

camels and passes through their mouths like bridles. This example very clearly shows that after a certain lapse of time ancient forms can become quite new and no longer hold their original meaning.

Plate XXVIII no. 4 gives an idea of the diversity of possible variations. This pair of ibex is far more broken up than any Minussinsk piece, although the element that causes this dissolution is formed of an ancient motive from this region, the circular perforation of which we spoke at length in Chapter VI. It takes possession of the tree at the centre and changes it into three wheels. It appears above the horns and below the bodies, in fact it takes hold of all possible spaces. Only the ibex themselves, well modeled moreover, are not so treated. Three stylistic tendencies meet here, the heraldic grouping and the circular perforations of Minussinsk, the modeling of an early period, and finally the tendency towards a schematic transformation which is an artistic characteristic peculiar to the barbarians of the northern Chinese frontier. A date near 1000 best corresponds to the coincidence of these three elements. When even the modeling disappears as in Plate XXVIII no. 5, we must be at an even later period and have entered the II millennium. Here the perforations have even broken up the forms of the standing animals, probably stags, the heads of which are backward-turned. Animals so geometrically simplified, three instead of a pair, and all turned in the same direction, are certainly an invention of our region. Among the latest yet most primitive plaques, is that of Plate XXVIII no. 6, composed in the same way as Plate XXVIII no. 4. The stags are nearly unrecognisable. The centre tree, a very ancient motive, has become a dotted line, and the circle above is less a symbol than a method by which the artist avoided small perforations and replaced them with a linear design. Such a weakening of original forms can only be possible at a late Mongol period. This object, so to speak, is of "no date".

There are animals in plaque form of so small a volume as to be mere skeletons. A wild animal (Plate XXIX no. 1) may, in spite of this fact, be recognised as a wolf. The disappearance of the body surface, however, cannot be possible before the middle of the I millennium. There is still less volume in the ibex of Plate XXIX no. 2, where even a true drawing of the legs has been lost. The back, the legs joined together, and the jaws, have become grooved bars. We always find at the end of this art, that is to say at the beginning of the II millennium, the same tendency to forget nature by placing the emphasis on the ornament.

The figure astride a camel (Plate XXIX no. 3) is of a type already observed in the hooks of Plate XX nos. 3 & 4, and is of the same period, the beginning of the II millennium.

The small figure (Plate XXIX no. 4) is not sufficiently distinct for us to draw any conclusions; it must probably be of the end of the T'ang period. A heraldic