

CHAPTER XI

LATE OBJECTS FROM THE STEPPES

1) The Persian circle.

Up to the present, we have spoken of the utilizations belonging to the Steppe civilizations of which we have found repetitions at the Chinese frontier in periods of which there was usually no question in the country of their creation. Besides these survivals there are objects which were created far from our region at a later period, but which nevertheless were repeated there. This is not at all surprising since trade, very active in the II millennium, particularly under the Yüans, brought many objects of western make to the north and to the east. The Seldchuk importations into Siberia are represented by one of the best known and most widespread of objects, the mirror with the winged sphinxes (Plate XLIII no. 3), of which we shall speak again later on. On the other hand no attention will be paid to the connection between Persian and Chinese art at an earlier period. Specimens of these mirrors have been found all over southern and eastern Russia. Our reproduction is of one that was found even at Minussinsk and is not the only imported example from that Seldchuk region. The sure date of XI-XIII centuries (1) for this type of mirror proves that in Siberia, even at so late a date, the dead carried objects of artistic value with them to the tomb. Of another example of Persian and Chinese art, we can say with assurance, because of its frequency, that it was imitated in the circle of the Steppes and finally at the Chinese frontier. This is the lock in animal form. It is known in the region of the Volga (2). Tallgren finds it in the inventory of the Bolgary civilization (1000-1500), complete with its iron key (3). Horses, rams, cows, and dogs are the animals represented. In order to understand the working of these locks, one must refer to Tallgren's drawing (4). The Finnish scholar considers that this object is characteristic of the barbarian world. During its popularity, the northern Chinese frontier also belonged to the domain of its distribution (Plate XLIII no. 4). A lock from Bolgary is also decorated with dots surrounded by circles. The conformity between examples from the west and the extreme east is therefore proved. In every region the date corresponds with that of Bolgary.