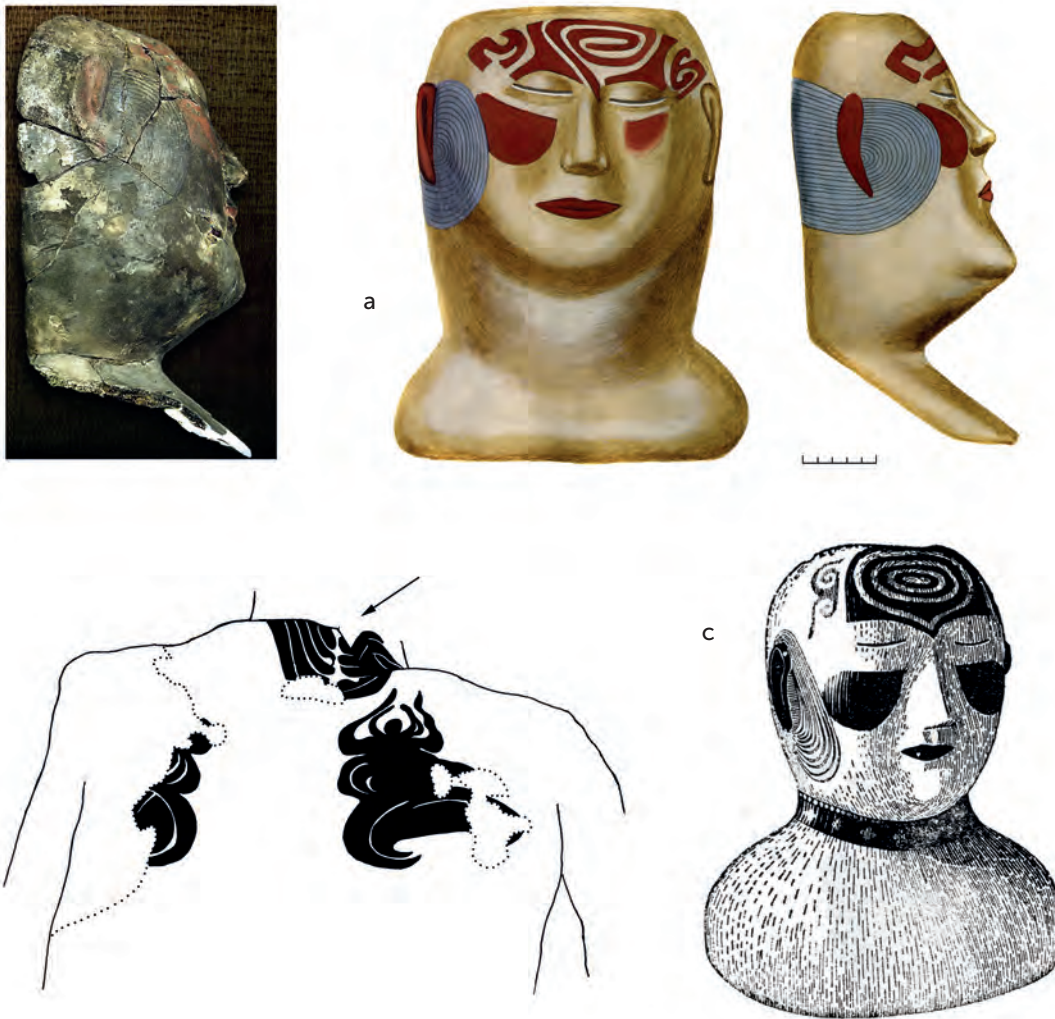
As mentioned above, the figures on the back and shoulders of the Oglakhty mummy seem to be unique among early Tashtyk artistic images. Were they really typical for the Southern Siberia natives? Fortunately, there are some testimonies to give a positive answer to this question. These are wooden two-sided slats with carved representations of battle scenes and wild animals recovered from the Tepsei III burial site in Minusinsk Hollow (Gryaznov 1979, 59–61). The slats belong to the same Tashtyk culture, but to its later stage, the 5th–6th centuries A.D. The pictures show warriors participating in battles. According to their garments and weapons, they represent three different ethno-cultural groups. The first of them may be identified with the people of

the Tashtyk culture (Pankova 2011, 121–126). One of its personages has special pictures on his breast or shoulders (Fig. 8a, d). Taking into account differences in material and technique of execution, this carved drawing can be considered similar to the tattooed figures (Figs. 8c, 7a). Another Tashtyk warrior on the same plank has a large shield with some mysterious depiction (Fig. 8a, b), which appears to be unique among the Tashtyk images, but, at the same time, is quite comparable to the tattoos on the scapulae and shoulders of the Oglakhty mummy. Therefore, the depictions show us that images of this type were actually common and significant for the Tashtyk people, and could be used by an artist as distinctive representations of the local military. The tattoos on the shoulders and scapulae of the mummy can thus also be considered as traditional marks of some part of the Tashtyk population.

3.2. Figure near the right elbow

There is another tattoo figure that probably has an analogy beyond the Tashtyk culture area. The peaked figure near the right elbow can be compared with "antler" motifs known among artistic images of the Pazyryk culture in the Altai (kurgans 3 and 5, dating to the 3rd century B.C.). Symbolic depictions of antlers were of particular significance in Pazyryk ornaments presented on wooden plaques of horse harnesses, felt horsecloths and a huge wall-hanging (Rudenko 1953, fig. 138, tabl. LIII–LV, XCV, CI, CII, CXIV). Details of the tattooed figure from Oglakhty, such as its one end transversally cut and the other sharpened, as well as the appendage and thickening along one side of the trunk, are close to Pazyryk motifs, although the latter usually have the shape of the object on which they are depicted, or become an ornament in the form of a rosette (Fig. 9b–d). The Pazyryk

Figure 10. Tattoo on the upper back of the Oglakhty mummy and similar design on funerary masks of the Tashtyk culture:
a gypsum mask from Uybat, tomb 11 (after Vadetskaya 2007);
b tattoos on the back of the mummy (drawing after infrared photo);
c first generalized reconstruction of gypsum masks, made from fragments by S. A. Teploukhov in 1929 (after Vadetskaya 2007).



and Tashtyk cultures belong to different periods, represent different traditions, and, though have some common features, cannot be directly connected. So one can assume that the antler-like elements were more widely distributed than previously assumed. At the same time, it should be noted that Pazyryk clothing has detailed counterparts among garments of some Xinjiang burial grounds (Polosjmak 2001, 113–131, 153), and the peoples of these regions could be related (Polosjmak & Barkova 2005, 168–169). Antler images were also represented in textile designs found at Shanpula in Xinjiang (Sampula 2001, fig. 407; Schorta 2001, figs. 83, 89, 98, 125). One can presume that the antler-like figures could be one more common element in the Altai and Xinjiang cultures, and were brought to the Minusinsk area at the beginning of the Christian era together with other mentioned images. However, more information would be needed to confirm this theory.

3.3. Tattoo on the upper back of a mummy and its probable analogies on the masks

A tattoo in the shape of concentric arcs on the upper back of the mummy, though fragmentary and distorted by folds of the skin, can be associated with particular details of the paintings on Tashtyk burial masks (Fig. 10). According to their design, the latter are divided into two groups – probably male (red background with black stripes) and female (white background with red cheeks and lips, as well as spirals on the forehead) (Fig. 2), although it is indeed not always possible to determine the gender of buried persons, often cremated. Some of the so-called female masks have elements of the concentric arcs painted with blue clay and soot pigment (Vadetskaya 2007, 49, 52). They are situated near the ears or bent around them and were considered as strands of hair (Teploukhov 1929, 51; Vadetskaya 2007, 52) (Fig. 10a, c). The design of concentric arcs is the only real clue to

connect the painted mask ornaments with the tattoos. If paintings on masks were really replicas of drawings on the faces of the buried persons, these blue and black arcs could express tattoos, while the red spirals were probably removable depictions. Most of the found ancient tattoos look blue and were made using soot pigment. Only some indirect evidence has recently emerged leading L. T. Jablonsky to believe that early Sarmatians had multicolored tattoos: stone palettes, assumed to be parts of tattoo sets, were found in female burials of the Southern Ural (Jablonsky 2011, 388–389). Certainly, until more data are available, such an idea must be entertained with caution. Nevertheless, the question of multicolored tattoos, their specificity and the very ability of applying them in ancient times is of real interest.

Returning to artifacts from the Oglakhty burial, we can assume that Tashtyk women may have had both tattoos and painting on their faces. As for the male masks, their black stripes could represent real facial tattoos, although we have no direct facts yet to support this idea concretely. The study of the Tashtyk burial masks is a vast and separate topic, and it is impossible to delve more deeply into it here, especially as the faces of the Oglakhty mummies are hidden and there is no information about representations on them. Fortunately, there is still hope of learning more about Tashtyk face decorations; the matter concerns the mummy mentioned above, which was uncovered from the same Oglakhty burial ground in 1903 and is kept in the State Historical museum (Moscow). Its head and neck are well preserved, having skin of dark brown color. Our next task will be to take infrared photographs.

4. Conclusions

The tattoos from the Oglakhty burial ground reveal one more ancient culture with a tradition of tattoos within the vast area of Central Asia and Southern Siberia, where at least about twenty ancient tattoos from different periods have already been found. All of these tattoos came from sites where the mummies have survived thanks to certain favorable natural conditions (frozen ground, hot desiccating sands, dry microclimate). For this reason it seems quite possible that the tattoo tradition in ancient Central Asia was even more widespread. It could be not limited to the regions of the Altai

Mountains, Tarim basin and the Minusinsk Hollow: tattoos in other lands culturally related to those might have not been discovered because of the absence of appropriate conditions to preserve organic materials.

Most of the tattoos on the Oglakhty mummy are images that appear foreign to the Minusinsk steppes. The figures on the scapulae and shoulders could be distorted representations of images found in several provinces of China including Xinjiang. The presence of similar depicts on later representations of Tashtyk warriors demonstrates their significance in that society. Together with other materials from Tashtyk burials, the tattoos of the Oglakhty mummy can be seen as evidence of the relations between the ancient people of Southern Siberia and Xinjiang. One can assume an appearance of a Central Asian group in the Minusinsk Hollow in the first third of the 1st millennium AD.

The Oglakhty skin pictures are so far the only known tattoos of Tashtyk culture so it is early to say generally about Tashtyk tattoo tradition. It should be noticed though that tattoo under consideration differs from other mentioned skin drawings not only by specific images but also by their symmetrical composition.

One of the Oglakhty mummy's tattoos is comparable with particular elements of the Tashtyk burial mask painting; these elements, even more painted in blue or black, can be seen as depicting facial tattoos. As there are also red ornaments on the masks, one can suppose that in the Tashtyk culture the faces of the dead were decorated with both tattoo and painting.

The exact meaning of the individual tattoo designs and their combinations on the Oglakhty mummy is not yet clear. The paired figures on the scapulae and shoulders, being somewhat frightening in appearance, may have performed a protective function, which corresponds to that of their possible remote prototypes – the mythical creature masks, related to *taotie*.

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