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# CHINESE CONTACT WITH LURISTAN BRONZES

BY W. PERCEVAL YETTS



ANY writings have appeared on the Luristan bronzes; but, so far as I know, in none has the remark been made that possibly these bronzes reached China, and influenced the art of the Han period. The following note summarizes a theory which I discussed in lectures at the time of the Persian Exhibition and later in Sweden. At the Östasiatiska Samlingarna in Stockholm, unexpectedly strong support for the theory was found among the amazingly significant collection of small bronzes which is one of the chief glories of the Museum. Three of the more striking examples are here reproduced (C, D and E), with the kind permission of Professor J. G. Andersson who, aided by Mr. O. Karlbeck, has gathered together an unrivalled mass of material in order to demonstrate the evolution of early Chinese design.

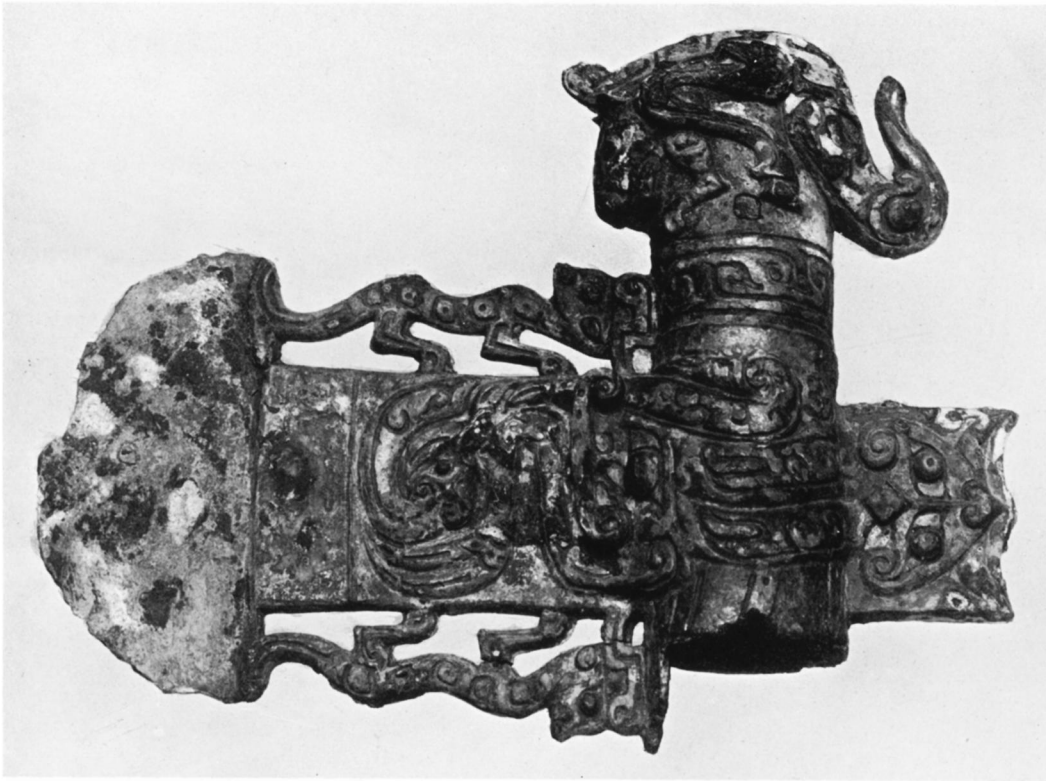
Several parallels may be drawn between the Luristan bronzes and products of the Han period; but here the issue is limited to one prominent feature which they have in common—the attenuate feline. This animal occurs commonly in confronted pairs; the Luristan example [PLATE B], from the collection of Professor C. G. Seligman, serves as the representative of a numerous type. Strikingly like it is the bronze object B which, together with C and E, was found in the Ordos region, corresponding to part of the northern frontier of the Han empire. These three belong to a diverse and plentiful class, which includes explained objects as horse trappings and adjuncts to human attire. Among them are many which undoubtedly served as buckles and ornaments to straps or other equipment. For instance, C has a stud on the reverse, between the animals' heads; and E is an obvious buckle, of which the tongue is a bird's head, projecting from the lower bar. The jingle, attached to the curve of C, is probably a Chinese invention, though it occurs among Siberian remains in somewhat atrophied form. The falcon-like head is common to archaic Chinese and "Scytho-Siberian" art; while the mask with long ears may be explained as the familiar onager of the latter school.

For the present purpose, interest in the ceremonial axe-head (A) is centred on a pair of the same attenuate and confronted felines. This piece, from the collection of Mr. Oscar Raphael, merits a fuller examination than can be given here, because it combines certain mannerisms and motives of archaic Chinese tradition with features which, so far as our knowledge goes, characterized Han design. Note must, however, be made of the forms at the top of the tubular

haft, which, by the way, still retains a remnant of the wood, preserved by corrosion products. On the right is a semi-realistic elephant's head with tusks and upturned trunk; on the left are the semi-realistic head and forequarters of a tiger. In the middle, where elephant and tiger merge, is an equine leg form, ending below in a hoof, viewed from the side, and above is another hoof, viewed from underneath. This and other detached animal elements of the decoration are reminiscent of "Scythian" practice. If the foregoing interpretation of the medley be true, and supposing that the felines originated from Luristan, we may regard the axe-head as a museum in itself of diverse influences, a veritable epitome of the vicissitudes through which Chinese art passed about the second century B.C.

A factor essential to the theory which links China with Luristan, is the quest of the superior horse, and it happened thus. Several Han Emperors had suffered humiliating invasions by the Hsiung-nu, their nomadic neighbours on the north. The menace became so threatening that the Emperor Wu sought to enlist foreign help against the foe. With that aim he sent in 138 B.C. a minor official, named Chang Ch'ien, as envoy to the Yüeh-chih, a tribe who themselves had received many injuries from the Hsiung-nu. The plan failed, because, unbeknown to the Chinese, the Yüeh-chih had migrated westwards, and, having settled in a land of plenty north of the Oxus, had lost desire for revenge. But when he returned, after twelve years, Chang Ch'ien brought back the first news of Persia, as well as of other countries, and became a national hero. In Ferghana he had seen "horses which sweat blood and belong to the breed of *t'ien-ma*, the celestial horse." The Emperor was seized with longing to possess some of these superior horses, no doubt chiefly because of army needs. By mounting his cavalry on horses larger and fleetier than the small Mongolian breed, which was the only kind then known in the Far East, he hoped to beat the nomads at their own tactics. From the Wu-sun, a people living near Lake Issyk-kul, he received in 115 B.C. several dozen horses in return for gifts. Eight years later, a thousand horses arrived from the same source, on the marriage of a Chinese princess with the Wu-sun chief.

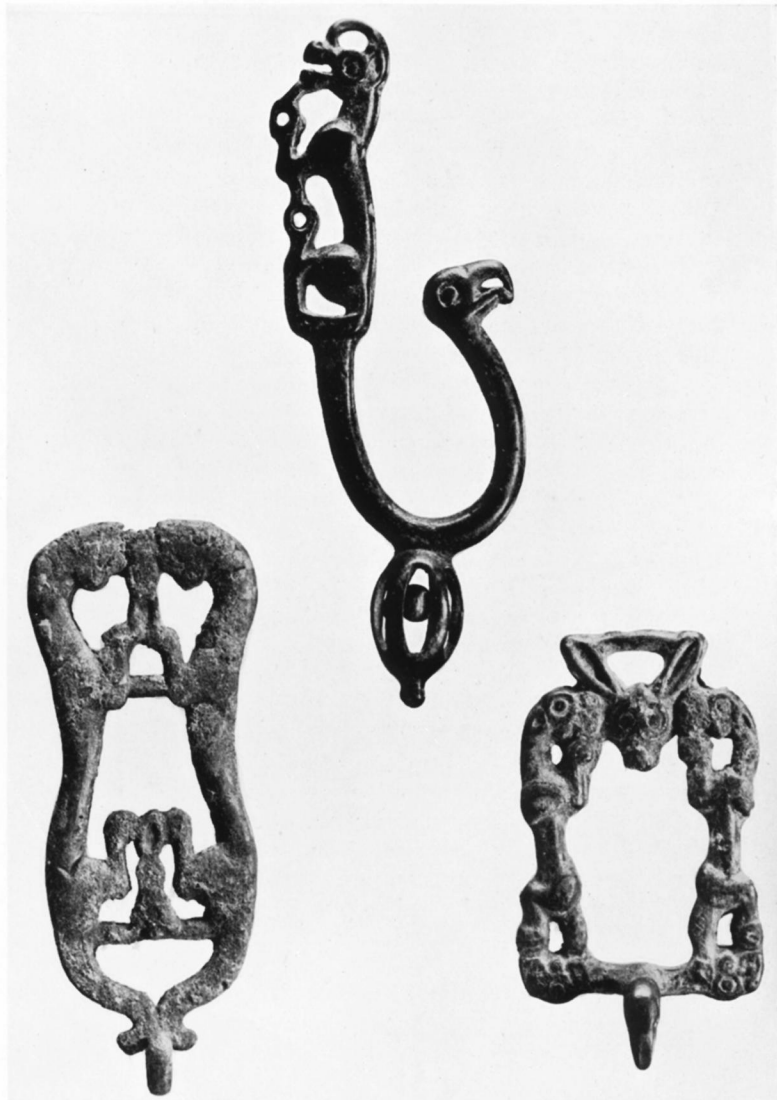
But the Emperor, not to be put off with an inferior substitute, still coveted the blood-sweating steeds of Ferghana. His agents reported that the best to be obtained there, called after a certain "City of Erh-shih," were kept out of sight. Accordingly in 106 B.C.



A—Chinese ceremonial axe-head of bronze. Former Han. Width, 14.6 cm. (Mr. O. Raphael)



B—



—C

—D, E

B—Luristan bronze of unknown date and purpose. Height, 14.8 cm. (Prof. C. G. Seligman). C—Northern Chinese bronze object. Han. Height, 10.3 cm. D and E—Northern Chinese bronze buckles. Han. Height, 8.5 and 6.5 cm., respectively (Ostasiatiska Samlingarna, Stockholm)

he sent a mission with 1,000 pieces of gold, and a golden model of a horse, in order to ask the King of Ferghana to satisfy his desire. The request was refused, and the envoys, in a rage, smashed the golden horse and started back home. The notables of Ferghana were also incensed at being thus treated with contumely, and so they had the envoys intercepted and killed on the frontier. A Chinese expedition of 6,000 cavalry and several hundred thousand foot was the sequel. Two years later it came back defeated and decimated. Instead of abandoning the quest of the superior horse, as some of his ministers advised, the Emperor insisted on another and larger expedition, which, in 101 B.C., returned victorious, but with heavy loss. The two campaigns against Ferghana, lasting four years, cost China several hundred thousand lives and a vast expenditure of material. The gain was not merely a score or two of superior horses and a breeding stock of lesser quality. Chinese prestige had been firmly established all along the great highway to the West, and the road became free to Chinese commerce.

Now, these superior blood-sweating horses may reasonably be identified with the famous Nisæan breed of classical lore. The evidence is plentiful that the Nisæan was generally esteemed the largest and best in Western Asia;<sup>1</sup> though I cannot find mention that it was credited with sweating blood—a peculiarity sometimes attributed to the Hungarian. Nearly forty years ago, Terrien de Lacouperie connected the afore-mentioned "City of Erh-shih" with the Nisæan tradition.<sup>2</sup> Hirth follows him in a long note to his translation<sup>3</sup> of Chang Ch'ien's biography in Chapter cxxiii of the

<sup>1</sup> W. Ridgeway, "The Origin and Influence of the Thoroughbred Horse" (Cambridge: 1905), pp. 186 *seq.*

<sup>2</sup> "Western Origin of the Early Chinese Civilization" (London: 1894), pp. 220, 224.

<sup>3</sup> "Journal of the American Oriental Society," XXXVII (1917), pp. 89-152.

## TWO EXHIBITIONS OF EARLY GERMAN PAINTING BY HANS TIETZE

**T**HIS summer the two cities which were rivals for the leadership of Upper German art at the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance, each give a survey of part of their artistic past. In connexion with the great Dürer exhibition arranged three years ago, Nuremberg shows her school of painting between 1350 and 1450; Augsburg celebrates the 400th anniversary of the death of Hans Burgkmair, the sympathetic contemporary of Dürer. To some extent the exhibitions are complementary to one another; one contains Gothic,

"Shih chi," which contains the historical data outlined above. The ancient sound of the two syllables, now pronounced in Peking as *Erh-shih*; was probably somewhat like "Nish." The Greek *Nῆσαία* may well have been the transliteration of some Persian, Parthian or Soghdian proper name like "Nish." As Hirth remarks, the name may have come to be associated with the best in the horse-breeding world. "Tattersall's" is perhaps a parallel. Once the name of a famous horse-market in London, it is now current all over the world as a general designation for concerns to do with horses.

The next step in the argument is to identify the home of the classic steeds with the place where the Luristan bronzes are found. Herodotus (vii, 40) located it on "a large plain in Medic territory," which Rawlinson recognized "in the rich and extensive grazing grounds of Khava and Alishtar." The latter lie in the Persian province of Luristan, and are sites of the recent bronze finds. Professor V. Minorsky discussed the subject at the Congress on Persian art last January; and here it must suffice to state that there is a strong presumption in favour of the identification.

The final argument for Chinese contact with Luristan bronzes is, of course, the plausible surmise that the superior horses captured in Ferghana were accompanied with the trappings peculiar to their place of origin. It is a theme which offers scope for much fuller treatment than is possible in a brief note. One illuminating fact to be stressed would be the objective evidence provided by Chinese tomb figures of superior horses at later dates. Many display the retention of Persian elements in their harness. Perhaps Han parallels may come to light; but at all events we see unquestionable similarities between isolated pieces from Luristan and China, as here represented.

the other Renaissance art; the latter is devoted to an interesting and individual, though not outstanding, artist, the former differentiates the phases of a hundred years' anonymous evolution. Both are distinguished by the clearness of their programme and the completeness of their material; for Nuremberg Dr. Fries, assistant at the Germanic Museum, has compiled an excellent catalogue, for Augsburg Dr. Feuchtmayr has done even more, publishing a *catalogue raisonné* of Burgkmair's complete pictorial work, a well-illustrated book the importance of which will outlast the exhibition.