

room for him. The upraised hand of the hero, disproportionately large as is the bird sitting on the hindquarters of the horse, gives the impression of work done by an inexperienced artist. It is certain that the barbarian creator of this scene did not attempt a composition, but merely put together haphazardly all the motives necessary for an understanding of the subject. An artist of the Han period would most certainly have grouped his figures with more care, and would have treated the surface in a plastic way. In the subjugation of the demon (Plate XXI no. 4) the confusion is emphasised by poor proportions. The animal above the cart completely overshadows both it and the draught animals, and is incongruous to the whole. In a letter published by Rostovtzeff in the review "Artibus Asiae", G. Roerich speaks of Turkish and Mongol texts that deal with sacred wrestling. It is among the myths of these tribes that we must search for the subject matter of these two plaques which deal with scenes in the life of the Conqueror of the Demons. These remarks force us to place the first example after the middle of the I millennium, and the second nearer the end. We have already discovered that at the Chinese frontier there is a period between 500 and 1000 A.D. with which to date Turkish and Mongol art when it is independent of other regions from the point of view of motive and artistic form. The relatively late date which we have given to the above pieces corresponds to this fact.

b) Animal-combats.

The principal motive for belt plaques in the Steppes, for western Sarmatia as well as for the gold Siberian pieces, is the animal-combat. It is also very often found at the Chinese frontier, particularly on pieces where the strong relief leaves no doubt of their being of the Han period (7). The artistic excellence of such objects has attracted the interest of scholars and collectors, and they have therefore been well published. But along the road through the epochs, the motive has suffered so many strange and multiple transformations, it has undergone so many varied influences, that it is well worth our while to study its development in detail.

On Siberian gold plaques we find an eagle fighting a wild animal (8). The composition is filled in with small animals and bird-heads. The latter motives are missing on a replica from the Chinese frontier (Plate XXII no. 1). Here the motive appears simplified, the surface flattened and softened. The hollows, which in the Steppe circle often served to hold inlay, are now merely decorative ornaments. This transformation had perhaps already taken place in the country that saw the birth of Sarmatian art, and certainly already in the Minussinsk region. In spite of a stylised rendering of claws and plumage, the combat between the eagle and the tiger is very impressive, even in north China examples. It is "pathetic", as Rostovtzeff would say. Objects in bronze may follow objects in gold with but little lapse of time, that is to say they are of between the III and IV centuries.