

m) Decorated rings and ring-holders.

Rings having animal-forms on their rims served a purpose that is not always clear. It is possible that this group may have some connection with one to which we shall give the name of "Chain-Holders" (Cf. Chap. VIII, 1). There is little doubt that in certain cases they are ear-drops.

A decoration that continues all round the ring has been seen in western sections of the Steppes. In the Caucasus an example has been found ornamented with several bird-heads (61). A similar object has appeared in the Ural, but limited to four heads (62). Certainly a late Scythian creation is the ring with three indistinct ornaments found by Brobinskoj near Tschigirine in the neighbourhood of Kiev (63). Such objects, therefore, were in use at the earliest periods of Steppe art.

Examples from the Chinese frontier, however, must be dated much later. Plate XVII no. 9 reminds us of Scythian prototypes, but the stags that here surround the ring are such stunted creatures that this piece brings us considerably past the millennium. The two horse-heads above another ring may be dated a little before 1000 (Pl. XVII no. 10). Their affinity with the Minussinsk model is evident. The same must be said of the lynx or tiger of Plate XVII no. 11, the body of which forms the upper part of the ring. Plate XVII no. 12 must be associated with the pendant-plaque. A square loop holds a C-shape ending in a bird form already noticed in Plate XVII no. 4.

In China proper we also find money used as pendants, amulets or appliques (64). This custom was especially popular with the barbarians of the north. We may presume that the examples from the Loo collection were cast at the frontier after Chinese models. Plate XVII no. 13 falls very well under this heading because of the way in which the seemingly paradoxical use of the object is emphasised. Of the four animals that stood at each side there are only two complete, one horse and one bird. The only character that can be read on the cash is also found on an undecorated coin from Troitzkossavsk at the northern border of Mongolia (65). It is the number 5. The animal-forms seem to prove a date after the middle of the I millennium. Plate XVII no. 14 shows us a pendant ring that was attached by a small loop. In its normal position the inscription would be incorrect, which leads me to believe that it was made outside of China. W. Y. Ting, of the Chinese Institute of Frankfort, believes three of the characters to be: "man", "one thousand", and "days". According to Ting there are two ways of deciphering the fourth character: it can be either "gold" or "Liao". In the first case the inscription would hold the customary good wishes, in the second it would contain an allusion to the barbarian K'itan dynasty that in the X century occupied the north of China. A date of about 1000 would then be justified, and seems to be the most probable in any case. The other side of the cash also bears an inscription very kindly deciphered