

The combat between a tiger and a stag, face to face (Plate XXII no. 2), in a rectangular frame, has no western parallel. The scene is surrounded with earth and foliage. The tiger is seizing the throat of the stag, the head of which is turned towards the front, and the antlers directly connected with the leaves. Siberian animal-combats have a plastic clarity that is lacking in the modeling here. The perforations are certainly related to those of Minussinsk, but the affinity of this piece to that region is only apparent in the stylization, since there are no representations of animal-combats in the Jenissei valley. It is only at the Chinese frontier that we find motives from gold objects combined with Minussinsk characteristics, and the subject still further transformed by the limited style of our region. At the same time all the foreign elements seem very much conventionalized. The date of this piece, of which several examples are known, should be at the earliest of about the middle of the I millennium A.D.

Among combinations peculiar to our region, we must mention the combat between a fabulous being resembling a dragon, and two tigers (Plate XXII no. 3). Two wild animals charging their prey are found on gold plaques as well as on pieces from the north of China. The only motive that connects this piece with the preceding one, so full of Minussinsk reminders, is the border in leaf design. Although these two examples must be of the same period, they differ from each other in every way. We have already noticed when dealing with hook-clasps (Plate XIX nos. 2-4) the very definite tendency to render the surface uneven and to give it animation by doubling the lines. At the same time great use is made of the distinctive Sarmatian decoration, the comma-shaped motive. Three lines follow the outline of the dragon, curved like a serpent, while the stripes on the bodies of the tigers agree somewhat with nature. The animal that is biting the hind part of the tiger seems to be twisted so that the hind legs are turned in the opposite direction to the body and head.

Plate XXII no. 4 is an excellent work of art, and demonstrates how many varied artistic tendencies may be combined in one object. In a frame formed of two plaited ropes two contorted horses are galoping with legs bent back nearly up to their thighs. They are attacked from below by two tigers that bite their bellies. Their S-shaped tails lie across the bodies to join in the centre. There are braided spirals on all the joints. Although all these peculiarities have a decidedly Sarmatian character, there is nothing barbarian about the group. The superimposed arrangement, without background, is proof of an artistic liberty only possible in an advanced civilization. The lines are well arranged and controlled in every detail, but do not agree with the style of the Han period, but rather with that of the T'ang. Therefore all technical details in this piece are Chinese. The subject comes from the circle of the Steppes, but the composition, and the doubling of the group in one frame, may only be explained as local peculiarities.

The Loo collection also contains examples of the last phase where we find