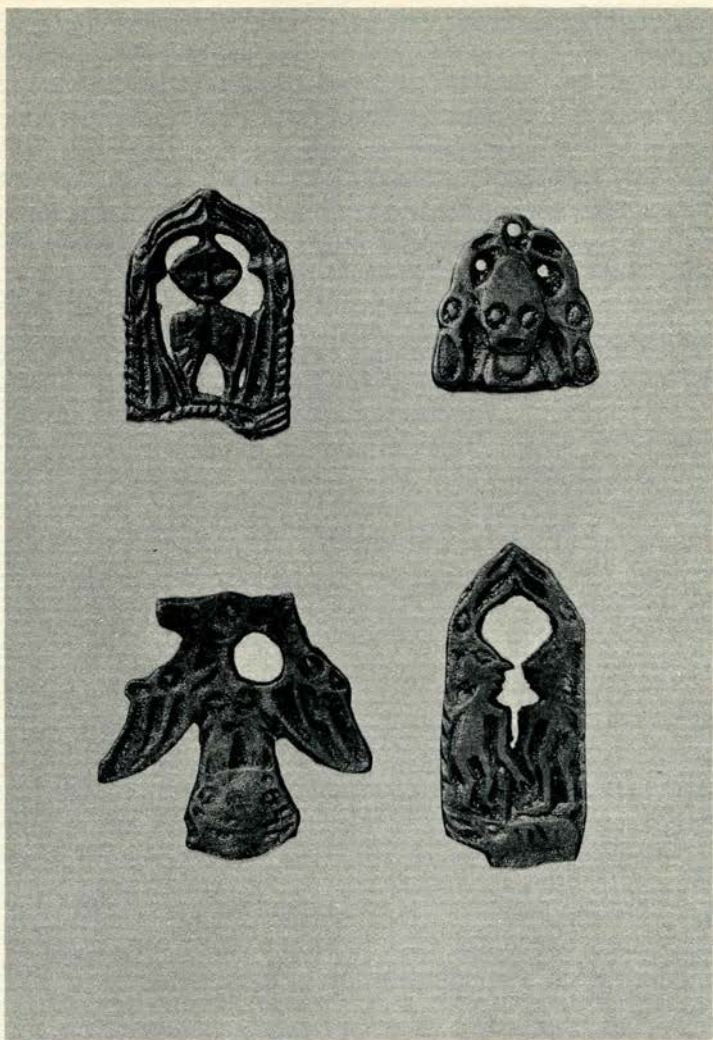


BRONZE BIRD FIGURES FROM THE PERM REGION OF RUSSIA



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of Cyprian earrings made in this period. They consist of circlets of gold, plain at the tip, twisted at the central part, and terminating in bulls' heads. The small end passes through a loop below the head, and a foliate collar makes a graceful transition from the spiral wire to the neck of the animal. The eyes, now missing, were probably rendered in enamel. Curly forelocks and shaggy hairs below the ears give a naturalistic touch but the modelling is restrained and formalized enough to suggest a date slightly anterior to the end of the fifth century A. D.

E. H. D.

*Bronze Bird Figures
from Russia*

AMONG the numerous examples of the bronze work from Russia and Siberia recently acquired by the Museum through exchanges with Soviet Museums, is a small but representative collection of so-called Perm bird figures. The region of Perm is situated in the northeastern corner of European Russia, separated from Siberia by the Ural Mountains. It is well known through the splendid examples of Sasanian silver work, Græco-Roman platters, pottery, coins and other objects which have been found there and which show the extensive commercial relations at one time carried on with far away countries by the people of this region.

Besides the imported articles referred to, the Perm region abounds in the remains of native civilizations, with numerous examples of their crafts. The bronze figures of birds, animals, and mythological beings, regardless of their original derivations, were undoubtedly manufactured on the spot by native artists.

Our collection consists of nineteen specimens; of these the most characteristic are represented on Plates IV and V. All of them are cast of bronze varying in the degree of the alloy and, therefore, in the color and texture of the metal. Outside of their artistic value, their specific purpose and meaning is of considerable interest.

The figure of a bird used as a decorative as well as a symbolical element is found to be spread all over the world. Such are the bird attributes of the gods of Egypt, Chaldea and Asia Minor, the 'Haruda' of India, the ancient representation of Kronos in Greece, the bird-creator of the world in Australia, the sacred birds of Mexico and Guatemala, the 'Thunder Bird' of the American Indians, and so forth. However widespread this motive is all over the world, there are certain characteristics of Perm birds which seem to distinguish them in style and meaning from others.

In the majority of cases the Perm bird is represented with its wings wide-spread, its head either in profile or *en face*, the whole outline bearing a strange resemblance to the conventional representations of the Thunder Bird of our American Indians. Often on the breast of the bird is a face, signifying the supernatural quality of the bird. In further development this anthropomorphic feature becomes so dominant as to transform the whole figure into that of a man with wings, claws, feathers, and other bird attributes.

As is often the case, the only means of interpretation of these archæological objects is through a comparison with ethnographical data, to which we must now turn for help. The presence of the cult of the bird among the native Siberians gives us enough reason for believing that our bird figures have symbolical and religious meaning. A further analogy is suggested by the widespread belief among the American Indians that thunder is produced by a mythical being in the shape of a great bird which claps its wings. It is often described as having a double or quadruple personality (Two Brothers or Four Brothers) fighting with some underground or aquatic monster, killing and devouring it.

When we compare the conventional representation of the Thunder Bird with the Permian, the general similarity of the design, in spite of the difference of technique, is quite striking. An additional feature suggesting a possible connection is provided

by the figure of a monster below the bird on Permian figures, graphically depicting the eternal feud between the Thunder Bird and the monster. This similarity is further augmented by the fact that the Permian artists often represented the bird with two or four heads (or two or four anthropomorphic figures) quite in accordance with the conception of Two or Four Brothers of the American Indian mythology.

The important rôle which the eagle, hawk, and other species of birds play in the general mythology of the native Siberians, and especially in the shamanistic Pantheon, seems to suggest the possibility of the hypothesis that the basic conception of the Thunder Bird may be of Old World origin, brought by the first settlers via Siberia to the New World, where it has undergone considerable stylistic and ceremonial modification.

The composition of two animals in combat may be one of the variations of the so-called animal style which, it is supposed, has developed later in the Old World, and, consequently would be found to be absent in the New World. It is of course too premature to consider this problem solved. The considerations outlined above should be regarded as affording a working hypothesis worthy of further investigation.

E. C.

*An Early Chinese
Sculpture*

DECORATED stone pedestals for the support of Buddhist statues are among the best of the early sculptures of China. The Museum has for some years owned two of the most famous of these pedestals and has recently come into possession, through the Randal Morgan Fund, of a third one, a stone which is already known to many lovers of Chinese art through the rubbings which have been taken from it. This new pedestal [Plates VI, VII and VIII] is a rather simple oblong block of limestone with a slot-like socket