

## CHAPTER V

### THE DATING OF METAL OBJECTS

Concerning northern Chinese frontier art there are many unanswered questions, and indeed many that are impossible to answer under actual conditions of scientific knowledge. There is one problem, that from an archeological point of view is more important than any other : that of dating objects. Until now literature has not seriously studied this question, and for that reason we shall place particular emphasis upon it in the following pages. We must remind our readers once more that chronological bases such as dates, names of owners, in short all that may be termed inscriptions, are nearly entirely lacking. There are few facts when attempting to classify according to period. They are in fact so scarce that a future study based on archeological and philological research may perhaps reach conclusions which somewhat differ from those attained here. We must not forget the accidental quality of the proofs we believe to possess and with which we uphold our theory, but it is impossible to refrain from an attempt at some chronological classification. One single reason among those enumerated further on would not suffice in many cases for the date chosen. It is only the coincidence of different causes that has led me to believe that not all objects created at the Chinese frontier under northern Asian influence should carry the designation "Han" with which they have been labeled until now. In certain cases we shall advance the limit of a date by about one millennium, admitting that the art in question may have enjoyed a long life in our particular region. Its tradition still existed in the II millennium. This would not be possible if between the Han and Yüan epochs there were no works of art which continued ancient forms. In the passage of years such forms underwent considerable transformation and change of style. But a criticism of style is always dangerous in the East, particularly in a region still obscure from want of serious excavations. Trusting to such a method one too easily forgets the possibility of the migration of objects easy to transport, and the more or less well developed capacities of the artisan. We must not neglect these sources of error.

On the other hand we should not be surprised to find an artistic retardation