

Western Cultural Factors in Weapons and Military Supplies of Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties as Well as Sui and Tang Dynasties

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Abstract: During the period of Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties as well as Sui and Tang Dynasties, there were many Western cultural factors in the weapons and military supplies of Han region; their origins were complex. It is of certain significance to analyze them systematically and comprehensively. Based on the research of predecessors, this paper discusses the origin of famous weapons from aspects of the Mingguang armour, the Suozhi armour (the hauberk), the way of armor wearing, Hulu (the quiver), curved Tao (the sheath) as well as animal head helmets. After analyzing the key problems of the form, the origin and the spreading of various foreign factors, we can find out the general situation of cultural exchanges between China and the west at that time, as well as the historical background of population flow and religious beliefs.

1. Introduction

During the period of Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties as well as Sui and Tang Dynasties, due to the unprecedented prosperity of cultural exchanges between China and the west, factors of western culture began to appear in weapons and military supplies. The armor, the armor wearing method, bows and arrows were all influenced by the west to some extent; new shapes and structures appeared. With the continuous accumulation and enrichment of archaeological materials, some related issues are worth further discussion. Some foreign clothing factors can be found in the new founding materials. But they have not yet been discussed by predecessors. In view of that situation, this paper intends to make a systematic and comparative study of various Western cultural factors in weapons and military supplies of the Han region, and to explore their usage in the East and the west, as well as the process of transmission and ethnic groups who use them.

2. Origin and Spreading of Various Weapons and Military Supplies



Fig.1 Image of the King of Heaven in Grottoes of the Sui Dynasty.



Fig.2 Figure of Ancient Roman Soldier, Stone Carving



Fig.4 Riors of the Tang Dynasty.



Figure 4 Sassanid Persian Silver Plate.

Mingguang armor became the most popular armor in the army in the late Northern Dynasty, and it was the main type of armor until the Sui and Tang Dynasties (Figure 1). In the early days of China, the armor was made through weaving and affixing small metal pieces like scales. The Mingguang armor, on the contrary, is characterized by the large, round pieces of metal which protect the left and right sides of the chest. The scale armor and Mingguang armor belong to different armor production systems. Bing Wei pointed out that the Mingguang armor originated from the Greek and Roman armor systems (Figure 2). On the basis of this study, we can find out the origin of the Mingguang armor, the Greek armor and the Roman armor through details. The armor of Roman high-ranking generals and nobles is often embossed with the head of Medusa, the female monster. In contrast to the image of the “king of Kapila” outside the door of the Dazhu Grottoes in the early Sui Dynasty in Anyang (Figure 1), the Mingguang armor has three circular pieces, all of which are decorated with human faces. In the fourth year of the opening of the British Museum (947), they issued the paper print of “king of the great saint pisama”. The figure also wears the armor which has two circular chest protectors decorated with human faces. The figure is the head of Medusa, which shows the origin of Mingguang armor in China. The spread of this armour should be closely related to people use it in Central Asia. It was first spread to Xinjiang and then spread to the East. In the murals of Qizil Grottoes at the end of the 4th century and the beginning of the 5th century, we can also see warriors wearing the Mingguang armor.

In ancient China, the armor was bound with taped ropes to strengthen it. This kind of rope is called as the “snake” in the *New Book of Tang*. This system is different from the central binding method in the late Northern Dynasty as well as Sui and Tang Dynasties. The central binding method means, the warrior needs to tie a knot on the chest or use a ring as the center, and then divide the wire into three strands, one binding upwards and two binding backwards. The image of Mingguang armor with this kind of knot is commonly seen in cultural relics (Figure 3). At present, there is no relevant research on its origin, which is worthy of discussion. The method should be influenced by the Sassanid Persia. In Persian cultural relics, we can find the similar way of armor binding. For example, many silver plates of Shapur II clearly show (Figure 4), the figures tie the center or use a

ring component, and then tie them up and down and on both sides to make the armor stronger. The Persian binding method spread to Xinjiang earlier. Murals of Qizil Grottoes and Kumtula Grottoes contain similar images. The same method can be found in stone burial tools and doors of the tombs of Sogdians entering China. They can also be found in tombs of Sogdian came to China; examples include the Tomb of Shijun of the Northern Zhou Dynasty, the stone couch of the Northern Qi Dynasty collected by the Miho Museum of Japan, as well as the stone door of the Tomb of Caoming Zhai of Northern Zhou Dynasty in Jingbian. The Sogdian should be directly influenced by Persia.



Fig.5 Stone Carving of Sassanid, Persia.



Fig.6 Tang Dynasty Stone Carving Warrior.



Fig.7 Warrior Portrayal of the Tang Dynasty.



Fig.8 Sassanid Persian Silver Plate.

Fuwei Shen and Dong Ma pointed out that the Suozi armor (the hauberk) was originated in Persia (Figure 5). Cao Zhi's epigraph is the earliest record of Suozi armor in China. It can be seen that Suozi armor was spread to the Central Plains in the late Han Dynasty and the Wei Dynasty, and was regarded as treasure at that time. In the period of the Eastern Jin and Sixteen Kingdoms, the armies of the western regions in Xinjiang were equipped with the Suozi armor, which was rare in the Central Plains. It appeared in the late Han Dynasty and the Wei Dynasty, which was related to the introduction of western culture by people from the Central Asian. The shape of the Suozi armor in Tang Dynasty (Figure 6) was influenced by the Central Asian Sogdian, which is an issue worth further discussion. It is recorded in literature that in the Kaiyuan period of Tang Dynasty, Suozi armor was the tribute of the Kang state. In addition, in the Pyanjikent mural of Central Asia, the image of a devil with four arms, the picture of duel under the city wall, and the image of Sogdian warrior (neck protecting part) were also painted with warriors and God images wearing the Suozi armor. It can be seen that Central Asia also produced and used the armor. In the Tang Dynasty, Central Asia still pay the hauberk as the tribute to China. It can be inferred that Central Asia hauberk had high quality, and it might affect the shape of the Tang Dynasty. In the Central Plains, the raw material of Suozi armor was brass: the "Toushi stone" recorded in literature, which was precious in Persia. Therefore, the Suozi armor should be mainly used for etiquette, not generally used in the battlefield. In addition, literature also records that most Tibetan army used the Suozi armor. The iron armor used in the actual battle was found in the tomb of Tubo in Dachangling, Gansu Province. The owner of the tomb may be a senior general. The Suozi armor imported from Central Asia should be commonly used in the Tubo army.

In Northern Dynasty, people used a cylindrical box to hold arrows, which is called Hulu. In the Tang Dynasty, it was widely used in the army (Figure 7). Shaoyi Zhong points out that its form originated from the western regions and spread from Xinjiang to the East. Yuanchao Wang holds it originated from Qiuci, Xinjiang. Wei Huo points out that the quiver worn by the Central Asian warriors was very close to that of the Tubo warriors. The origin, usage and spreading of Hulu in Persia are worth discussing. The Persepolis palace of Achaemenid Dynasty in Persia was built in the period of Darius I (522-486 B.C.). The relief stone carvings show warriors with cylindrical arrow sheaths, as well as bows on the back and spears in the hand. The Persian wall decorations around the 6th century B.C. also have similar images. Images on silver plates (Figure 8) of Sassan Ardashir I (224-241), Shapur II (309-379) and Khosrau II (590-628) also show knights hanging the cylinder arrow sheath at the waist. It can be seen that Hulu appeared in Persia earlier and prevailed for a long time. In addition, Hulu should spread eastward through Sogdian. In tombs of the Sogdian in the Northern Dynasty, there are many Sogdian images holding Hulu, including the tomb of Anjia, the tomb of Shijun, as well as the stone couch of the Northern Qi Dynasty collected by the Miho Museum of Japan. In the Central Asia, the Sogdian murals in Panjikent were also painted with similar Sogdian knights. It can be seen that under the influence of Persia, the Sogdian also used Hulu.



Fig.9 Stone Figurine of Tang Dynasty.



Fig.10 Sogdian Warrior of the Central Asia.



Fig.11 Pottery Figure from Tang Dynasty.



Fig.12 Ancient Greek Painted Pot.

The curved Tao is a bag holding the bow, which is often used in Tang Dynasty. It takes the shape of crescent, and is often made of tiger, leopard and other animal skins (Figure 9). It is used with

Hulu, the box holding the arrows. Shaoyi Zhong points out that the curved Tao and Hulu originated from the western regions and reached the Central Plains through the Hexi Corridor in Xinjiang, but he cannot find out the specific place. Yuanchao Wang believes that the curved Tao might have originated from the Persian Parthian Empire, and then introduced to Xinjiang, but there was no proof in this article. In the relief stone carvings at the site of Persepolis Palace, we can found spear holding warriors with bags holding the bow on their waists. The shapes of their bags are different from the later curved Tao, but they should have the same source. Hulu is originated in Persia, and it is very possible that the curved Tao is also originated there. It is worth noting that before Tang Dynasty, the image of curved Tao appeared only once in the Central Plains, which was found in the Tomb of Anjia, a Sogdian who entered China in Northern Zhou Dynasty. In the Central Asia, there are many images of curved Tao in Sogdian frescoes of Panjikent. In the Site of the Castle on Mount Mug, figures of Sogdian warriors riding the horses (Figure 10) unearthed, which clearly depict the curved Tao. Therefore, it is likely that in Tang Dynasty, the shape of the curved Tao was introduced to China by the Sogdian.

Warriors wearing tiger helmets may have appeared in troops of northern and Southern Dynasties. It can be seen in the *Biography of Wei Lu* in the *Book of Southern Qi Dynasty*. Terracotta figures with tiger shaped armor and riding suits have been unearthed from Tang tombs in Shaanxi, which show the use of this costume by Tang warriors. In the Tang Dynasty, the helmets of beasts worn by warriors (Figure 11) originated from Heracles (Figure 12), the hero in Greek mythology who wore lion helmets. With the eastward expedition of Alexander the Great and the expansion of the Roman Empire in the eastern Mediterranean, the image was spread to Central Asia and the east of Central Asia. In Gandhara art, Heracles became the King Kong God guarding Shakyamuni. The image spread to Qizil Grottoes and Maijishan Grottoes in Tianshui in the East, and appeared in grottoes of the prosperous Tang Dynasty in the form of Gandharva. In the National Museum of China, there is a stone hall for Sogdians entered the northern Tibet in Northern Dynasty. The author observed that among four warrior statues which were embossed at four corners, there were warriors wearing helmets made of lion and tiger leathers. This should be the earliest case at present, and it is engraved on the stone burial tools of the Sogdian entering China. It can be seen that, images of warriors wearing lion, tiger and other animal helmets in tombs of the Tang Dynasty should also be related to beliefs and customs of the Sogdian.

3. Conclusion

Based on the above analysis, it can be found that in Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties as well as Sui and Tang Dynasties, weapons and military supplies were influenced by the West and changed a lot. The origins of various cultural factors are different. Weaponry originated in Central Asia and Western Asia spread to the Han region due to different communication channels and motives. Among them, Persian elements had the greatest influence; the armor wearing method, the Suozi armor and Hulu were all originated in Persia. The Sogdian played an intermediary role in the communication. Weaponry came from Persia, Greece and Rome were used by the Sogdian, and then spread to the East through them. The exchange of military equipment reflects various historical backgrounds, such as the smooth traffic between China and the west, frequent trade exchanges, a large number of Sogdian who came from the East, as well as the introduction and prevalence of Buddhism.

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