
Metal Chin-straps for the Deceased: Origin, Acceptance and Archaeological Interpretation

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Abstract (in French and English)

One of the most peculiar funerary customs in the Northern Wei period (386-534) is the use of metal chin-straps to prevent the mandible of the deceased from dropping. In a preliminary study it has been demonstrated that the immediate origin of this foreign headgear for the deceased can be traced to East and West Turkestan, while the usage in these areas was loosely linked to the Greek Antiquity. But not all members of the Xianbei society adopted the apparatus. While the use was definitely associated with wealth and high ranks, chin-straps were also associated with certain groups of people. Judging from the funerary concepts of the tombs, in which chin-straps occur, Sogdians and an association of chin-straps with Zoroastrianism, as maintained by a number of Chinese scholars in the past two years, can be ruled out. The funerary custom was passed down to Tang times. Again it was linked to certain groups, whose origins were often non-Han Chinese. Furthermore, a new development in the funerary rite appeared: In many cases the chin-straps were excavated from rich burials together with elaborate headdresses. The question arises whether the original purposes of the chin-straps were maintained or if the chin-straps became a decorative part of the headdress for the deceased?

Keywords: chin, straps, headdresses, Tuoba, Tang

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