【National Treasures in Liaoning】

Gilded Wooden Stirrups

In 1965, archaeologists excavated nearly 500 funerary objects from the Tomb of Feng Sufu, an influential mandarin of the Northern Yan Dynasty, which lay at the eastern base of Jiangjunshan Hill in Xiguanyingzi Town, Beipiao County-level City, Chaoyang City, Liaoning Province. Of those objects, the most remarkable was a pair of stirrups.

It is by far the earliest double stirrups whose age can be determined, both in China and the world.

The stirrup arm was made by twisting the two ends of a triangular mulberry wooden strip upwards to form a stirrup eye, with the fork then filled with a triangular wooden wedge. The outside of the stirrup arm and the eye are covered by nailed gilt copper sheets, and the inner side of the stirrup arm is covered with a thin nailed sheet of iron painted with black lacquer.

Zhou Yali, a scholar from the city of Chaoyang, said that although the earliest prototypes of stirrups in China could be seen in pottery figurines unearthed from a tomb built in the second year of the Yongning reign of the Western Jin Dynasty in the city of Changsha, that were just single triangular stirrups that would help a rider to mount and dismount but could not be used while riding.

The earliest metal riding stirrups in China and he world were discovered in the Tomb of Murong Xianbei in West Liaoning and date from the middle of the third century to the beginning of the fifth century, nearly 1700 years ago.

Those stirrups are 300 years older than the first European stirrups, and their use spread from the area north of the Yellow River to the area south of the Yangtze River, from East Liaoning to the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese archipelago, and along the Grassland Silk Road from Central Asia, westward to Europe.

The invention of stirrups gave cavalrymen a strong point of support for their feet, which freed their hands to shoot while galloping. They could also move sharply on horseback during combat, such as slashing on both sides.

The invention of stirrups, particularly double metal stirrups, made cavalry more important in the majority of battles in the cold weapon era. The Encyclopedia Britannica states, “It is surprising that the foundation of the age of knights is due to the invention of stirrups.”

Dr. Needham, an authority on the history of science and technology from the UK, said, “There are rare inventions like the stirrups which are simple but make such a profound impact on history! As Chinese gunpowder helped destroy European feudalism in its final stage, Chinese stirrups initially helped establish European feudalism.”

It is no exaggeration to say that it was the stirrups invented by the Xianbei in ancient China and improved by Murong Xianbei in West Liaoning that pushed medieval Europe into the “Age of Knights” and triggered earth-shaking changes a thousand years ago.

铜鎏金木芯马镫：慕容马镫开启“骑兵时代”！

1965年，辽宁省朝阳北票市西官营子镇将军山东麓，在北燕权臣冯素弗墓的发掘现场，考古工作人员清理出近500件随葬品，其中最引人注目的是一双马镫。

这是迄今为止有明确年代可考的双马镫实物，也是中国乃至世界上较早的骑乘用的马镫实物。

镫环以三棱体的桑木条揉成，木条两端向上合成镫柄，分裆处再填以三角形木楔。镫环和柄的外表包钉了鎏金铜片，镫环内侧加钉了一层薄铁片，上涂黑漆。

朝阳市学者周亚利表示，虽然中国最早的马镫雏形，见于西晋永宁二年长沙晋墓出土的陶俑，但那只是呈三角形的单镫，供骑者上下马蹬踏，上马后就不使用了。

中国乃至世界上最早的骑乘用马镫实物，特别是金属双马镫，是在三世纪中叶至五世纪初的慕容鲜卑墓中发现的，距今约1700年。

辽西慕容鲜卑创制的金属双马镫，比欧洲年代最早的马镫早出300年。此后，这种马镫由黄河以北传至长江以南，由辽东传到朝鲜半岛、日本列岛，又沿着草原丝绸之路，由中亚向西传入欧洲。

马镫的发明，使骑兵的双脚有了强劲的支撑点，骑在马背上的人解放了双手，可在飞驰的战马上且骑且射，还可以在马背上左右大幅度摆动，完成左劈右砍的军事动作。

马镫特别是金属双马镫的发明与创制，使骑兵一跃升级为冷兵器时代战争的主力兵种，《大英百科全书》中这样写道：“让人无比惊讶的是，人类骑兵时代的实现，居然是因为马镫的发明。”

英国科技史权威李约瑟博士赞誉道：“只有极少的发明像脚镫这样简单，却在历史上产生了如此巨大的催化影响！就像中国的火药在封建主义的最后阶段帮助摧毁了欧洲封建主义一样，中国的脚镫在最初帮助了欧洲封建制度的建立。”

毫不夸张地说，正是由古代中国鲜卑人发明、由崛起于辽西的慕容鲜卑改进的马镫，助推了中世纪的欧洲迈入“骑士时代”，促发了千年前翻天覆地的世界变革！