

is characteristic of the Minussinsk region, not only when it has a simple loop, but also when there is an animal form at the top (25). Its small size seems to us to be against its having been used as a mirror, and at the Chinese frontier we must add to this reason the important fact that there are sometimes drawings and inscriptions on both sides of the disk. Tallgren (26) and Merhart (27) prefer to consider this object a belt-ornament rather than a mirror. The latter use was perhaps the original one. It is interesting to turn here to a Chinese text, quoted by Hirth, according to which it is claimed that already in the VII century B.C. there were mirrors used as belt-ornaments (28). It has never been possible, however, to find a Chou mirror. It seems likely that this object was one of the many forms later borrowed from the Steppes.

At Minussinsk, besides the figure of a naturalistic animal placed on the edge in the guise of a handle, one finds a pair of animal-heads above their prey (29). This type, according to Teplouchoff, ends with the I century A.D. (Plate III, line IV, 3, no. 98); according to Tallgren, with the V century A.D. (30), which is certainly more exact. A date later than Han is therefore necessary for the same type at the Chinese frontier. Andersson has supplied us with the first example from this region (31).

The disk from the north of China belonging to the Guimet Museum (Plate XLI nos. 1 & 2) at once offers a difficulty with the question of what the animal on the handle can be. It seems fairly well modeled. The same animal, less clearly drawn, is often found at Minussinsk placed on the tops of daggers. Because of the head which is bent down, Merhart has called it the "browsing animal" (32). But the strong claws and the fangs do not give the impression of an inoffensive beast. I consider it to be a wolf, an animal which we have encountered several times (cf. Plate XV no. 8). When the head is raised, as on a standard-top in the Tchita Museum (unpublished), it is clearly some wild species. It seems possible to me that in the region of Lake Baikal, still but little excavated, this motive may exist in a perfected style, while at Minussinsk it only happens to be found in a degenerated form. As we pointed out in Chapter VI, it is not surprising to find the wolf an important animal in this art. In myths which deal with the origin of the Turks, and even of the Mongols, it plays a leading role. The Yuan emperors still remembered their ancestor, the "grey wolf" (33).

Both sides of this disk are decorated. Let us first examine the back (Plate XLI no. 2). It has, etched on the surface, a resting stag, upside down, the proportions of which are not very clear. The body is decorated with large spirals, a sign of a relatively late period (cf. the dog, Plate XI no. 11). The other side holds an inscription in Si-hia characters. That a disk should be used for the purpose of writing is not surprising. Chinese mirrors with inscriptions in ancient Turkish have been observed a number of times in northern Asia (34). It is interesting that Minns believes that the Si-hia inscriptions on this object and on the