

Arts & Travel

SECTION D

January 29, 2006

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**RON
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'Ancient Bronzes'

A nomadic culture and its art come to Salem

Steppes and nomads may sound distant and musty in the modern world, but Trudy Kawami, curator of "Ancient Bronzes of the Asian Grasslands from the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation," finds a more immediate link to this new exhibit at the Hallie Ford Museum of Art.

STORY BY **RON COWAN**
PHOTOS BY **TIMOTHY J. GONZALEZ**
Statesman Journal

Think of truck drivers and their mobile lifestyle, but think "truck drivers" who rode horses and camels

and traded in fine silks, rare herbs and other precious goods.

The steppe peoples guided and supplied trade caravans, supplying horses to the empires of Eastern and Western Asia.

"We're talking a luxury trade in which there was a living to be made," said Kawami, who is director of research for the foundation.

"They were actually cosmopolitan, compared to the great settled cultures."

Although the histories of these peoples, who ranged from Northern China westward through Mongolia to the plains of Eastern Europe, were oral and thus largely lost to the modern world, their traditions come alive in this exhibit of fine bronze artworks from the second through the 13th centuries B.C.

Featured are more than 80 masterpieces of steppe art, from bronze belt buckles to plaques, pendants, finials, ornaments and weapons, some well-worn through use and some retrieved in pristine condition from tombs.

"For me, I marvel at the sophistication of their artwork," said John Olbrantz, director of the Hallie Ford.

'Ancient Bronzes of the Asian Grasslands'

WHEN: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays through April 1

WHERE: Melvin Henderson-Rubio Gallery, Hallie Ford Museum of Art, 700 State St., Salem

COST: \$3, \$2 for seniors and students and free on Tuesdays and for ages younger than 12

CALL: (503) 370-6855



A finial from northwestern China, dating back to the 12th century B.C., may have sat at the tip of a shaman's staff. The bell announced the shaman's approach.

Free events

TUESDAYS THROUGH MARCH 24: Gallery talks by Elizabeth Garrison, education docents, 12:30 to 1 p.m., galleries

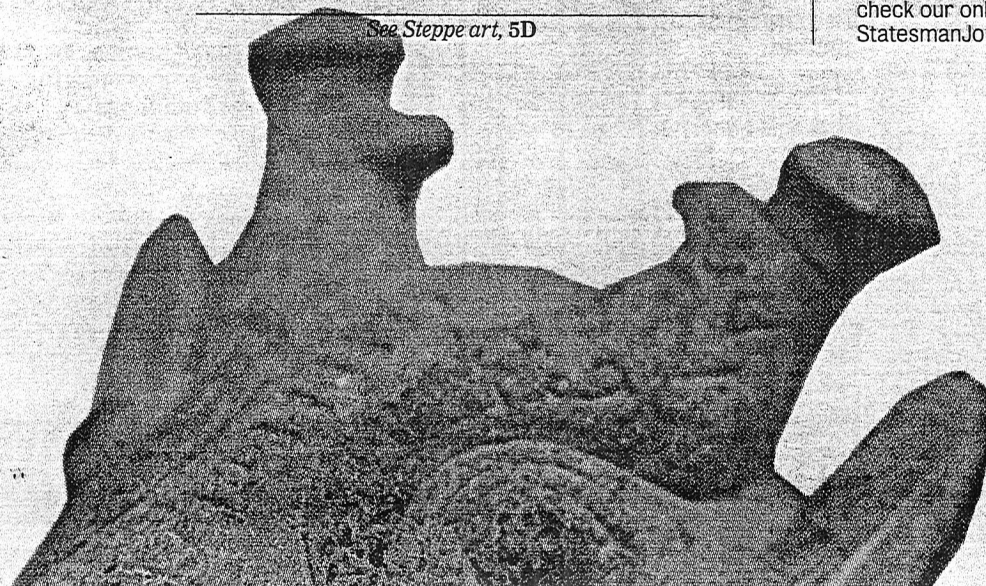
FEB. 23: Sandra Olsen, curator of anthropology at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh, discusses "Herders, Artisans, Shamans and Warriors," 7 p.m., Paulus Lecture Hall, College of Law, 900 State St. Salem

MARCH 9: Morris Rossabi, professor of history, at the City University of New York, on "Mongol Khans and the Settled Civilization," 7 p.m., Paulus Lecture Hall, College of Law, 900 State St., Salem

MARCH 18: Family workshop, "Camels and Leopards and Bears, Oh My!," create sculptures and wearable art, noon to 4 p.m., lobby, Hallie Ford Museum of Art

Online extras

For more on events, check our online calendar at StatesmanJournal.com.



A gong with lid from Henan Region, Central China, which dates to the early to middle Western Zhou dynasty (1100-771 B.C.), was used

BOOKS

State's top authors to read at library

By **ANGELA YEAGER**
Statesman Journal

Some of Oregon's most well-respected authors will give readings Thursday at the Salem Public Library.

All of the authors will read passages from their current books. After the readings, audience members will have a chance to meet the authors at a reception hosted by the Friends of the Salem Public Library. Refreshments will be served.

The authors were recognized in 2005 by the Oregon Book Awards.

Author tour

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WHEN: 7:30 p.m. Thursday

WHERE: Salem Public Library, Loucks Auditorium, 585 Liberty St. SE

COST: Free

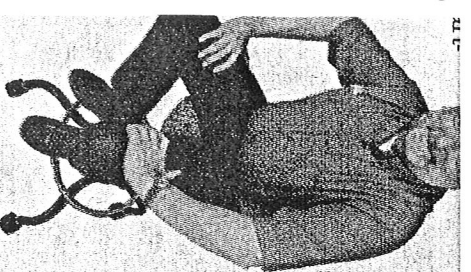
CALL: (503) 588-6301

The authors are:
Kathleen Dean Moore, winner in creative nonfiction for "The Pine Island Paradox." The Corvallis author's collection of essays is about her adventures exploring an island off the coast of Alaska and Canada where her family vacations. Moore is a professor of philosophy at Oregon State University and the founding director of the Spring Creek Project for ideas, nature and the written word.

Michael Strelow, finalist in fiction for "The Greening of Ben Brown." Strelow, who teaches English at Willamette University and has lived in Oregon for 32 years, has published poetry and fiction in literary magazines. In "The Greening of Ben Brown," Strelow tells the story of a town and its mysteries through protagonist Ben Brown, who becomes a citizen of East Leven after he recovers from being electrocuted. He didn't survive unscathed, however — the accident turned him green. He befriends 18-year-old Andrew James, and they unearth a chemical spill cover-up that forces the town to choose sides.

Kassten Alonso, finalist in fiction for "Core: A Romance." Alonso was born in Seattle and lives in Portland. "Core" is his first published novel and is told from the narrator's point of





RON

GOWMAN

What About the Arts?

Salem's number one orchestra, the Oregon Symphony, is celebrating its 50th anniversary. What about the arts in Salem? Ron Gowman, executive director of the Oregon Symphony, talks about the orchestra's future and the challenges it faces.

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ARTS & CULTURE

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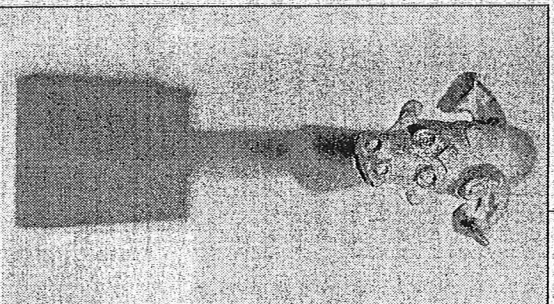
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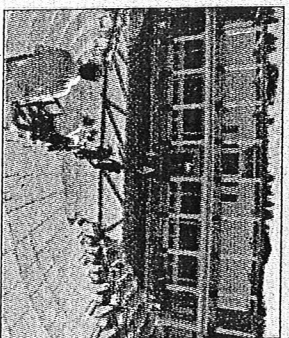
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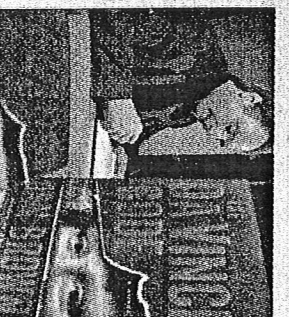
NATIONAL BOOKS

Publishers trying to tap into "Da Vinci Code" audience with similar books
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THEATER

Broadway musical "Wicked" is coming to Portland
Page 7D



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Maura Conlon-McIvor, finalist in creative nonfiction for "FBI Girl," Portland author Conlon-McIvor was inspired by reading letters from J. Edgar Hoover that were sent to her father; a special agent in the Los Angeles area for 27 years. The book

tells the story of a young, quiet girl whose family secrets unravel after a murder takes place.

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Steppe art

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"If you really look at them very carefully, they're incredibly detailed."

These artworks speak of a world where the people were mobile and their lives dominated by the animal world, with antlered stags, wild boars, birds of prey, horses, camels and deer. "They definitely are a portable art," Olbrantz said. "They are pieces which are meant to be worn."

The ancient, horse-riding cultures of Mongolia and Central Asia used the animal world for symbols to indicate tribe, social rank and connections to the spirit world.

"There's virtually no narratives," Kawami said. "There are some belt buckles that seem to refer to legends long lost."

"The focus seems to be on the animal, the animal as an avatar, as a symbol."

The exhibit focuses on the eastern or Asian steppes, from snow-topped mountain ranges to deserts such as the Gobi and the Taklamakan.

The parallels to early North America are obvious.

"The people who lived there lived on the Asian grasslands, which was very similar to our western grasslands," Kawami said.

"There was the whole ethos of living in space and traveling freely."

Still, these people, who lived 3,000 years ago and encompassed different cultures and traditions, offer something new for us to learn.

"It's a culture (that) in the West we know little about," Olbrantz said. "I think people will be impressed by the sheer quality and beauty of the pieces."

"It just gives you a little light on a part of the world where now what we've got is negative views," Kawami said.

Little is known about the craftsmen who created the work, from knives to funerary pieces, since the works are unsigned and the artists not remembered in any formal way, she said.

Metal often was recycled and thus hard to trace.

"These were specialized artisans," Kawami said. "There's no question about that; some of the items were specialized lost casts."

Among the interpretive materials in the exhibit, which includes maps, text panels and photomurals of modern nomads, is a list of the techniques used: lost-wax casting, indirect lost-wax, open mold and piece mold.

Some works used separate molded pieces, but the lost-wax pieces were one-of-a-kind. The clay mold, which was formed around a wax model and the wax replaced with bronze, was used only once.

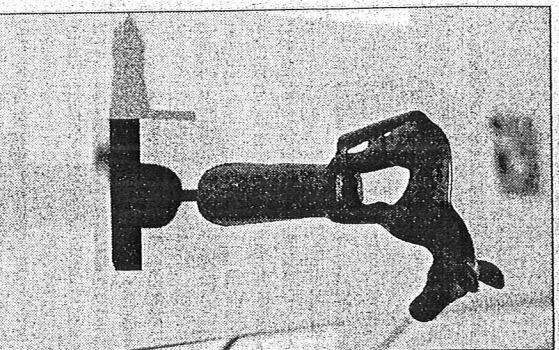
The people of the steppes lived in portable, tentlike structures, traveling to specific regions in a seasonal cycle to provide grazing for their livestock.

Women and men rode horses and camels and wore sleeved jackets, a garment they invented and still wear today.

"They invented what we wear now, trousers and jackets," Kawami said.

"It's cold up there on the steppes."

They crossed paths with and influenced the people of such empires as China, Rome and Greece.



A finial for a funeral canopy, from Northern Hebei and Western Liaoning, China, dates back to the sixth and fifth century B.C.

The "Ancient Bronzes" exhibit shows the cross-pollination of these cultures, as Chinese art forms also were translated into the nomadic culture, in items such as cauldrons, more likely used for ceremonial purposes than for cooking.

The Chinese tradition of the dragon also was incorporative, but the nomadic art shows a dragon being attacked by other animals, something the Chinese rejected.

The nomadic women wore long skirts and tall soft boots, but they rode and carried weapons like the men and played important social roles, much in contrast to the civilized, settled world that considered the nomads barbarians and cast women in inferior roles.

"It's from these people that came the myth of the Amazons, the warrior women," Kawami said.

"It was egalitarian by necessity. You have to be able to do it all because it's needed."

Their lifestyles influenced art, legends and myths among different cultures, as well as fueling their own art.

If the nomads were wrongly cast as barbarians, they didn't write the books, the histories, Kawami said. "The people who write the books generally win the day."

One of the elements touched on in this exhibit is the spiritual world, the practice of shamans.

The shaman was a special person, either male or female, who linked the real, mundane world to the supernatural.

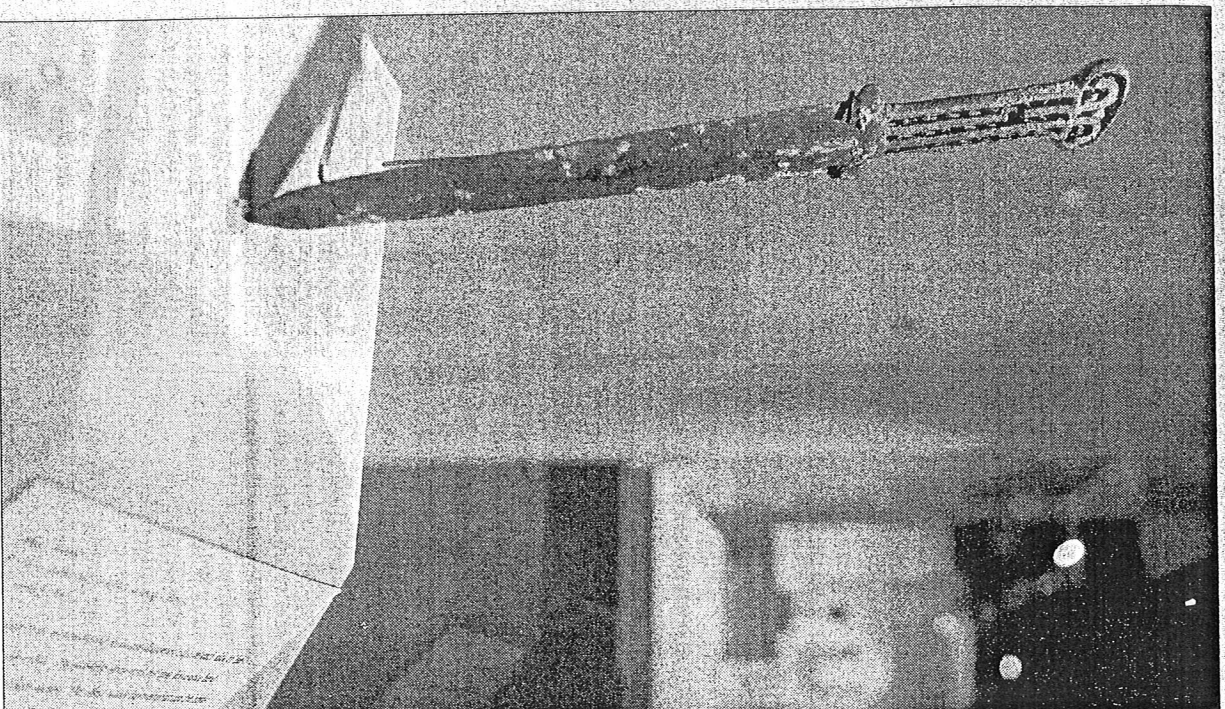
Shamans are identified in this exhibit by their burial goods, such as bells, jingles, rattles and small spoons, used to grind, measure and dispense sacred herbs.

Although many of the art forms represented here still survive today in different steppe cultures, bronze has been replaced by plastic.

"We have lost most of their textile art," Kawami said. "We know they invented felting. The precious metal of value has shifted from bronze to jewelry."

"The arts of these people are still generally personal arts. You can carry your identity with you."

Kawami said among her favorite pieces in the exhibit are the figures of red-eared



A short sword, from Northern Hebei and Western China, dating back to the sixth century B.C., is part of the "Ancient Bronzes of The Asian Grasslands from the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation" exhibit at the Hallie Ford Museum of Art.



Music was an important part of court ceremonies. Here a detail of a Nao (bell) shows an inscription that was added later.

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After Salem, the exhibit will go on to Calgary, Alberta; Victoria, British Columbia; Santa Fe, N.M.; and museums in Tennessee and Massachusetts.

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"It's because the director and

Romano of the Brooklyn Museum of Art," she said.

Olbrantz said they met at the funeral of Romano, a close friend who died in a traffic accident in 2003, and Kawami visited the Hallie Ford while seeing her mother in McMinville.

"It's all because of the human connection," she said of the Salem showing of the bronzes.

Although this isn't a flashy exhibit with a showy pedigree, "Ancient Bronzes" offers a more intimate, entertaining and educational experience, Kawami said.

"Blockbusters aren't about enjoying things," she said. "They're about knocking you over the head."

A free color brochure is part of the exhibit, and a full-color hardcover book is available.

The museum also will have a series of two lectures, a family workshop and regular free Tuesday gallery talks during the noon hour.

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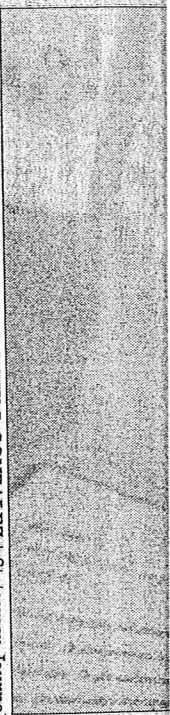
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A 5-foot vehicle fitting from Southwestern Inner Mongolia of Northwestern China, which dates from the fourth century B.C., would have adorned the pole to which animals were yoked on a funeral cart.



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Source: Salem Market Study, 2004. Reach based on a 10-day Statesman Journal/StatesmanJournal.com ad.

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