

**An Exploration of Patterns in World History Through Arts,
ca. 600 to ca. 400 BC**
**Report on the 1977 Institute in Cross-Cultural Studies
sponsored by the Department of History in Art, University of
Victoria in collaboration with the Institute for the Study of
Universal History, 4 July–17 August 1977**

A. G.

Volume 5, Number 1, 1978

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1077318ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1077318ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (print)

1918-4778 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

G., A. (1978). Review of [An Exploration of Patterns in World History Through Arts, ca. 600 to ca. 400 BC: Report on the 1977 Institute in Cross-Cultural Studies sponsored by the Department of History in Art, University of Victoria in collaboration with the Institute for the Study of Universal History, 4 July–17 August 1977]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 5(1), 47–48. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1077318ar>

An Exploration of Patterns in World History Through Arts *ca. 600 to ca. 400 BC*

Report on the 1977 Institute in Cross-Cultural Studies sponsored by the
Department of History in Art, University of Victoria
in collaboration with the Institute for the Study of Universal History
4 July – 17 August 1977

Six participants of extraordinarily diverse backgrounds contributed to this second annual institute. (The first, on the epoch ca. 1100 to ca. 1300, was reported in RACAR, IV, 1976, pp. 40-41; the third, on the seventeenth century, will be held 3 July–16 August 1978.) All the more remarkable, then, that in the course of its proceedings, three common themes kept recurring, apparently relevant in some degree to all civilizations of that age: (a) a substratum of religious belief involving that sort of interrelationship of human and natural forces which in a late degenerate form goes under the term 'shamanism'; (b) a concern for analysis of relationships of parts to wholes, manifest in all sorts of forms, from theories of government to metalwork designs; (c) a concentration or focusing of these developments at specific ritual sites, with concomitant questions of dissemination versus indigenous growth applying to all civilizations and cultures of the first millennium BC.

Introducing the institute with the first public lecture and two weeks of classroom lectures was Alan Gowans, Department of History in Art, University of Victoria, and director of the institute. He talked about the principles of social function in arts and architecture generally, and in particular, how they apply at the ritual site of Olympia from beginning to end of classical civilization. He examined the possibility of an 'ontogeny repeats phylogeny' paradigm in a comparison of creative and mental growth patterns in children's art with evolution of historic art forms from prehistoric through classical times. The first millennium BC could be seen as the first age to demonstrate unequivocally a capacity for analytical thought, evidencing it in new types of speculation on moral, philosophical, and governmental questions involving relationship of individuals to the community, and in deliberate and conscious beautification.

In a single public lecture, John Peter Oleson, Department of Classics, University of Victoria, introduced a major theme of the institute: dissemination versus indigenous growth, exemplifying the problem specifically in the case of *Tomb Design and the Presence of*

Etruscans in the Hellenistic Greek World. His basic contention was that the problem of whether Etruscan culture was indigenous or imported via immigration from Asia Minor 'has in a sense been misstated: the culture of Etruria is what really concerns us, and it cannot have come from anywhere, since it is found only in Etruria, where it first came into being and matured.' Oleson made his point by detailed comparisons of selected Etruscan and Greek tomb designs of the third and second centuries BC.

Partha Mitter, of the School of African and Asian Studies of the University of Sussex, England, was concerned in public and class lectures with the nature of the change in society which set in during the second millennium and culminated in the first with the contemporaneous civilizations of classical Greece and Vedic India. He proposed that 'the oldest Veda, the Rg, and the other three . . . as well as exegetical treatises such as the Brahmins' may well be compared with the heroic age in Greece celebrated by Hesiod and Homer.' He suggested that Vedic Aryans were also like archaic Greeks in having gods who were originally heroes (possibly of the wars of invasion or settlement following their migrations) and in having little *angst* over and only vague concepts of any after-life.

Boris Piotrovsky, director of the Hermitage Gallery in Leningrad and one of the USSR's foremost archaeologists, delivered a public lecture on Scythia in general, and specifically on interconnections between East (Mongolia, China) and West (Asia Minor, Greece, Caucasus) exemplified by recent discoveries in Scythian archaeology. His classroom lectures were likewise concerned with East-West relationships from Spain to China as demonstrated by archaeological finds in the Caucasus region and by finds made in his own excavations over a thirty-year period at Karmir Blur (Teishebaini citadel, near Erevan, Armenian SSR). He concluded that interrelationships were far more extensive and far earlier than previously imagined, comprising the whole of Eurasia from the later second millennium onwards, long before the 'silk routes' of Imperial Roman, Kushan, and Han times.

Dissemination versus indigenous growth was also the theme of lectures on ancient cultures of East Asia by David Waterhouse, Department of East Asian Studies, University of Toronto. In his public lecture he sketched the broad general premises of his argument, which four class lectures supplemented in detail, and made particular reference to the historical background, bronzes, religion, and music of Chou China. He suggested that the problem is to decide which culture traits have been diffused, and which are so simple or non-specific or general that they are found in any developed human society. According to Professor Waterhouse, the problem is often phrased in terms of an opposition between function and structure, but he said that the importance of Robert von Heine-Geldern's type of diffusion also needs to be recognized, even if one does not accept his ideas *in toto*. Also deserving more cross-cultural study, Professor Waterhouse observed, are the interconnections of the 'Animal Style' manifested in Chinese bronzes with Scythia, the Hsiung-Nu, Assyria, and Mesopotamia.

Charles Wicke, Department of Anthropology, University of Oklahoma, dealt in a public lecture and a

week of classes with two New World cultures which flourished in the first millennium BC: the Olmec of Middle America and the Chavin of the Andean area. The two cultures were not only contemporaneous, but shared common features. Moreover, although almost completely isolated from the rest of the world, the Olmec and Chavin demonstrate remarkable parallels with other cultures dealt with in the Institute in Cross-Cultural Studies. After characterizing the two styles, Wicke underscored some of the differences between them. Similarities, he noted, were more general. The styles share an esoteric, exotic quality when viewed subjectively. They avoid the obvious. They favour curvilinear forms. Also, at a general level, content is similar. The most effective explanation of such similarities, Wicke suggested, was on the principle that styles are reflections of, if not dictated by, ideologies.

ISUH proposes to publish the full proceedings of the 1977 Institute, with each participant's own texts, in its publication series.

A.G.