

mounted armed warriors, as well as horn-shaped rhyton cups which suggest contact with Western Asia, an assumption which is strengthened by the discovery at Taesong-dong of a Scythian or Northern-type bronze jar, 25 cm (10 in) high. Nelson suggests that this contact may have been the result of sea trade.³¹

Although it is difficult to differentiate between some Kaya and Silla tomb wares, in general Kaya pieces are characterized by a more rounded profile and an inward-curving stand, as opposed to the straighter Silla profile. The technology of Three Kingdoms pottery has been researched by Tite, Barnes and others. Scientific analysis of sherds shows that the clay of which they were made can be classed as stoneware clay.³² Already sloping kilns had been introduced, and there is no doubt that the development of stoneware technology was the result of contacts with China, probably through the Han commanderies in the north. The development of the high temperatures associated with the production of stoneware is also linked with the production of iron at this time.³³

Kaya stoneware with characteristic shapes and incised, pierced and combed decoration, found in a Yamato tomb of the early fifth century, provides evidence that it was exported to Japan at this time, before the technique for producing high-fired stoneware had been introduced there by Korean potters (a development which was to result in the production of Japanese *sueki* ware in the fourth–fifth century).³⁴

Other interesting examples of Kaya tomb art and artefacts include a mural painting discovered in a tomb at Koa-dong in Koryong, consisting of lotus flowers and cloud designs in red, green and brown. The date of this tomb is uncertain but the motifs would suggest a Buddhist connection. Two gilt-bronze crowns with shamanistic upright tree and antler-shaped projections have been found at Pisan-dong near Taegu, similar to early Silla gold crowns (see section on Silla metalware, below).

Silla

The Silla kingdom evolved out of Saro, one of the seventy-eight walled-town states of Samhan. Saro consisted of six villages or clan communities, according to the *Samguk yusa*, and its leaders all came from the Pak, Sok and Kim families. The Korean terms used to describe the rulers of Saro (early Silla) varied, but one, 'chachaung', meant shaman or priest, showing that rulers at this time probably also acted as shamans. The title 'Maripkan', a native Korean word meaning 'ridge' or 'elevation', was adopted by King Naemul (reigned 356–402) and from that time his Kim family dominated the succession. The Chinese title 'wang', meaning 'king', was not adopted until the sixth century. In the latter part of the fifth century the six clan communities were organized into administrative districts, as part of the development of a centralized authority. Post stations were set up and markets established in the capital. Although Silla was harassed by Koguryo and concluded an alliance with Paekche in 433, its relatively isolated position meant it was largely left alone, separated from the rest of the peninsula by mountains. Under King Chijung (reigned 500–514), ploughing by oxen and irrigation works were introduced, bringing about a great increase in agricultural production. A law code was promulgated in 520, instituting the 'bone-rank' system, and Buddhism was officially adopted by 535, considerably later than in the other kingdoms.

The 'bone-rank' system (*kolpum*) was a kind of caste system, whereby every member of society was graded according to their hereditary blood line or 'bone-rank'. The top rank

(*songgol* or 'sacred bone') was occupied by the monarch, the second rank (*chin'gol* or 'true bone') was occupied by ministers and high aristocrats. Below this were six grades of 'head-rank'. One's rank determined one's position and function in society as well as the size and decoration of one's house or the kinds of clothes one could wear and the utensils one might use. For example, male *chin'gol* were not allowed to wear embroidered trousers made of fur, brocade or silk and female *chin'gol* were forbidden to wear hairpins engraved and inlaid with gems and jade. Saddles were also graded into specific types for certain ranks, including women.³⁵ The authority of Silla kings was somewhat tempered by the *hwabaek* assembly, a council of aristocrats that decided the most important matters of government and governed by consensus. The third distinctive feature of Silla society, in addition to the *kolpum* and *hwabaek*, was the *hwarang* cult of aristocratic youths, who were educated and trained as military heroes. *Hwarang* has been translated as 'Flower Boys' and some scholars have attributed shamanistic elements to this group. However, their tenets were based on five commandments of the learned Buddhist priest, Won'gwang, although, in contrast to traditional Buddhist pacifism, they elevated the importance of war, and death in battle was highly prized. To a certain extent, the imported Buddhist church justified and supported Silla's aristocratic system, the monks being drawn primarily from the noble class. However, Buddhism also appealed to the common people through ritual healing and wish-granting teaching, which partly replaced native shamanistic practices. That shamanism continued to be practised after the introduction of Buddhism is evidenced by the gold crowns found in Silla royal tombs which are dated to the fifth–sixth centuries (see section on Silla metalware, below).

Gold mines and iron mines were exploited by Silla and fourteen state-run departments existed specifically for the production of silk, cotton, hemp and ramie fabrics, wool blankets, leather products, tables, wooden containers, willow and bamboo products, ceramics and tiles, clothes and embroideries, tents, lacquer and metal weapons and tools. Trade with Tang China is recorded and can be seen in the form of a Silla envoy painted on the wall of the tomb of Zhang Huai near Xi'an, complete with a hat with wing-like projections similar to those found in Silla gold (see fig. 40). From China, Silla imported threads, silks, gold and silver ornaments, tea and books. Tang *sancai* ware has also been found in one Silla tomb. Silla exported to China gold, silver, copper or bronze needles, horses, ginseng, dogs, skins, ornaments and slaves. King Chinhung established boundary stones to mark the extent of his rule from 540 to 576, the northernmost of which was at Pibong on Pukhan mountain, north of Seoul, thereby showing the extent to which Silla had expanded its territory. Unusually, Silla was ruled by two successive queens in the seventh century, the result of a lack of male successors in the *songgol* royal line. These were Queen Sondok (reigned 634–47) and Queen Chindok (reigned 647–54). Queen Sondok introduced Chinese court dress and customs, established temples and schools and sent Korean students to study in China. It was also under her rule that the Chomsongdae astronomical observatory was set up, which still stands in Kyongju (see fig. 36). At the time of Queen Chindok's death, Silla was threatened by Koguryo, Paekche and Tang China and so the powerful Silla general Kim Yu-sin succeeded in placing his brother-in-law on the throne as King Taejong Muryol, the first non-*songgol* king. He instituted a policy of strengthening the bureaucracy and of increasing military, political and cultural ties with Tang China. The outcome was Silla's unification of the Korean peninsula in 668.³⁶

Tombs

Silla tombs, known as 'stone-surround wooden chamber tombs', consisted of a pit filled with a wooden chamber covered with a huge pile of stones and a mound of earth. Layers of clay over the pile of stones ensured that there was no water seepage and, when the wooden chamber collapsed through decay, the stones and earth would fall into the chamber, making it virtually impossible to rob. Silla tombs were therefore quite different from those of Koguryo and Paekche, both of which were more easily looted because of their horizontal entrances. Although the most famous Silla tombs are in the vicinity of Kyongju, there are also some in groups along the Naktong river, the Han river, the east coast and on the island of Ullung. Sometimes up to ten burials are found under a single mound, and occasionally jar-coffins are used. Following Buddhist practice, cremations were introduced in the Unified Silla period. The chronology of the excavated tombs is in dispute amongst Japanese and Korean scholars and several sequences have been proposed.³⁷

Japanese archaeologists such as Umehara Sueji first carried out excavations of Silla tombs in the early twentieth century, during the Japanese occupation. He excavated the Gold Crown tomb and, since then, further Silla tombs such as the Gold Bell tomb, the Hwangnam Taechong tomb, the Lucky Phoenix tomb and the Heavenly Horse tomb have been unearthed around Kyongju.

One of the most famous of these is the Hwangnam Taechong tomb, also known as Tomb no. 98 and excavated between 1973 and 1975. Controversy surrounds its date. The tomb encloses a double burial. The northern of the two mounds contained a gold crown, which must have been for a woman because it was accompanied by a belt inscribed 'girdle for the lady'. The southern of the two mounds contained large numbers of weapons and a gilt-bronze, not a gold, crown. Since the two known Silla queens ruled in the seventh century, it is curious that fifth-century pottery types have been found in this tomb. This anomaly has led to the suggestion that this is possibly a double tomb of a couple who reigned jointly in the fifth century, the man as military head and the woman as religious and ceremonial leader, who would therefore have worn the gold crown.³⁸ The tomb site is large, 80 m by 120 m (262 ft by 393 ft), and the twin mounds are respectively 22 and 23 m (72 and 75 ft) high. Some Korean archaeologists believe that it may be the tomb of King Soji (reigned 478–500) and his queen. The inclusion of foreign glass vessels, however, suggests direct contact with China, which only became possible after the reign of King Chinhung (reigned 540–76). If it is assumed that it was the burial of one of the two recorded Silla queens, then it is more likely to be that of Queen Chindok, as the tomb of her predecessor, Queen Sondok, is known and recorded in the *Samguk sagi*. Queen Chindok died in 654 and, according to the *Samguk sagi*, the Tang emperor Gaozong sent envoys with three hundred bolts of silk to her funeral. If this is the case, then the burial goods from Hwangnam Taechong should be dated to the mid-seventh century. The dating of this tomb and its contents are still in dispute, but the generally accepted date is fifth–sixth century.³⁹

The Heavenly Horse tomb, excavated in 1973, contained 140 funerary objects including a Syrian blue glass cup, and is named after the white winged horses painted on the birch-bark saddles and saddle-flaps found in a chest in the tomb (fig. 32). These constitute some of the very few examples of Silla painting and can be compared with the early seventh-century Koguryo winged horse painted in the Kangso Taemyo tomb near Pyongyang. The



32. Painting on a birch-bark saddle-flap of a winged horse. Excavated in 1973 from the Heavenly Horse tomb in Kyongju, this is one of Korea's earliest paintings and shows the importance placed upon horses in the Silla, 5th–6th century AD. 53 × 75 cm.

Heavenly Horse motif can also be seen as a reflection of influence from the Silk Route, having similarities to the famous Chinese Flying Horse of Gansu or the 'sacred horse' in the Dingjia Tomb no. 5 at Jiuquan in northwest China. The crescent-shaped forms on its body, however, show similarities to inlaid jades from Scythia. It is moreover thought that Silla people had an indigenous belief in horses, as shown in the foundation myth of Silla recorded in the *Samguk yusa*.⁴⁰ Other scholars interpret the horse as a unicorn (*kirin*) and trace it back to Han China. In the Heavenly Horse tomb, the coffin was placed on a stone platform and contained a sword and gold ornaments worn by the king: a crown, earrings, rings, bracelets and a girdle. A pair of gilt-bronze openwork shoes were probably originally lined with silk. The chest containing the riding gear also contained pottery, metal vessels and lacquer. Since there was no epitaph tablet, it is not known to which Silla king this tomb belonged.⁴¹

Metalware

Magnificent regalia have been excavated from the tombs of the Silla kings and queens, justifying the name of Kumsong, or 'city of gold', given to Kyongju during the Silla. Crowns, belts, shoes, earrings, caps and vessels were made of thin sheet-gold and twisted gold wire and decorated with dangling leaf-shaped gold and curved jade ornaments, evidence of the elegant and sophisticated lifestyle of the rulers of the period. Some scholars contend that

these regalia were not for use, but were made especially for the tomb, for use in the after-life, pointing out, for example, the impracticality of wearing gold shoes. Others point to evidence of wear and tear, showing that the crowns were used by the rulers. There is no doubt that, if worn, the shimmering crowns would have made a splendid and impressive sight, the upright projections swaying and the dangling pendants tinkling as the king or queen walked in procession (fig. 33).

In tracing the route through which the motifs found on Silla crowns and the sheet-gold working technique may have arrived in Korea, comparisons have been made between Silla gold crowns and one found at Novercherkassk on the northeastern shore of the Black Sea, from a Sarmatian royal burial of the first to second century BC. Both the tree projections on top of the crown (interspersed with stags) and the gold pendants dangling from the lower edge are similar to those on Silla crowns. The thin sheet-gold construction of Silla crowns is, however, closer to that of one found in the former kingdom of Bactria at Tillya Tepe (present-day Shibarghan in northern Afghanistan), dating to the first century AD. It may have been that this type of gold-working entered Korea through northeast China, as gold head-dress ornaments, one pair of which is tree-shaped, have been excavated from a tomb at Fangshen in Liaoning province dating to the Northern Jin period (AD 265–316).⁴² It seems likely that the shamanistic rituals practised in Silla were influenced by Scytho-Siberian shamanism and that the transfer of the outward symbols of these rituals and beliefs was facilitated by the nomadic lifestyle of the peoples of the steppe region. However, the gold crowns were not only full of religious symbolism, they were also indications of rank, worn only by the *songgol* or later *chin'gol* rulers, in the strictly hierarchical Silla society.

Ten gold crowns have been excavated so far in Korea, although only six are of the spectacular kind with elaborate appendages. Some simpler ones are closer to one said to have come from a late Kaya tomb at Koryong. The crown from the Gold Crown tomb also had an inner cap with wing-like projections and the crown from the Lucky Phoenix tomb ends in a phoenix-like finial. Another crown from Uisong, north of Kyongju, has feathery-looking uprights. These all suggest association of burial with birds, which is borne out by the record in the Chinese *Sanguo ji* that the predecessors of the Silla people included birds' wings in their graves.⁴³

Gold belts with pendant objects, found together with most of the crowns, show some influence from China, and possibly came to Silla via Paekche. The openwork plaques forming the belts would probably have been sewn on to a backing of leather or fabric. A series of pendants are attached on a chain of ovoid and small square plaques. Usually one particular pendant on each belt is longer and larger than all of the others. The pendant objects include fish, a small knife in a gold sheath, curved jades and a gold wire tassel. They stem from a long tradition of official belts originating in Han dynasty China or earlier.⁴⁴

Gold earrings with leaf-shaped gold and curved jade pendants were also found in all the excavated royal tombs, worn by both males and females. The British Museum is fortunate to have in its collection some fine examples of Silla gold earrings. The granulation technique of decoration, which occurs on some of these earrings, also has its origins in Han China. The fact that Paekche tombs also featured gold earrings suggests that the technique travelled through Paekche to Silla. The earrings decorated with granulation

33. Royal crown in sheet-gold excavated from the Gold Crown tomb, Kyongju, in 1922. The antler- and tree-shaped uprights show links with Siberian shamanism, and the curved jade pendants are similar to those found in Japan. Silla, 5th–6th century AD. Ht: 27.5 cm.



are often the more elaborate ones, with a thick, hollow main ring. Hexagon patterns often occur in the granulation and some of the very small hanging leaf-shaped pendants are serrated around the edge to imitate granulation. Some earrings contain a rattle and are set with glass beads.

Pottery

The most comprehensive study of Silla pottery, which was buried in large quantities in Silla tombs, has been the work of the late Kim Won-yong, whose lifelong studies of the subject started with his PhD thesis in New York in 1960 and continued until his death in 1993. Other important work has been done by Han Byong-sam.⁴⁵ One of the difficult questions in the study of Silla and Kaya pottery is differentiating Silla from Kaya pieces. Kim Won-yong divides Silla pottery into four periods which he calls Former (250–350), Early (350–450), Middle (450–550) and Late (550–650) Silla. This does not include the Unified Silla period. His chronology differs from those of the Korean scholar Choi Pyonghyon and the Japanese Fujii Kazuo. His Former Silla and Early Silla periods overlap with Kaya. Some wares that he calls Early Silla other scholars call Kaya.⁴⁶

Although Silla pottery is famous for its dramatic, sculptural forms, which are associated with pre-Buddhist shamanistic burial rituals, many Silla pottery shapes are utilitarian ones and the vessels were probably placed in tombs for their contents. They contained food-stuffs and other items needed in the after-life. By far the most numerous are the mounted cup (*kobae*) and the long-necked jar (*changgyong ho*). It is believed that the *kobae* (see fig. 30) were used not just for storing food in burials, but also for serving food on special occasions or during rituals. The *kobae* shape shows clear influence from the ancient Chinese *dou* form of a cup on a high foot. Its lid could be inverted and used as a separate dish. The long-necked jar can also be compared with the curved profile of the ancient Chinese *hu*. Other cups had wheels attached and some were horn-shaped, similar to Kaya ones. Bell cups were so called because the hollowed-out lower section contained clay pellets which rattled when shaken. Very large globular jars with short necks also appear frequently, as do cups with no stand and with one handle.⁴⁷

Ewers fashioned in the shape of horse-riders are amongst the most spectacular of Silla ceramics. The most famous examples came from the Gold Bell tomb, excavated in 1924. Two riders of different ranks were depicted on pouring vessels placed next to the head of the deceased man, probably a king or prince. One, a servant, has a bag slung across his shoulders and wears a jacket and trousers. The other wears pointed shoes resting in stirrups and a high, narrow cap with broad ornamented rim. Mounted-warrior cups from the Kaya period have also been found, the most famous being a figure of a rider wearing scale-armour, who is shaped into a twin-horn cup. Twin-horn cups usually have a tube joining the two horns, so that the liquid can reach the same level in both sides.

The most dramatic of all Silla pottery forms is the stand. Stands were produced in both the Paekche and Kaya kingdoms, but they reached their height of development in fifth- and sixth-century Silla. The stands come in two types: one is purely a support and has a dish-shaped rim at the top, designed to hold a round-bottomed vessel; the other has an integral bowl at the top of the stand. Stands, called *kurut pachim*, usually have horizontal divisions into bands and triangular or rectangular holes in rows. It has been suggested that the largest, monumental stands would have been used for outdoor rituals,

perhaps state rituals. Silla stands have more triangular and less rounded profiles than the Kaya-Paekche type.⁴⁸

Pottery lamps may have copied the form of metal ones. In these lamps several small cups are arranged around the rim of a larger mounted cup and the bottom ends of all the smaller cups are connected, to allow a free flow of oil. Perhaps the most elaborate sculptural vessel known from this period is a small ritual spouted ewer in the form of a fabulous bird or a dragon, with flame-like projections along the neck and back, excavated from a grave near the tomb of King Michu. It recalls the flying horse painted on birch bark in the tomb of the Heavenly Horse (see fig. 32).⁴⁹

Silla pottery is mostly grey stoneware, fired at 800°–1000° C in a climbing kiln, which, as already noted, was probably introduced from China, either through Lelang or from southeast China. Accidental glazing sometimes occurred when ash fell from the kiln roof on to the pot. Deliberate glazing seems not to have been attempted until the Unified Silla period. Surface decoration was at first incised and the shapes include parallel lines, wavy lines, triangles, V-shapes, circles and half-circles. Sometimes human and animal forms were incised on the pots and sometimes three-dimensional figures were applied to the outsides. These display many aspects of Silla life, including a figure playing a stringed *kayagum* or zither, and figures engaged in sexual activities. The latter may have been associated with shamanistic fertility rituals. A figure carrying a *chige* (A-frame) has also been found. Snakes also appear applied on some pieces and it has been suggested that they may have been associated with the coming of crops from under the ground. Dangling, leaf-shaped ornaments suspended from rings attached to applied loops also exist, comparable to the dangling ornaments on gold earrings, crowns and belts found in the royal Silla tombs. ‘Swollen bands’ or convex grooves which divide the vessel into broad horizontal registers are also common decorative features of Silla pottery.

Apart from vessels, small pottery figurines have also been found in Silla tombs, such as those excavated in 1920 during the construction of Kyongju railway station. They are hand modelled and depict people and animals in a simplified form, the male figures frequently with an erect penis, suggesting that they were symbols of fertility. These figures are similar to those found decorating some vessel lids and sides. The bodies are long and cylindrical, some with folded hands and some with open arms and mouth, as if singing. The costumes are baggy skirts or trousers. More elaborately modelled human figures were also made in the following Unified Silla period, some depicting long-sleeved dancers, officials and bearded foreigners, undoubtedly evidence of contact with Western Asia through Tang China.⁵⁰

Buddhist sculpture in the Three Kingdoms

With the introduction of Buddhism in the late fourth century AD from China into Koguryo and Paekche and its gradual adoption throughout the three states by the court and ruling aristocracy, temples were constructed on a large scale, state-protecting Buddhist ceremonies were held and many images, both large and small, were made for worship. Extant Buddhist sculpture from the Three Kingdoms period mainly consists of triads portraying a Buddha with two attendant *bodhisattvas* or single bodhisattva figures. Most of these sculptures are small portable icons made of bronze or gilt-bronze. The

destruction of the majority of stone and wood pieces means that it is difficult to gain a complete picture of early Korean Buddhist sculpture. Koguryo Buddhist images tended to reflect the northern Chinese style of the Northern Wei (AD 386–534), which was of non-Chinese origin, while Paekche Buddhist art came under the influence of the southern Chinese Liang dynasty (502–57). In the case of Silla, Buddhism probably entered from both adjacent kingdoms and it is also clear that Koguryo exerted considerable influence on the two southern kingdoms of Paekche and Silla.

The earliest example of Koguryo sculpture is a gilt-bronze standing Buddha dated 539, showing clear evidence of the sixth-century Northern Wei style, particularly in the flaming mandorla and the stiff drapery folds projecting out on either side. It was discovered at Uiryong in South Kyongsang province. The workmanship is quite rough when compared to similar Chinese examples. Triads dating to 563 and 571 show a more sculptural style, with rounder modelling of face and bodies and more order in the flame patterns on the mandorlas. The triad dated to 563, which is in the Kansong Museum in Seoul, also shows a feature which was to become popular – a dot design around the edge of the lotus petals of the pedestal and the inner area of the mandorla.

That Buddhism experienced great growth in Paekche under King Song (reigned 523–54) is known through documentary evidence of Paekche's diplomatic relations with both Liang China and Japan. The early seventh-century triad at Sosan in South Chungchong province is a rare example of Paekche stone sculpture, being carved out of a cliff face (fig. 34). The central Buddha figure has his right hand raised in the *abhaya mudra*, symbolizing freedom from fear, and the left hand lowered in the gesture of wish-granting. The gentle smiles of the figures and their lotus-petal pedestals and haloes are particularly beautiful. A peculiar feature of this triad is that the figure on the left of the Buddha is a standing bodhisattva holding a jewel in both hands, while that on the right is a half-seated figure in the meditation posture, depicting a Bodhisattva contemplating his role in the rescue of people from suffering. The standing figure in the Sosan triad may be Avalokitesvara (Kwanum). It is a type which was very popular in Paekche and which may have been taken by Paekche artists to Japan when they introduced Buddhism there in 552, as this depiction of a standing bodhisattva holding a jewel in both hands became popular in Japan in the seventh century.

Sui Chinese sculptural style can be seen in small seventh-century Paekche figures of Avalokitesvara, as is evidenced by gently swaying bodies and strings of jewellery crossing in front. By the late seventh century, technical expertise was growing as can be seen in the small details on sculptures from this period, which often wear a crown and carry a Buddhist jewel in one hand.

Many Silla stone sculptures dating to the seventh century can be seen in the region of



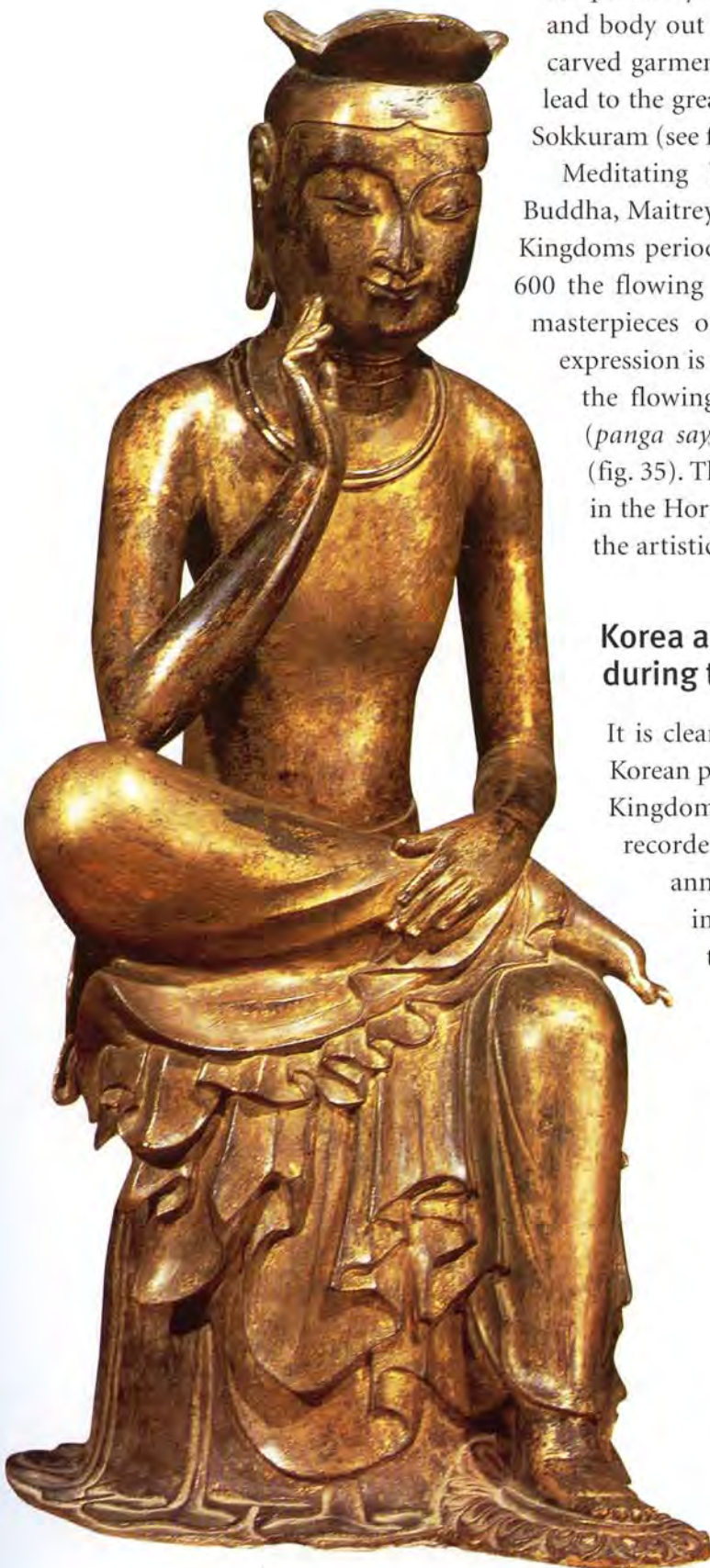
34. Buddha and two bodhisattvas carved out of stone at Sosan. The seated bodhisattva on the right is in the half-seated posture of meditation. Paekche, 7th century AD.

Kyongju, especially in the Mt Namsan area, which was a centre of Buddhist activities. They tend to show a stocky form with a comparatively large head, a feature of old Silla sculptural style in stone. A growing interest in modelling the head and body out from the surface of the rock and in more deeply carved garment folds can be seen, a development which was to lead to the great sculptures of the Unified Silla period, such as at Sokkuram (see fig. 39).⁵¹

Meditating bodhisattvas, usually identified as the future Buddha, Maitreya, were also produced in gilt-bronze in the Three Kingdoms period. In two famous Silla examples dating to around 600 the flowing drapery and finely modelled facial features are masterpieces of bronze Buddhist sculpture. The gentle facial expression is of supreme beauty, the naked torso contrasts with the flowing drapery over the seat and the meditative pose (*panga sayusang*) emanates a feeling of calm benevolence (fig. 35). This pose is very similar to that of a wooden example in the Horyu-ji in Kyoto, which was clearly produced under the artistic influence of Korea.

Korea and Japan during the Three Kingdoms

It is clear that there was a close relationship between the Korean peninsula and the Japanese islands during the Three Kingdoms period. Evidence for such contact is not only recorded in the Chinese, Korean and Japanese historical annals,⁵² it can also be seen from archaeological finds in Japan and in Japanese art in various media from this period. Although both Koguryo style wall-paintings and Kaya stoneware have been found in Japanese tombs, it seems likely that it was Paekche



35. Gilt-bronze seated Maitreya in meditative pose. Silla, 7th century AD. Ht: 93.5 cm.

people, by origin the old Puyo warriors from the north, who emigrated by boat to Japan in the latter half of the fourth century and created Yamato Wa in Japan.⁵³ If this is the case, then the dramatic changes that came about in the Kofun period (AD 300–710) in Japan might be attributed to this influx of a more advanced, horse-riding group who brought with them iron, horses, stoneware technology and corridor-type painted chamber tombs for their élite, in which were buried Korean-style gold crowns and shoes, stoneware ritual vessels and curved jades, amongst other objects. Without further archaeological evidence from Japan it is difficult to fully substantiate this theory, but it would seem likely that the Japanese ruling élite originated in Paekche Korea. Early Buddhist architecture and sculpture in Japan also shows their Korean origins in many ways. There is no doubt that these influences are the result of an influx of monks, craftsmen and artists from the Korean peninsula, despite the persistent tendency amongst Japanese historians to point to a more general ‘continental’ influence.⁵⁴

Unified Silla

Silla, under Kim Chun-chu (later King Muryol), made an alliance with Emperor Gaozong of Tang China, with the strategy of first defeating Paekche and then attacking Koguryo simultaneously from both north and south in order to unify the Korean peninsula. Paekche was defeated in 660 by a combination of Chinese forces under Su Dingfang and Silla forces under Kim Yu-sin, despite strong last-minute resistance by Paekche Prince Pung, who returned from Japan. Then, in 667, a successful invasion of Koguryo was launched under Li Ji of Tang, supported by Silla. However, Tang China’s ultimate aim was to subdue the whole of the peninsula as part of the Chinese empire, while Silla wanted power for itself. Silla therefore met the Chinese army in a series of battles in the region of the Han river basin and eventually drove it back in 676. This successful resistance of Chinese aggression by Silla allowed the independent development of the Korean people and has always been seen as an event of great significance and a cause of national pride by Korean historians.⁵⁵

Both Unified Silla and Parhae (a state in south-central Manchuria, which included some former Koguryo people and a large group of semi-nomadic Malgal tribesmen of Tungusic origins) eventually established peaceful diplomatic relations with the Tang, a major change in Korea’s relationship with China, which had to a large extent been one of armed conflict throughout the Three Kingdoms period. During the eighth and ninth centuries many luxury goods, books and works of art were imported from China and many monks and students travelled to Tang China to study Buddhism or Confucian scholarship. As a result, Tang influence was widespread and contributed to Korean cultural development. Silla and Parhae also had maritime contacts with Japan and with Arab merchants. Silla, indeed, appears in several Arab publications from the ninth century onwards, portrayed as a kind of paradise (see Introduction, section on Western knowledge of Korea).

After unification, monarchs displayed increasing authoritarianism. They were now not always from the ‘sacred-bone’ lineage but from the lower ‘true-bone’ rank. The ruling Kim house came to exercise almost exclusive political power, at the expense of other aristocratic families. The stipend village system, whereby officials were paid a salary in the form of