

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years there have been brought to our notice by art dealers and some archeologists who import Chinese art, certain objects which are not sufficiently explained by the artistic development of the Far East alone. Among these dealers, C.T. Loo and Co. have for some years been accumulating a group of articles permitting a study of this art today. These objects have already interested sinologues, and the question of their origin has provoked considerable discussion. We are usually given some indication as to their provenance, connecting them with countries bordering the north of China. It has been possible at times to make this origin appear probable, even to prove it, but little has been gained by an approximative geographic determination. These objects from the north of China have for the most part been brought to us with no report of their discovery, with no tomb inventories, and above all with no inscriptions, that is to say, with none of those means by which science is usually helped, when it endeavours to classify unknown material.

Difficulty begins at once with the designation of these articles. The adjective "Scythian" has frequently been used by dealers, who with this word wish to convey the idea that such articles owe some part of their artistic formation to the inhabitants of the Eurasiatic Steppes. This is no doubt true, only unfortunately, in certain cases we do not know in detail what tribe nor even what race from the northern frontier of China may be considered as inspiring this art. This search for the creator is at once combined with a search for the period of creation, since we have sufficient information on the succession of the different peoples on the continent of Eurasia, thanks to historical documents of both East and West. With the adjective "Scythian" we refer only to the first ethnical group the existence of which has been historically proved, and which inhabited the extreme west of the zone of the Steppes. In attempting to start exclusively from the Scythians in order to determine the period of all this Chinese frontier art, a date is reached that in most cases seems to us too early (1). Besides it is