

CHAPTER X

OBJECTS DERIVED FROM CHINA

This chapter-heading is justified when we deal with objects from the point of view of use. It has, however, a provisory character since some day certain objects may be found in Siberia, the inventory of which is far from having been sufficiently studied.

1) The handles of horizontal poles.

An explanation of the probable use of Plate XLII nos. 2 & 3 is reached by means of the decoration. The object is a combination of horizontal pole and animal representation that cannot be understood when upright. Since the work of Steppe artists was always more or less in keeping with nature, a vertical position, that is, one that is unnatural, is impossible. The size of this piece justifies us perhaps in considering it a shaft-end. I have published the Chinese model of this type elsewhere (1). But this object also goes back alternatively to the ancient Near East. It is only necessary to remember a bas-relief of the VIII century B.C. from the Palace of Sargon (Louvre, Paris). Two eunuchs are bearing a light chair, the shaft of which not only slightly curves and ends with an animal-head, but has also below the head, a loop with a pompon attached (2).

China of the Han period also knew the S-shaped shaft-end (3). That of Plate XLII nos. 2 & 3 is slightly wider at the end and considerably more important than in Chinese examples. But the animal-head is not at all Chinese. Below the neck is the loop common to Chinese shaft-ends and to the dagger handles of Minussinsk and of the northern Chinese frontier (cf. Plate XXXVI). It represents an ibex with curled horns. The chief characteristic of all local manifestations in the Eurasiatic Steppes, from the Scythians down to Minussinsk, is the combination of naturalistic and stylised elements. Even in a region where naturalism predominated as in the Jenissei valley, conventional elements were nevertheless added, as for example the formation of the eyes (Plate V, no. 2). On the shaft-end of Plate XLII nos. 2 & 3 only the horns appear stylised. They are reminiscent of those which we saw on knives and daggers (Plate XXXVI). But the head reproduces only real elements. The surface is subtly and delicately modeled