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INTO HISTORY



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Year One

Along the Silk Road

The Invention of Trousers

by Patrick Wertmann

You have at least one pair in your closet—trousers or, as they are better known today, pants. We all have a clear idea about what they are: a connected piece of fabric from the waist down to the ankles, with a separate cover for each leg. Did you ever wonder when humans began to wear them?

The history of trousers...

goes back much farther in time than the Year One, but let us start our journey into the past at



about that time. Our evidence is part of a grisly find: a mass grave near the city of Khotan on the southern Silk Road route that skirted the Taklamakan Desert.

In 1984, archaeologists discovered a first century B.C.E. grave at Sampula. Lying there were the remains of at least

The world's oldest pair of trousers—so far!

133 men and women, victims of a horrible attack. The arid climate in this region helped to preserve many pieces of their clothing, which, in turn, offer us intriguing clues about the histories of these people.

Especially fascinating...

was a pair of trousers (opposite) that had been created by piecing together various patches. Art historians recognized the head of a Greek warrior on one of the patches from the left leg (below). Contrary to what they expected, the warrior was not dressed in the Greek fashion, but rather in a long robe or caftan, which is a traditional Central Asian dress.



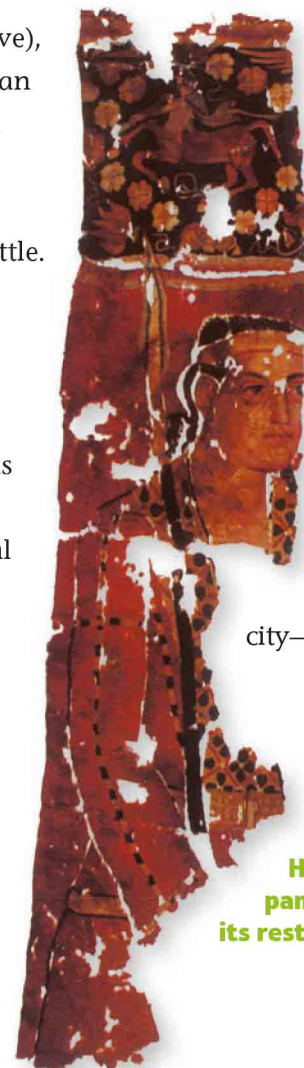
A close-up of the Greek-Macedonian warrior on the left leg of the trousers



On the trousers' right leg, we see a galloping mythological creature called a centaur (above), with the upper body of a human and the lower body of a horse. The creature on the trousers is playing a *salpinx*, a signaling trumpet used by soldiers in battle. While centaurs are creatures common in Greek mythology, the *salpinx* is a Persian instrument. This merging of motifs from different cultures is extremely interesting, as it offers evidence of cross-cultural interaction.

You cannot see the detail in the trousers photo opposite, but in one area on the right leg is this galloping centaur playing a musical instrument known as a *salpinx*.

A closer look at the patches led textile conservators to believe that the patches might actually have been part of a single piece of art. They took the trousers apart, gathered the patches with similar design work, and then sought to match the sections, much like working on a jigsaw puzzle. The result was fascinating:



The life-size Greek warrior had once been part of a tapestry (left). It is believed that this tapestry had adorned the wall of a palace in a Bactrian city—a city that

See the warrior? Here's how the left pant leg looks after its restoration.

originally had been Greek. Most likely it was there that the tapestry had been manufactured. Ancient written sources reveal that Bactria was invaded by Central Asians around the year 145 B.C.E. So, it seems that the invaders stole the tapestry and then cut it into smaller pieces. Years later, some of these pieces ended up as a pair of pants in the grave near Khotan.

So, who invented trousers...

Millennia ago, men and women across Eurasia did not wear anything like them. They preferred stockings, loincloths, capes, skirts, tunics, and cloaks. Exactly when people began to wear pants is still a matter of debate. Archaeologists have discovered woolen trousers in several tombs in the Yanghai cemetery in Turfan, on the northern Silk Road route that borders the Taklamakan Desert. These tombs date to approximately 1000 B.C.E. (or a little earlier), making the trousers the oldest discovered thus far. Each pair consists of three pieces: two for covering the legs

and one forming the crotch. In those days, scissors had not yet been invented, so each of the pieces had to be woven separately on a loom into its exact shape. The pieces were then sewn together to make one pair of pants.



Meet the man uncovered in the Yanghai cemetery.

When you look at the trousers from the Yanghai cemetery, you can see that the crotch is really wide. Do you have any idea why? —So you can easily stretch your legs. This was especially useful for the people at that time, since they often rode horses, and the extra width would provide more comfort. We know from the gear found in the tombs that the wearers of these trousers were horsemen. The corpses were also armed with bows and arrows, no doubt for hunting in the afterlife.

The evidence suggests...

that trousers were invented in Central Asia as part of ordinary riding gear or as uniforms for mounted warriors. Wearing them helped riders stay on the backs of their horses, while they traveled long distances at high speed. As more and more armies chose to include cavalry units—military forces that fight on horseback—the popularity of trousers gradually spread to East Asia, then to West Asia. The Chinese, Persians, and Greeks encountered this new fashion by, at the latest, the fifth century B.C.E. Tradition says that the Greeks and Romans found trousers very ugly and chose not to wear them. In

So, what stories do your trousers tell us?

HI, GANG! HOW DID YOU GET ON WITH YOUR PROJECT TO MAKE A HISTORICAL PAIR OF TROUSERS?

I DID OK, BUT I'M STILL NOT SURE WHAT TO DO WITH THIS EXTRA LEG?!

I WANTED MINE TO BE LIKE THE ONES FOUND AT **SAMPULA**, SO I MADE THEM OUT OF A TAPESTRY...

GOSH, REALLY?!

...WELL, ACTUALLY, I USED THIS OLD BEACH TOWEL.

SIGH THAT WAS MINE!!

BUT WE STILL DON'T GET THE **POINT** OF TROUSERS - WE'VE NEVER WORN THEM BEFORE!

WELL, THE **EVIDENCE** SUGGESTS THAT TROUSERS WERE INVENTED BY **HORSEBACK RIDERS** TO HELP THEM STAY ON OVER LONG DISTANCES AND AT HIGH SPEED.

BUT I AGREE WITH YOU ALL, I **NEVER** WEAR TROUSERS EITHER...

HUH?

...THAT'S RIGHT, I MUCH PREFER **SHORTS**!!!!

Jim Lee