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## An Artistic Study Of Several Crenellation Patterns Unearthed In Central Asia

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### ABSTRACT

Ancient Central Asia was connected with Eurasia and was the most important transportation hub in the middle section of the Silk Road. The cultures of West Asia, South Asia, Persia, India and China met here, and collided with the spark of art. The crenellation pattern is a unique oriental pattern, and it is also one of the important patterns in the pattern modeling system of the Silk Road. Its development and evolution bear the alternation, spread and blending of civilizations, and its roots can be traced back to the bronze civilization and even more distant civilization periods. Taking the crenellation patterns unearthed in Central Asia as an example, this paper uses the method of archaeological typology, and finds that the vast Central Asia including BMAC is the key area for the innovation and development of crenellation patterns. From the macroscopic geographical point of view, this paper discusses the origin, circulation and some forms of crenellation patterns in development and evolution. By analyzing and citing typical patterns, it aims to explore their diversity and regularity in artistic modeling, and provides new thinking for deeply exploring the cultural, iconographic and artistic significance of crenellation pattern.

**Keywords :** Central Asia, Crenellations, Bactria Margiana, Namazga

### INTRODUCTION

"Central Asia" is a geographical term coined in the 19th century to replace the name of Tartar or West Turkestan (Francfort, 2009) German geographer

Alexander von Humboldt believed that the geographical scope of Central Asia "starts from the Caspian Sea in the west, reaches the Xingan Mountains in the east, from the Himalayas in the south, and ends in the Altai Mountains in the north". Another statement mainly refers to the areas in the Amu Darya and Syr Darya basins. In a broad sense, Central Asia also includes northern Afghanistan, northeastern Iran, northern Pakistan, northwestern India, Mongolia, Xinjiang and Tibet in China, and Western Siberia and southern South Siberia in Russia. Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC) is a highly developed oasis civilization in the late Bronze Age of Central Asia (about 2300-1700 BC), which is famous for its exquisite seals, utensils and unique architectural style. The area centered on the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (Figure 1) is the intersection of ancient Central Asian cultures, and has become one of the birthplaces of art in the margins of various civilizations. One of the typical elements of BMAC material culture, "battlement pattern" (or battlement pattern, ladder pattern), is widely seen on seals, pottery and metal products, but few scholars have conducted in-depth research on it at present. In recent years, with the in-depth development of BMAC archaeology, the local characteristics of BMAC civilization have become more and more prominent. This study takes the Bronze Age of ancient Central Asia as the background. By focusing on the crenellation patterns on the cultural relics unearthed in BMAC, and using archaeological typology and iconography methods, it is placed in a broader cross-civilization comparative field of vision, and systematically sorts out its correlation and differences with similar ornamentations in surrounding civilizations (such as Mesopotamian civilization, Elam civilization, ancient Indus civilization, etc.). This study is not only dedicated to tracing the form of the pattern itself, but also attempts to use this micro case as an entry point to reveal the complex communication network and dialogue practice at the levels of trade, technology and ideology in Central Asia during the Bronze Age, so as to deepen our understanding of the early globalization. Understanding of the dynamic interaction within Eurasia during the process.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

As the core civilization of the Central Asian Bronze Age, the unique material culture of the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC) has been the focus of cross-regional research in Eurasia. A review of academic history shows that early studies mostly focused on the origin, social complexity and macro-connection of BMAC with the Indus Valley and the Iranian plateau (Sarianidi, 1998; Hiebert, 1994). Among them, the iconic ornamentations on seals, scepter heads and other utensils are regarded as the key carriers of cultural identity. In recent years, with the rise of global historical view and material culture theory, scholars have paid more and more attention to the locality of BMAC culture. Some scholars have placed it in a broader context of Eurasian interaction to explore its possible connection with Mesopotamia, Elam and other regional cultures or decorative motifs, suggesting a long-distance ideological exchange. Kohl (2016) believes that the spread of South Turkmen

cultural elements throughout the Middle East and spread to Mundigak, Said-Qala, Shahr-i Sokhta, and Harappa (Figure 1). At the same time, Tosi emphasizes in his article that the geometric patterns on Farol vessels (cross or step, carved or embossed) are very similar to the artistic style of early ceramic ornaments, which comes from the period known as Namazga III or Quetta in the first half of the third millennium BC (Tosi, 1972). This style is also widely reflected in the ruins of Mondigak and Shahr-i Sok Tower. Studies have shown that before the formation of BMAC civilization, an "interactive cultural circle" covering the eastern part of the Iranian plateau to the southern part of Central Asia already existed. Some scholars have pointed out that similar ladder patterns were endowed with the symbolic meaning of theocracy or royal power in the rolling seals and architectural decoration in Uruk and Elam periods, which may represent temples, sacred mountains or the order of the universe. Angelo Andrea Di Castro (2017) It is believed that the image of the goddess wearing the crenellated crown in Gandhara area is influenced by the Greek city goddess, and the religious significance of the wall crown is pointed out. Between 2200 and 1800 BC, the Amu Darya civilization expanded east to the west of the Indus Valley (Jarriage and Hassan 1989). A large number of clay pots with crenellation patterns have also been produced in northern Afghanistan, Mondigak, Piluzhistan and other regions. Although the existing studies have identified the uniqueness of BMAC crenellation patterns, the existing studies lack special case studies, especially the lack of in-depth analysis of the specific transmission path and symbolic meaning of this pattern. This study aims to fill this gap.

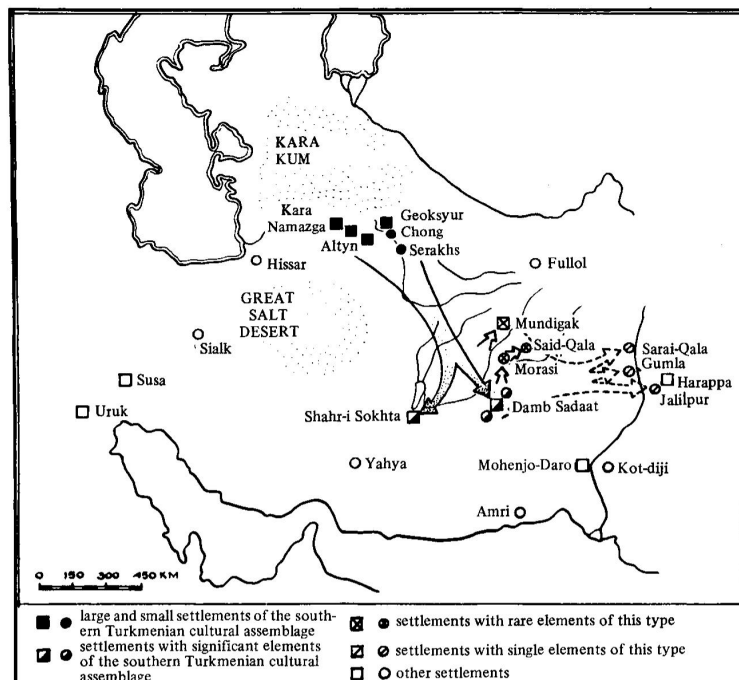


Figure1

Figure1. The spread of southern Turkmenian culture elements throughout the Middle East , after Kohl, 2016, page 92

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to make up for the shortcomings of existing research, this study systematically sorted out the crenellation patterns unearthed in the core area of BMAC, beyond the comparison of shapes, made a correlation analysis between them and other unearthed ornamentations, focused on the different artistic characteristics of the patterns in different contexts, traced back to the agricultural cultural types of Central Asian copper and stone combination times, compared the crenellation patterns unearthed in BMAC with similar patterns unearthed in Mesopotamia, Elam and Indus Valley, and interpreted their cultural implications by using iconography methods.

### Some Crenellation Patterns in Indus Civilization

In the first half of the third millennium BC, an early agricultural culture developed from the primitive Harappan cultural layer flourished in the Indus Valley region. Mehrgarh culture (7000-2600 BC) was a part of the Indus civilization. From a piece of faience unearthed, it can be seen that the single crenellation is organized and repeated in triangular frieze (Figure 2). Due to the orthomorphic representation, the crenellation presents more prominent characteristics than the triangular fold line as a linear decorative band. Around 3000 BC, Mundigak in Afghanistan facilitated the establishment of trade ties between Susa in Mesopotamia, East Iran, Amri, Nar, Quetta, etc., and became an important hub of cultural exchanges in Central Asia. The crenellated pottery unearthed in the fourth period of Mondigak is wide at the top and narrow at the bottom, with a waist. The shape of the vessel is very unique. The pattern is divided into upper and lower parts, and the structure is like a continuation of the crenellated pattern in Melgach. The surface of the vessel is decorated with two-layer crenellated patterns upper and lower, and the space is divided by belt-shaped broken lines. The arrangement, composition and sequence of the crenellation patterns are almost consistent with those unearthed at the Melgach site (Figure3). However, Mondigak crenellated pottery began to emerge from the plane, due to the influence of its shape and manufacturing process, the three-dimensional sense was stronger. Around the same period, pottery unearthed in areas such as Mergach and Mohenjo Daru depicted almost the same folk tales, all decorated with single crenellations. According to textual research, many pottery forms and decorative painting themes found in Afghanistan can be similar in Harappa culture, India, and the crenellation pattern is an intuitive reflection of this phenomenon. Around 3000 BC, from the Indus Valley to Afghanistan, crenellation patterns were widely spread.



Figure2



Figure3

2. Clay Pot, Indus Valley Tradition, Harappan Stage, Southern Balochistan, Pakistan. Quetta, Southern Baluchistan, 2500-1900 BC, Royal Museum of Ontario, Toronto, Canada

3. Crenellated pottery, near northwest Kandahar, Afghanistan, unearthed from the fourth phase of the Mundigak site, Afghanistan Museum, Kabul

### Some Crenellation Patterns in Namazga Culture

The middle of the third millennium BC played an important role in the contact between the Baluchistan region of Iran and the Indus Valley region of the proto-Elamite civilization. The costume pattern of the kneeling bull with a round tube in his hand unearthed in the pre-Elamite civilization is typical of the crenellation pattern (Figure 4). The origin of the crenellation patterns in the primitive Elamite period may be related to the early agricultural culture in southern Turkmenistan in Central Asia. Chinese archaeologist Han Jianye named the crenellation pattern: sawtooth pattern. He believes that in the oasis at the northern foot of the Kopet Mountains in southern Turkmenistan, there are many agricultural and cultural relics where sawtooth grass pottery is prevalent, including Altyn-Tepe third to fourth stages, Namazgaz, late Geoksyur remains, etc. (Han Jianye, 2018), which shows that the crenellation patterns have been multiplied and flourished in the Kopet Mountains since the late copper-stone era. He also believes that the zigzag or pyramid patterns of Namazga II to IV cultures may also affect the grassland area northward, becoming the source of similar patterns in grassland cultures such as Sintashta-Potapovka-Petrovka. The southeastern Sistan region of Iran shows influences with southern Turkmen, evidence of which is clay figurines and pottery similar to those of the third period of Namazga. (Sarianidi, 1983) At the same time, Shahr-i Sokhta in Sistan, Iran, is closely related to the Golden Age culture of Mondigak. Therefore, it can be inferred that the Mondigak crenellation pattern should also be influenced by the early culture from southern Turkmenistan. Period from 3000 BC to 2500 BC. Meanwhile, in the northern part of the Indus Valley, we find evident signs of cultural influence from South Turkmenistan (Kohl, 2016). There are eagle and cross diamond-shaped amulets unearthed in Harappa. These shapes are of western rather than local origin (Vats, 1940). The eagle pattern is unique in Indus art, while the cross diamond design is more widely distributed, such as the jagged circular plaque unearthed in northern Afghanistan (Figure 5), which is extremely similar to the bronze plaque unearthed in Bactria, and similar traces of this similarity can also be found in subsequent Lorestan bronzes. This fact once again proves the influence of the southern culture in the Turkmenistan era, and the complexity of the stepped pattern lies in the fact that despite maintaining a stepped arrangement when surrounded by a concentric straight pattern, its multiple repeated application only produces an effect at the junction of the decorative elements (Kohl, 2016).



Figure4



Figure5

Figure4.Kneeling bull holding a round gold cup, Pre-Elamite civilization, 3100-2900 BC, Metropolitan Museum.

Figure5.Crenellated pattern circular plaque, Bronze Age, 2000-1500BC, unearthed in North Afghanistan, Los Angeles Museum

## Artistic modeling of crenellation patterns unearthed from BMAC archaeological complex

A large number of punctured bronze seals were unearthed in Bactria Margiana civilization, among which the unearthed bronze seals with crenellation patterns are typical geometric patterns, and the punctured cast crenellation seals are repeatedly arranged in a cycle to form a closed loop. The central two lines intersect vertically. A golden bowl with crenellations was unearthed in Fullol-Tepe (Figure 6). You can see the geometric ornamentation hammered on it. Crossed crosses are added to the structure with rectangles as the basic unit, and crenellations and engraving lines are decorated in the triangles divided by the crosses. This decorative form is obviously influenced by materials and technologies, which shows that different media have influenced and decorated each other in the early days. In addition, the Tillya-tepe, the famous "Treasury of Bactria" was discovered. In Tomb No.2 of Tillya-tepe, together with a large number of heart-shaped ornaments, there are also crenellated gold stickers (Figure 7). Like the costumes of the owner of the decorative tomb, the golden hill is a product of the late Hellenistic period. However, compared with the decorative tendrils commonly used in Hellenistic techniques, the crenellated patterns began to be preserved and widely used in daily decoration such as utensils and costumes. In the northern region where BMAC civilization area is located, Mikop culture (3700 BC-3000 BC), which existed at about the same time, has highly developed metal craftsmanship and unique decorative style, and is the earliest complex society to master bronze technology in Eurasian grassland. The metal craftsmanship of Fullol-Tepe may have been influenced by Mikop culture, but the decoration system still adopts the decoration techniques commonly used in BMAC area. Illustrates the ornamental tradition that has continued since the Bronze Age. A large number of patterns are very similar to the cultural relics of Mesopotamia and Turkmenistan, reflecting the exchanges and interactions of early civilizations in this region.



Figure6

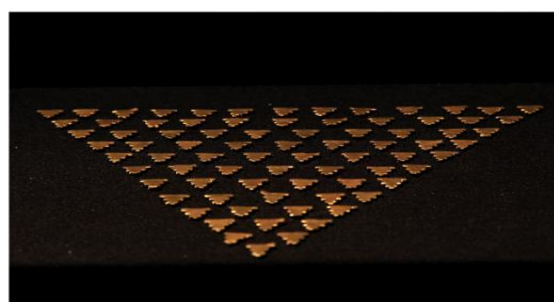


Figure7

6. Gold cup with geometric pattern unearthed in Fullol-tepe, 2200-1900 BC

7. Gold gold plaque unearthed in the land of Tillya-tepe, 25-50 AD

### **A Central Asian Goddess Wearing a Crenellated/Mural Crown on Her Head**

In Central Asia, images outweigh words in importance. The castellated crown is a particularly important sign of identity in the iconographic system of Central Asia. First of all, the crown of Sasanian King Shapur II is all crenellated (Figure 8), and the statue of the goddess Nana of Sogdian unearthed in Khwarezmian also has a crenellated/mural crown. The distinction between different crenellations may also be a distinction of some hierarchical status. It should be said that the crenellated crown is a unique creation in Central Asia, which is different from the sun and moon crown in Egypt and has been greatly developed in Central Asia. The original image of the wall-shaped crown may be related to the Sumerian temple, Ziggurat, the most distinctive architectural form in Sumerian architecture. Ziggurat was built to imitate a mountain peak and represents the Sumerian religious center. It is a stepped pyramid-shaped structure, made of bricks, mostly with three or seven floors. This kind of temple has the tradition of being built on a platform, and already has the symbolic meaning of the holy "mountain". Therefore, it possesses a special symbolic significance, combining the origin and symbolic nature of the fresco crown with the towers, battlements or crenellations) will be investigated together with our discovery that it is related to symbols carried by some goddesses depicted such as Greco-Bactrian, Indo-Greek, Saka and Kushan coins, as well as symbols on other artifacts, indicating kingship or protection of the city (Castro, 2017). A crenellated ring was unearthed from the Amu Darya treasure, in which the crenellated image appears in a negative shape, which emphasizes the rays of the sun and also symbolizes the world of four corners. The sun is round, but its decorative symbols are symbolized in the shape of a cross in many peoples. All modeling factors and patterns in the Persian art system are related to its religion. This image may be influenced by Zoroastrianism, a worship of the God of Light and a symbol of kingship. Since then, this kind of goddess with crenellated/mural crowns may have the attributes of city goddesses. In the relief art of Gandhara, a large number of goddess images wearing crenellated/mural crowns can be seen, and they have developed into typical symbols of Central Asian goddesses. The image of the four-armed goddess Nana is often depicted as wearing a crenellated/mural crown (Figure 9). The crenellated crown has a certain religious undertone, and the goddess wearing the tower crown may represent a city goddess, Kuśīnagara, and when considering the crenellated/mural crown, its origin and its association with the Greek goddess Tyche, who embodies the protection of a town by granting kingship and fertility (Castro, 2017). It was widely prevalent in Bactria and Gandhara in the 3rd-1st centuries BC.



Figure8



figure9

Figure 8 Shapur II wearing a crenellated crown  
Figure 9 Image of Goddess Nana

## CONCLUSION

It is found that the occurrence of geometric patterns has no common origin, but it can indeed be combined with local culture and develop towards their own systems. As the crossroads of civilizations, ancient Central Asia provided an important boost for the diversified development of ancient patterns on the Silk Road. The late Neolithic Turkmen culture, represented by Karadepe and Geoksulvarya, played an important role in the cultural matrix that formed the basis of early art in Central Asia. The development of crenellation patterns reached its peak in ancient Central Asia, and became a specific decorative system in ancient Persia, which provided a basic framework for the subsequent production of new variant patterns and the expansion of application fields. Some of these styles are related to ancient Persia-Hellenism and have spiritual symbolism, such as the waist-shaped or inverted crenellations imitating the Jikulata or Zoroastrian altar of fire. Some structures are related to the cultural customs of various grassland peoples in Central Asia. By the Hellenistic period, this special oriental pattern continued without assimilation, and it showed a strong regenerative power when combined with religion, which also showed the significance of crenellation pattern as the basic pattern.

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