

*Emma C. Bunker, C. Bruce Chatwin, Ann R. Farkas: "Animal Style". Art from East to West. The Asia Society Inc., New York, 1970. 186 pages, 145 pl., 27 fig.*

This book is a catalogue of an exhibition which was presented in three American cities (New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco) during 1970. Each object is shown in a plate as well as parallels or possible antecedents. There is a description and a short commentary including references to previous publications. Introductory chapters present the cultural background and the special problems of the regional groups.

Ann R. Farkas, who writes about the objects from Anatolia, Iran and Mesopotamia, North Caucasus and Transcaucasia, and finally the Pontic region, has mastered her task with eloquence and elegance. She is perfectly up to date in respect to the Western and the Soviet publications, and always aware of the central problem, namely the connections between the Near East and the divergent artistic trends in the steppes before the consolidation of the Scythian Animal style. Regarding the two quadratic belt plates in openwork (No. 32) it may be mentioned that in the mean time B. V. Techov has collected all relevant data in a short article published in *SA*, 1969, no. 4.

The next chapter, Central Asia and the Altai, is not

based on a great number of exposed objects, since the exhibition lacked loans from Soviet collections. The text written by Emma C. Bunker is in fact a concise evaluation of the present state of knowledge. An interesting question arises by her dating of a plaque and harness trappings from the Altai region in the 6th and 5th centuries B.C. (Nos. 41, 42). If this is correct, then it would be of considerable consequence for the chronological position of similar Ordos bronzes which otherwise would be attributed to a much later period. It may be added that she is absolutely right in comparing the harness ornament no. 39 to the hilt of a dagger found in the Pamirs (and not in the Kazakhstan steppe region as mentioned p. 69. The text to fig. 8 however is correct). Even nearer are bronze ibex sculptures found in Tasmola V kurgan 2. The introduction to the group of objects from the Ananino culture in Eastern Russia and the Tagar culture in the Minussinsk basin was written by C. Bruce Chatwin. It may be mentioned that the "bronze and iron" dagger (No. 52) is depicted on the left and not on the right side.

Under the heading "China" there is a variety of objects which may be relevant for the evaluation of animal motifs in the steppes in some respects. The text written by Bunker gives a useful evaluation of recent studies by Dewall, Haskins, Weber and Frisch. Bunker is also the author of the next chapter, rather vaguely titled "Animal Style Art of the Far East" and in fact devoted to the so-called Ordos bronzes. It contains several important observations. It may be mentioned that the pendants Catalogue nos. 85 and 92 may be compared to a specimen found at Tapchar in Transbaikalia (N. N. Dikov: *Bronzovyy vek Zabajkal'ja*, Ulan-Ude 1968, Pl. XVI/4). The same mysterious object is shown hanging from the belt on stag-stones in Mongolia (V. V. Volkov: *Bronzovyy i rannyy zheleznyy vek Severnoj Mongolii*, Ulan Bator 1967, fig. 22/3, 23/1). Perhaps those things were symbols of rank and power derived from the "bow-shaped ornaments" which were actually used as implements during a much earlier period, in Shang time China.

Recent Soviet excavations (which could not yet be taken into consideration by Bunker) give us a clearer dating and a fuller understanding for several types of Ordos bronzes, e. g., the specimens nos. 114, 115, and 119. Such rectangular plaques with animals in combat were found in situ in a rich burial evidently of a female. They were used for closing the outer, visible girdle, since the waistband below had a buckle with

movable tongue. The same combination of these two systems occurs at Tulhar (Tadžikistan) in a necropolis rather exactly dated—by coins—to the end of the 2nd century B.C. Davydova dates the specimens of Ivolga to the 2nd century B.C. and proposes to explain them as symbols of rank (A. V. Davydova in *Sovietskaya etnografiya* 1971, no. 1, a preliminary report in *Acta Archaeologica*, Budapest 1968).

Two objects from Ipiutak form part of the exhibition. One of them has a tempting similarity to a bronze finial from Mongolia. The short text is written by Chatwin.

Then we are back in Iron Age Europe to be confronted by a rather mixed assemblage of bronze and silver objects. The bulk is coined by actual Scythian affinities. The text is written by Bunker, evidently not on a familiar ground here. I doubt whether the Roman legions by all means can be credited for the destruction of the Sarmatian tribes "in the 5th century A.D." At that late period many of those tribes were already absorbed by their Germanic and Hunnic neighbors, some moving towards the West, others toward the Caucasus. Whether they invented the metal stirrup is a problem too. Some authors believe that this part of the saddlery is derived from the Far East.

As in so many popular books splendid works of art from the "Migrations period in Europe" were also added to this stock. Bunker gives a short introduction. As we learn by the foreword the exhibition originally was to be called "The Animal Style in Nomadic Asia", because it was intended to show the "Animal Style" "as a quasi-international manner of decoration which flourished from China to Ireland during the Iron Age and, later, in the barbarian art of the Migrations period". But not even this wide delimitation was kept up—and therefore we cannot avoid some sceptical remarks.

I think the term "Animal Style" has always been a concession to museum officials and private collectors so as to bring objects of different origin, some related in fact, others with only superficial similarities, under a general and highly impressive heading.

Bunker emphasizes in a general survey called "The Animal Style" and illustrated by a picture of the Wên Ch'i Scroll (painted on silk, not on paper, as Mrs. Bunker informed me) that Rostvtzeff popularized this rather ambiguous term. He did so when he was an emigrant and had to regard the interested layman and the owners of the treasures he published and explained so splendidly.

In fact there is no general "style" of this kind. There is a variety of decorative systems using theriomorph motifs, some closely related. One of those related groups dominates during the time and in the area of the early nomads. Since the excavations in the High Altai we know that it did not encompass the whole artistic production of the peoples involved. For textiles other standards were relevant. So the exhibition is based on a doubtful presumption permitting to bring together a magnificent but rather disparate material. (The inclusion of an object belonging to the Shih-chai-shan complex was also called in question during the last Orientalist Congress by Sir Basil Gray.)

Chatwin has the most difficult task in this book. He has had to give us justification of the decision to arrange such a bold exhibition. As an anthropologist he does his best. He states that there is a nomadic alternative to the urban civilisations. Nomadic art representing this alternative "tends to be portable, asymmetric, discordant, restless, incorporeal and intuitive". The background is the spiritual system of the nomads. It is perfectly expressed in a special kind of "religious ideology" described as shamanism. In shamanism animals play a prominent roll. If the artistic tendencies just mentioned are applied to their reproduction, the rise of the Animal Style is the consequence.

This assumption however fails to explain the fact that so many nomads of later periods and so many nomadic hunters of the North practising shamanism have no animal style of their own.

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