

that century they were united by the famous Cingis Khan and led by him to magnificent conquests. By about the year 1200 he was master of all Mongolia, and then, in the south, he subjugated the remaining K'itans and the Si-hia. Among the Turkish and Mongol vassals of Cingis we know the Öngüts. In the XII and XIII centuries, and even later, in the time of Marco Polo, they lived north of the Yellow River, in the country of the Ordos. We shall later have to speak of what remains of their art, which Pelliot has already studied (24). The advance of the Mongols was ended in the east by the founding of the Yüan dynasty on Chinese soil in 1280. The Mongols remained masters of those regions of the Steppes which bordered China, and slowly they absorbed the remaining tribes who had lived there before them.

This general view of historical events on the northern Chinese frontier, although simplified and shortened, cannot help but bring to our notice three ethnical groups that are possible links and bearers of the art with which we are concerned : they are the Tungus, the Turks and the Mongols. As we have had no systematic excavations, and since they resemble each other in their manner of living, it will be impossible to set forth what belongs to each individual group. Besides we must bear in mind their constant intermingling.

It would be an error to consider as nomads or semi-nomads all the above mentioned peoples. Their lives as hunters and cattle raisers often obliged them to move their homes. But we already know that the Scythians, as their civilization progressed, practiced agriculture. It is above all the smiths who were artisans in metal objects who found it most difficult to change their domiciles, and who probably preferred to continue working in localities where natural conditions were favourable to their tasks. In spite of this their treasure of artistic forms and myths is that of the nomads. The objects they produced corresponded to the needs of migratory peoples. These artists of the Steppes were never impelled towards the diversity in artistic creation that always arises of its own accord among a sedentary people. There seems to be at the northern Chinese border relatively few forms due to the high civilization that was so near, but many forms resulting from nomadic life.