

SOME CLUES OF THE HELLENISTIC WORLD
AND THE ROMAN EAST HIDDEN IN CHINA'S
*EARLY FOUR HISTORICAL BOOKS**

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The contacts between China and the Hellenistic world may trace back to the establishment of the Silk Road. From the Chinese diplomat Zhang Qian (2nd century BC) onwards, many Chinese and foreign envoys, merchants, and even monks to and fro between Central China and the Western Regions (Xiyu, 西域) as far as the Mediterranean and India, brought information of Roman and Hellenistic Civilization into China. Reflections of messages and oral reports are to be found in the early Chinese official historical books. Although the records about them are sometimes confused, ambiguous, or even anachronistic, they actually provide first-hand information about the Western Regions where Greek and Roman culture once prevailed. This article will focus on the records about the Western Regions in the so-called Early Four Historical Books (前四史) and try to discern the clues hidden in them which contain the information of Hellenistic and Roman world and the courses and the way by which this kind of information was brought into China and eventually mingled with the main stream of Chinese historical and cultural tradition.

Introduction

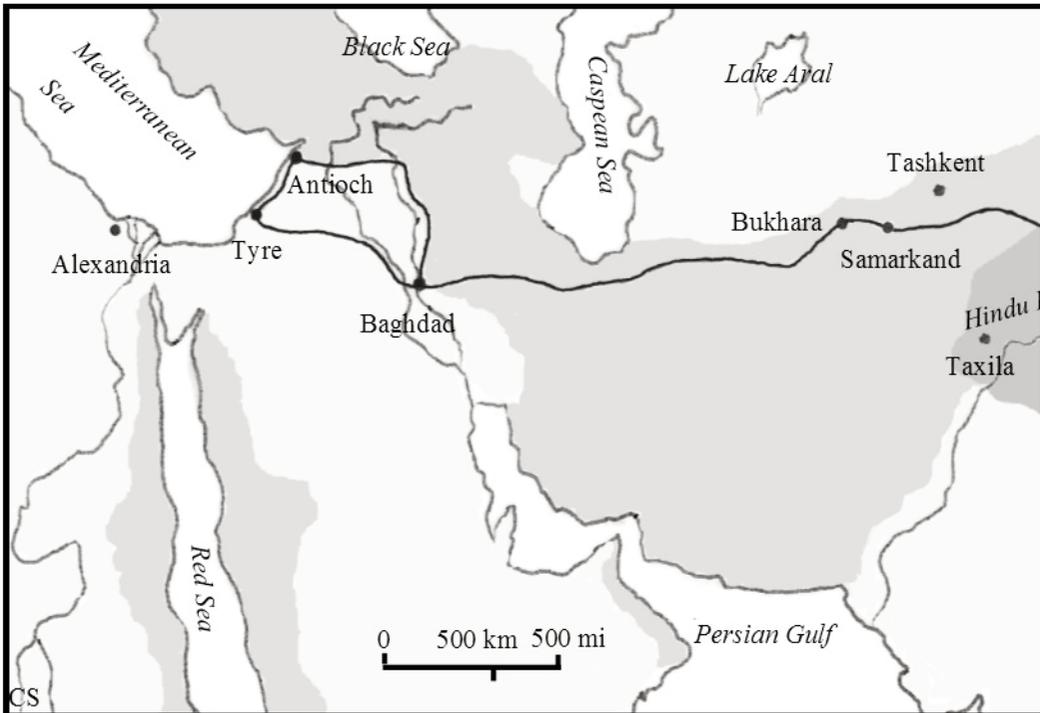
The so-called “*Early Four Historical Books*” consist of *Shiji* (史記) by Sima Qian (司馬遷), *Hanshu* (漢書) by Ban Gu (班固), *Houhanshu* (後漢書) by Fa Ye (範曄), and *Sanguozhi* (三國志) by Chen Shou (陳壽). One particular chapter in Sima Qian’s work is devoted to the introduction of historical events and countries, peoples, and kingdoms in the Western Regions, i.e. the areas from the west of China to the Mediterranean. From Sima Qian onwards, the inclusion of one or more chapters focusing on the affairs of the Western Region in Chinese formal historical books became standard. The reasons for this are as follows: on the one hand, there had been a continuous link between Central China and the Western Regions, regardless of changes in the political situations

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in both China and in the local regions, and on the other hand, Chinese knowledge of the Western Regions increasingly grew as time went by. The periods of the former and later Han dynasties and the Three Kingdoms largely coincide with the Hellenistic period and the ages of the empires of Kushan, Parthia, and Rome that coexisted from the first century AD onwards. These three empires occupied the lands of the former Hellenistic kingdoms and became the natural successors of Hellenistic Civilization. The Silk Road covered all the mentioned areas. The chapters about the Western Regions in the “*Early Four Historical books*” most probably contained much useful information about Hellenistic and Roman Civilizations and could provide some clues about the exchanges of all kinds between China and other civilizations.

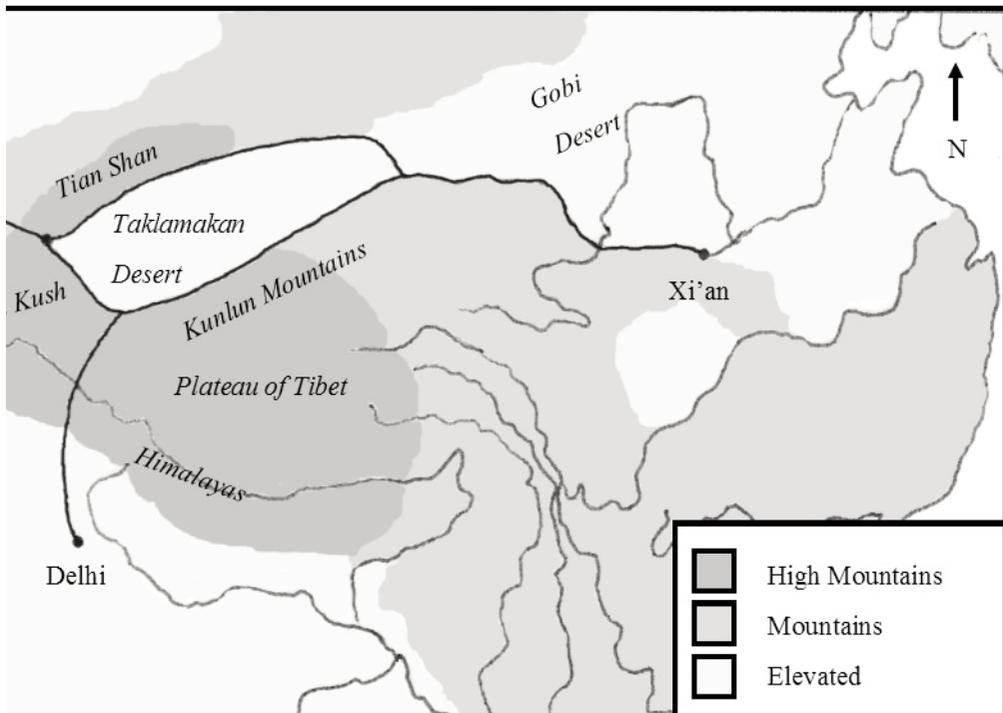
The description of Greco-Bactria and philhellenic Parthia in “Dayuan Liezhuan” in *Shiji* (“大宛列傳 Collective Biographies of Dayuan” in the *Records of the Grand Scribe*)

All records about the Western Regions beyond Congling (蔥嶺, Onion Range, the Pamir Mountains) in the later three books of the “*Early Four Historical Books*” are based on the “*Collective Biographies of Dayuan*” in *Shiji*. That chapter contains a report to the Emperor Hanwu Di (漢武帝, ruling 141-87 BC) from Zhang Qian (張騫), an envoy to unite the Dayuezhi (大月氏), a nomad



people from today's Gansu province of China, against the Xiongnu (匈奴), a nomadic people living on the steppes of North and Northwest-China. Although his mission failed, he brought back home first-hand information about the Western Regions. The first country he visited after he escaped from the Xiongnu was Dayuan (大宛). From there, he was led to Kangju (康居) by a guide from Dayuan, whereafter he arrived in Dayuezhi. By that time Dayuezhi had subdued Daxia and settled in the North of Amu River. Daxia, according to Zhang Qian in his report, was reduced to a dependent state South of the Amus under the rule of Dayuezhi (Sima 1959, 3157-3158). Dayuan is generally identified with the area of Fergana, Kangju with the Valley of the Zarafshan River and the land at two sides of the Syr River. If we accept this geographical and political situation, the areas within Bactria and Sogdiana passed along by Zhang Qian, were conquered and ruled by Alexander, the Seleucid kingdom and the Greco-Bactrian kingdom successively. Zhang Qian also heard of one large country, Anxi (安息), to the East of Dayuezhi, which has been identified with Parthia. The latter also had been a province of the Empire of Alexander and, thereafter, the Seleucid kingdom. Almost in the same time (in the middle of the third century BC) both Bactria and Parthia became independent from the Seleucid kingdom. It must be

Fig. 1. Silk route. Drawing: Clio Stronk.



noticed, however, that the founders of the Parthian kingdom were not Greeks but Parthians. Parthia's rulers were conscious of Hellenistic culture and called themselves "the lovers of Greeks or Greek culture" (Philhellenes)¹. Zhang Qian ignorantly entered this world, which was new for him. What Zhang Qian saw and heard in the Western Regions might have been the remains of Hellenistic civilization².

Above all, Zhang Qian seems to have been surprised about the enormous amount of towns and cities in Dayuan, Bactria, and Anxi. There were more than seventy walled towns and cities both large and small in Dayuan, and several hundreds in Anxi, and some in Bactria (Sima 1959, 3160; 3162; 3164). The records have been confirmed by classical authors and by modern archaeological discoveries. Alexander the Great and his successor Seleucus I had founded many Greek cities, colonies or settlements, and garrisons in Central Asia, India, and Western Asia, some of which would have been in Bactria³. According to Strabo, the Greco-Bactrian king Eucratides once ruled "a thousand cities"⁴. Although these records need to be further verified, especially the allegation of "the country of One thousand Cities" must be an exaggeration, some of them already existed and, by the time of Zhang Qian's arrival, became prosperous. Zhang Qian might have visited these cities, whether or not there were still Greek inhabitants in them. The best example as the site of a Greek city is Ai Khanum in Afghanistan (Bernard, 1982; cf. Yang 2007c). The site was located in the northeast of Afghanistan along the modern Amu River (ancient Oxus River). Greek theater, Corinthian and Ionian capitals, gymnasium, the sculptures of figures such as Heracles and Hermes, Greek inscriptions and traces of Greek writing, and Greek

¹ For details see Yang 2013.

² See my article (Yang 2007a) about information about Hellenistic culture brought to China by Zhang Qian; here, I will provide a brief summary of and some supplements to it.

³ For the cities that were attributed to Alexander the Great as a founder, see Plu. *Mor.* 328E, though Plutarch only mentioned the number ("more than seventy") of the all cities of Alexandria founded by Alexander among so-called "savage tribes"; Arr. *An.* 3.28.4 (one in Caucasus, here intending the Hindu Kush); 4.4.1 (one on the Tanais, here intending the Syr River, ancient Jaxartes); 5.19.4 (two on the Hydaspes, modern Jhelum River in Punjab); 6.15.2; Str. 11.11.4 (eight in Bactria and Sogdiana); Just. 12.5.12-13 (one on the Tanais, twelve in Bactria and Sogdiana); Plin. *Nat.* 6.18.47-49 (one in Margiane); Curt. 7.10.15-16 (six in Margiane). For those attributed to Seleucus I, see App. *Syr.* 9. 57 (fifty nine in the entire territory of Seleucid kingdom). For the detailed research on these cities, see Cohen 2013.

⁴ Str. 15.1.3; see also Just. 41.1.8. For the discussion of the "thousand cities", see Leriche 2007, 121-153. Although admitting that numerous military colonies or settlements in Bactria were actually established by Greeks in Bactria, he thinks that "the Greeks did not pursue a systematic policy of founding towns"; they "did not really found a major city except for Ai Khanoum"; "the creation of cities was only exceptional in Greek Bactria". His conclusion is that "'Bactria of a thousand cities' appears to be a phrase applicable not so much to the Hellenistic period but rather to the one which followed the departure of Greeks." Leriche's idea should certainly be taken into consideration, but it cannot be denied that precisely the cities and towns founded by Greeks in Bactria and India catalysed the developments of Kushan cities.

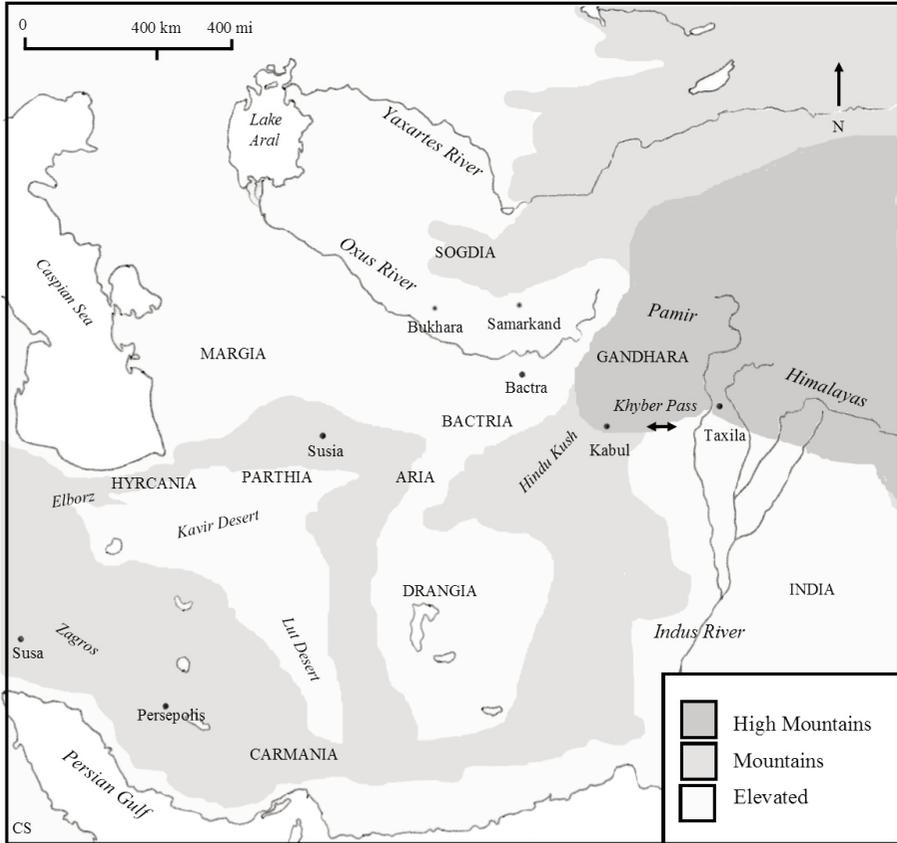


Fig. 2. Route from China to the south. Drawing: Clio Stronk.

coins have been unearthed since 1964, although large excavations had to stop in 1978. When Zhang Qian returned to China, he took the route along the Southern mountains of the Tarim basin (Sima 1959, 3159). This means he could probably pass by this Greek city on his way back to China, if he went eastwards up the Amu River and over the Pamir Mountains. Other sites such as Hekatompylos, Parthaunisa (Nisa), Merv, Marakanda (Samarkand), Alexandria Eschate (Khujand), have also been identified with their modern locations. In recent years the site of the Greek colony or garrison of Termez has been confirmed by the French archaeologists Pierre Leriche and his team (Leriche/Pidaev 2007, 209). Secondly, Zhang Qian provided information about the coins issued by the kings of Anxi (安息): “The coins of Parthia are made of silver. The face of the king appears on the coin. As soon as one king dies the coins are changed, on which appears the new face of his successor” (Sima 1959, 3162). Anxi is generally identified with Parthia, the kingdom being founded by Arsaces, the head of a

nomadic tribe (the Aparnians) (Str. 11.9.2). Anxi might be the transliteration of it in Chinese and was used as the name of his country. The kings of Parthia called themselves Philhellenes, as was stated above: they adopted Greek as one of the official languages and issued Greek-style coins with Greek legend and Greek deities on them. The kind of coins with the head or an image of a king was introduced by Alexander the Great. His successors, the Seleucid kings, continued this tradition (Yang 2007b). The description of Zhang Qian of Parthian coins indeed reflects the basic features of the Greek-style coins issued by Parthian kings⁵. Moreover Zhang Qian mentioned the habit of calligraphy in Anxi: “they write horizontally on leather” (Sima 1962, 3162). This record describes the wide use of one kind of parchment created and made in Pergamon, a Hellenistic kingdom in Asia Minor, and the way of writing in Greece and the Near East. Zhang Qian was surprised by these special materials and the system of writing, as it was totally different from the Chinese custom of writing on bamboo slips or pieces of silk, vertically.

Thirdly, for the first time in his life, Zhang Qian saw grapes and wine, which were abundantly present in these regions⁶, which might be associated with the Greeks who had been settled in Western and Central Asia. Although we are not sure that the Greeks following Alexander and his successors were the first to introduce the grape into Central Asia, it certainly were Greek settlers who introduced and transmitted the new viticulture. Both Strabo and Sima Qian (from Zhang Qian) mentioned a particular phenomenon in Central Asia: great amounts of wine could be stored and kept well for long (Str. 15. 3.11; 11.10.1-2; Sima Qian 1959, 3171). After Zhang Qian, the viticulture was imported into central China⁷. The pronunciation of the Chinese word “蒲陶” (*Pu Tao*, “grape”), first transliterated by Zhang Qian, possibly comes from the ancient Greek word “βότρυς, *botrus*”, which means a bunch of grapes⁸.

⁵ As to the basic features and evolution of Hellenistic coins, see Metcalf 2012, 173-294; Carradice/Price 1988, 104-136.

⁶ Sima 1959, 3171: “The wine is made of grapes in Dayuan and the lands around it. The rich can have the storage of wine as much as over ten thousands Dan (石) and its quality can be kept good as long as several decades”.

⁷ Sima 1959, 3171-3172: “The envoys of the Han emperors brought the seeds of the grapevine and the purple medic back to Central China. So the emperor Wudi (Tianzi 天子, the Son of Heaven) began to plant them in lands of great fertility. The number of Heavenly Horses (天馬) rose steadily and many foreign envoys came to the capital, so that the grapevine and the purple medic were planted over large areas near the palaces and hotels.”

⁸ Chavannes 1962, (Vol. 2, Chapter 8) 7. Pall Pelliot cites this explanation brought forward by Ritter, which was supported by Kingsmill and Hirth, while he himself was hesitant to accept it. See Pelliot 1962, (Vol. I, Chapter 5) 82-83. The American scholar B. Laufer does not agree either; see Laufer 1919, 226. However, his conclusion might be outdated because of new Greek evidence discovered in Ai Khnoum and the coins with Greek legends in Bactria and Parthia, which confirm the popularity of Greek in Central Asia in the Hellenistic Period and beyond. Zhang Qian surely heard the word and assured it as the name of vine, transliterating it as Chinese “蒲陶”.

Fourthly, the political situation in Daxia described by Zhang Qian⁹ corresponds with Strabo's report that the Greco-Bactrian kingdom was destroyed by four Scythian tribes from the north (Str. 11.8.2). One of these, the Tochari, should be identified with the so-called Dayuezhi in Chinese, because the lands of previous Bactria were generally called Tuhuoluo (吐火羅) in later Chinese records¹⁰. It happened that Dayuezhi people occupied Bactria after the Greeks there retreated into India, just before the middle of the second century BC¹¹. In the beginning of the first century AD, Kushan, one of the five parts of the Dayuezhi confederation, subdued the other four parts and established a vast empire of Kushan (Fan 1965, 2921). Since Bactria had been conquered by Dayuezhi from the northwest of China and then was ruled by Kushans until the third century AD, and since the Tochari were one of the four tribes that destroyed the kingdom of the Greeks in Bactria, it is probable that Dayuezhi is the Tochari mentioned by Strabo.

Fifthly, according to the record of Sima Qian, "from Dayuan to Anxi the customs were similar and people could understand each other although they spoke different dialects" (Sima 1962, 3174). That means that there was a common language in this area and *Koine* Greek could have played such a role. Greek inscriptions and remnants of papyri found at the site of Ai Khanum confirm that the Greek language was in general use¹².

⁹ "There is no powerful king in the country but the cities and towns always have their small chiefs. The soldiers there are weak and fearful to fight.When Dayuezhi immigrated westward, it defeated Daxia and subjected the people of Daxia under its rule" (Sima 1962, 3164).

¹⁰ The name of "Tuhuoluo" first appeared in *Weishu* 魏書 (The History of Wei Dynasty) as "Tuhuluo, 吐呼羅", one of the different transliterations for it in Chinese (see below). Later it was introduced in more detail in "*Suishu*, 隋書 *book of Sui*" (*the History of Sui Dynasty*). According to these two records, it should be located in the east of Bactria near the Pamirs (Wei 1974, 2277; Wei/Ling 1973, 1853-1854). However the most detailed and exact record about Tuhuoluo should be the chapter "the original lands of Duhuoluo (覩貨邏, another transliteration for it)" in *Datang xiyuji* 大唐西域記 (The Records on the Western Regions of the Great Tang Dynasty) by Buddhist Xuanzang (玄奘), who passed through this area himself in the first half of the seventh century when he went to India for learning the sutras of Buddhism. It says: "going through the Iron Gate one arrived in the original land of the country of Duhuoluo. It is over one thousand *li* from its south to north, and over three thousand *li* from its east to west. It links Pamirs in the east, Persia in the west, the Great Snow Mountains in the south, and the Iron Gate in the north. The Amu River flows westward in the middle of the country." (Ji 2000, 100). Obviously, Duhuoluo includes the lands at two sides of the Amu River, namely Bactria that was controlled for nearly four centuries by Dayuezhi and Kushans in succession.

¹¹ See Sima 1959, 3161-3162, 3164. The people to have destroyed Daxia are still disputed. It is possible that Sakas (Sai People, 塞人) in the valley of the Ili river, might have attacked Bactria when they were forced by the Dayuezhi tribe to immigrate southwards. However, they did not occupy the land there, but finally settled in the area of Seistan, named after them in the southeast of Iran and south of Afghanistan. Following them, Dayuezhi people arrived in Bactria and subdued it. (see Ban 1962, 3901)

¹² Bernard 1982, 148-159; Wiesehöfer 1996, 114; Holt 1999, 176; 2005, 160.

Finally, there is a story that the king of Dayuan (today's Fergana) was killed by aristocrats who colluded against him. This event might throw light on the tradition of Macedonian kingship that the power of kings was restricted by a council which consisted of aristocrats of various tribes. Perhaps this tradition was still preserved to some extent in the ruling rank of Dayuan in Sogdiana. As part of the Hellenistic world, Sogdiana had been controlled by the Greeks from the conquest of Central Asia by Alexander the Great in 330 BC to the coming of Dayuezhi almost in the middle of the second century. According to J. Lerner, the king of Bactria Euthydemus I once "governed Sogdiana either as a satrap under Diodotus II, or as an independent sovereign" and issued his own coins with the regal title and the bridled 'horned' horse (Lerner 1999, 84, pl. I-II). Chinese 宛 is pronounced as "Yuan". It happened that in modern Uzbek, Greeks are still being called "Yunon"¹³. There might be some similarity in pronunciations between "Yuan" and "Yunon". "Yunon" probably comes from Yavanas or Yona, which was the special name for those Indo-Greeks in Indian Language (Yang 2013)¹⁴. Dayuan should be regarded as a part of Greco-Bactria kingdom. If there remained some Hellenistic traces it would be understandable. In one word the travel of Zhang Qian in the Western Regions should be revalued and reviewed. He was the first known of Chinese people who entered the Hellenistic world.

Some clues for the Indo-Greek Kingdoms in "Xiyu Zhuan" in *Hanshu* ("西域傳 The Descriptions of the Western Regions" in *The Han Histories*)

Indo-Greek is a modern specific term coined by the historian A. Narain in his monumental book *The Indo-Greeks* published in 1957. It is generally used to describe the Greeks who stayed in India after Alexander, especially the Greeks who invaded India from Bactria from the early second century BC onward and remained there till their disappearance around the turn of the first century BC and AD. In their peak of power, they occupied all the northwest of India including Afghanistan south of the Hindu Kush, and even launched a long-distance raid eastward as far as the Pataliputra, the capital of the Sunga dynasties located in the valley of the Ganges River, in the reign of Menander I, the king of Indo-Greeks (ca. 155-135 BC). Later these Greeks split in many small kingdoms but most of them could not exist for long because of the inner struggles among them or the invasions or threats of newcomers from the north or west¹⁵. From the very early first century BC onwards, some Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian kingdoms appeared in the North-West of India. They subdued some of these small principalities of Indo-Greeks, and received their bilingual coins, Greek and

¹³ I found the evidence in a tri-language caption in the Ark Museum of Bukhara, September 21, 2014.

¹⁴ The standard name for Greeks in Achaemenid inscriptions is *Yauna*: both 'origins' appear very related to that word [JPS].

¹⁵ For the names and reigns of these Indo-Greek kings and their territories, see Bopearachchi 1991, 453.

Kharosthi (a kind of Indian script), and the Greek deities depicted on them. The recovery of the history of Indo-Greeks, Indo-Scythians, and Indo-Parthians mainly relies on the coins issued by them, and considerably less on literary evidence in India. Are there some clues to these Indo-Greek kingdoms and other Hellenistic information in Chinese documents which referred to contemporary India? *Hanshu*, the second of the former four historical Books, seems to throw light on this question to a certain extent.

Hanshu was compiled by Ban Gu (AD 32-92) in the Later Han Dynasty and recorded the history of the Former Han Dynasty up to AD 25. In the chapter of “Xiyu Zhuan”, the last recorded event took place in AD 23. Since the time of Zhang Qian and Sima Qian, more than hundred years had passed. The political situation and cultural environment in the Western Regions had changed considerably. Meanwhile, the Chinese had become more and more familiar with countries and peoples there. Some of them, which were only heard of in the time of Zhang Qian, had established diplomatic relations with the Han Empire. The Silk Road from China to the Mediterranean had emerged. With the extending and developing of it, more detailed foreign information was brought into China. Ban Gu’s source about the Western Regions was obviously from his brother Ban Chao (班超) who had been in charge of the affairs of the Western Regions for about 30 years (from AD 73-102, promoted to Protector Governor in AD 91). Two important countries were mentioned in *Hanshu*: Jibin (罽賓) and Wuyishanli (烏弋山離). Both appear to have some relations with the Indo-Greeks or their heritage.

According to the record of Ban Gu, Jibin was located in the North-West of India, possibly in Gandhara, where the Indo-Greeks used to stay. For Jibin, two issues should be investigated further. Firstly, its coins: “on the obverse is a man riding on a horse and on the reverse is a man’s face”. Undoubtedly, this kind of coins can be attributed to Greek-styled coinage, similar to that of the Indo-Scythian Kings because of the same figures on both obverse sides: a man on horseback. However, the figures on the reverse sides of the Indo-Scythian coins are in general Greek gods standing frontally or in profile¹⁶, which obviously differs from the coins of Jibin and the Indo-Scythians. Given that the compilation of *Hanshu* was largely completed by Ban Gu in the second half of the first century AD, there might be a possibility that Ban Gu had mixed up the coins of Jibin with those of the so-called “Nameless King”, Soter Megas of the Kushan Empire, for his coins are similar to the ones that Ban Gu described as the obverse being alike to the reverse. This hypothesis, however, is evidently anachronistic because the reign of this “Nameless King” was in the second half

¹⁶ This type of coins was issued by the Indo-Scythian kings Vonones (ca. 75-65 BC), Spalirises (c. 60-57 BC), Azes I (ca. 57-35 BC), Azelises (ca. 57-35), Azes II (ca. 35-12 BC), etc.: see Li 2008, 116-127; Srivastava 1996, Pl. II. 4, 6, 9; III. 2, 5, 6-7, 9-10; IV. 1, 4-8.

of the first century AD¹⁷ and the events relating to the Han Court and Jibin took place in the first century BC. However, given that Ban Chao, who was the General-Protector of the Western Regions and a brother of Ban Gu, could get in touch with the Kushans many times (Fan 1965, 1579-1580), he most probably saw the coin of the *Nameless king* and transmitted some features of this kind of coins to Ban Gu. It seems that there is another possibility that Ban Gu mistakenly combined both obverse sides of the coins of the Indo-Scythians and the Kushan *Nameless King* or other Greeks as the two sides of the coins of Jibin. As we know, the Greek king Eucratides (*ca.* 171-145 BC) of Bactria once issued a certain type of coins: bust or head of king/Dioscuri on horseback. If its obverse and reverse are exchanged, it would be basically consistent with the coins of Jibin. But this coin was issued earlier than the period of Scythians or Jibin. Anyway, although we do not know exactly where Ban Gu got the information about the coins of Jibin, it cannot be denied that the information of Greek-styled coins once again was spread into China.

The second point is the identity of the Rong Qu Prince (容屈王子) who overthrew the King of Jibin with the assistance of an envoy of the Han court. These events were recorded as follows: “the Han dynasty got into contact with Jibin during the reign of the Emperor Wudi (汉武帝, 140-87 BC). The King Wutoulao (烏頭勞) of Jibin thought that his kingdom was so far away from China that Chinese troops could not reach it, so he killed the Chinese envoys repeatedly. After Wutoulao had died, his son succeeded to the throne in the reign of Han Yuandi (汉元帝, 48-33 BC). He sent envoys to China with tributes to apologize for the wrongdoing of his father. A Chinese general, Wen Zhong (文忠), escorted his envoys back. However, the king tried to murder Wen Zhong. Having discovered the conspiracy, Wen Zhong joined forces with the prince of Rong Qu (容屈王子), Yinmofu (陰末赴), and together they attacked Jibin and killed its king. Then Wen Zhong made Yinmofu king of Jibin and granted him the seal and ribbons (as sign of his subjection to China) on behalf of the Han Emperor” (Ban 1962, 3885-3886).

According to W.W. Tarn and other scholars, Rong Qu is possibly the Chinese transliteration of “Yonaki” (“Greek city”). The city, then, should be Alexandria-Kapisa (located in today’s Begram in Afghanistan). Yinmofu should be Hermaios,

¹⁷ There are two main arguments about Soter Megas’ position in the chronology of the early Kushan royal family. According to the first one, Vima Taktu and Soter Megas are the same person, whose reign possibly falls in the middle and late first century AD or even at the beginning of the second century AD, the time span being between 20 to 55 years. This has been accepted by most scholars. According to the second one, Soter Megas was one of the kings of the early Kushan Dynasty, whose reign was from 97/92-110 AD (Bopearachchi 2007). However, in my opinion Soter Megas was a satrap who had been sent to India by the Kushan king. He became so powerful that he called himself “Soter Megas” on his coins. He belonged to the same generation as Yan Gaozhen who was the second king of the Kushan mentioned by Fan Ye in the *Houhanshu* (1965, 2922) and his reign falls approximately in the later years of the first century AD. See Yang 2009.

the son of the ruler of the Greek city. Wutoulao might be the name of the Scythian Spalyros/Spalyrisis/Spalirises (reigned *ca.* 60-57 BC or 50-47 BC) who styled himself the brother of the King (ἀδελφού του βασιλέως) on his coins. Wen Zhong, mistakenly, regarded ἀδελφού as the king's name, he transliterated it as 'Wutoulao' (烏頭勞)¹⁸. It is generally believed that Hermaios was the last Greek king of the family of Eucratides in northwest India. If this hypothesis is tenable, Hermaios would be the first and also the last Indo-Greek king who accepted seal and ribbon from China and established a formal political relation with the Han court, and the Greek kingdom of Jibin could be admitted as a vassal state of China. However, the friendly relationship did not keep for long, for troubles and conflicts continued to appear between the kings and the Chinese envoys in Jibin. Later, Jibin sent envoys twice to the Han court to apologize for their mistakes, but both were refused and relations between the two countries were cut off (Ban 1962, 3886-3888).

What needs to be pointed out is that Tarn's argument was totally rejected by N. K. Narain and others in the 1950s¹⁹ and also opposed by Osmund Bopearachchi in recent years. Bopearachchi thinks that the reign of Hermaios should be in *ca.* 90-70 BC (Bopearachchi 1991, 453), which evidently does not match the time when Yinmofu ruled as a king according to the records of *Hanshu*. However, no matter whether Yinmofu could be identified with Hermaios or not, it is quite possible that Han China might have had some contacts with the Indo-Greeks who still remained in the northwest of India in the 1st century BC. Ban Gu particularly mentions that "The people of Jibin are ingenious in carving, ornamenting, engraving, and inlaying; in building palaces and mansions; in weaving wool, ornamental perforation, and embroidery" (Ban 1962, 3885). It means that both the art of Greek sculpture and the Chinese techniques of silk weaving were well-known there.

Wuyishanli (烏弋山離) is the last country at the end of the southern stretch of the Silk Road. It should be located to the south of Kabul in Afghanistan and includes the areas of ancient Seistan and Arachosia. "Wuyishanli" as a name of one kingdom may be a transliteration from the capital of Seistan, Alexandria Proththasia or Alexandria in Kandahar²⁰. According to the records of Ban Gu, the coins here were rather peculiar: on the obverse was a man's head and on the reverse a man on horseback (Ban 1962, 3889). In fact, that is just one type of

¹⁸ See Tarn 1951, 469-473, 418, 339-342. Tarn's conclusion was based on the views of, among others, Von Gutschmid Whyllie. For the coin of Spalyros and its legend, see Li Tiesheng 2008, 118. In the legend of his coins, he called himself the king's brother. Maybe he was only a vice king by that time. He became a king in the middle of the 1st century BC or from *ca.* 60-57 or *ca.* 50-47 BC.

¹⁹ Although not accepting Tarn's argument, in fact Narain could not solve the problem whom the "Yinmofu and Wutoulao" could be identified with. See Narain 1957, 154-155.

²⁰ Sun 1978; Yu 1992, 168-171; Cohen 2013, 255-256, 283-286.

the coins of the Greeks in Bactria and India, and as mentioned above it is the basic coin-type of the *Nameless king* Soter Megas. Obviously, Ban Gu had noticed the difference of the coins between Jibin and Wuyishanli.

Information about Daqin (大秦), Tiaozhi (條支) and Buddhism in “Xiyu Zhuan” of *Houhanshu* (“西域傳 Biography of the Western Regions” in *the History of the Later Han Dynasty*)

In the later Han Dynasty, Chinese knowledge of the Western region became more and more extensive with the expansion of exchanges between China and the distant countries in the East Mediterranean and India. Although Hellenistic kingdoms had already disappeared, the information related to the Hellenistic legacies also continued to be brought into China. The “Xiyu Zhuan” of *Houhanshu* provides some clues for it.

Houhanshu was written and completed in the early fifth century AD. Concerning the compiling principle of his “Xiyu Zhuan”, the author Fan Ye said: “Ban Gu had recorded the cultures and customs of the Western Regions in *Hanshu* in detail. What is described in the ‘Xiyu Zhuan’ differs from the former. All events recorded in it took place after the beginning of the reign of Jianwu (AD 25-57, one of the reign titles of the Emperor Liu Xiu) and had been recorded by Ban Yong (班勇) at the end of the reign of Emperor Andi (AD 107-125)” (Fan 1965, 2912-2913). It means that, in his chapter on the Western Regions, the author would not repeat what Ban Gu had described but focused on the new materials from Ban Yong, the son of Ban Chao. As the successor to his father’s career as a general, he had gone to the Western Regions twice²¹. Although his stay in the Western Regions did not last longer than his father’s, he offered more new information from the distant West and India. By that time, the political situation of the Western Regions had changed significantly. Firstly, both the Seleucid and Ptolemaic Kingdoms in the area of the Eastern Mediterranean had been annexed by the Roman Empire. The latter had expanded eastwards to the Euphrates River and was confronting Parthia (Anxi) along it. Secondly, those small kingdoms of Greeks, Scythians, and Parthians in Northwestern India had been replaced by the Kushan Empire. Thus, at that time there were three strong powers which could be compared with China in Eurasia, namely Rome, Parthia, and Kushan. Except Han China, the other three Empires largely occupied regions that once had belonged to the Hellenistic world. Parthians, Scythians, and the people of Dayuezhi, all were originally nomads. In order to rule these newly occupied and civilized regions well, they had to assimilate the cultures of the conquered peoples, and adopted the Greek-styled

²¹ The first was in the first year of the reign of Yongchu (永初元年, AD 107) of Emperor Andi (漢安帝). The second was in between the sixth year of Yuanchu (元初六年, AD 119) of Emperor Andi (漢安帝) and the second year of Yongjian (永建二年, AD 127) of Emperor Shundi (漢順帝).

coins, Greek gods and art, as well as other legacies of Hellenistic world. Although it is hard to identify the characteristics of Hellenistic culture from the “Xiyu Zhuan” in *Houhanshu* clearly, more implicit clues can still be noticed. Particularly, for the first time in Chinese historical books, Daqin was introduced, a country where its people look like Chinese (Fan 1965, 2919).

In the preface of “Xiyu Zhuan”, the author generalized the closer relation between China and the countries in the Western Regions as far as the Mediterranean: “From Tiaozhi and Anxi to the other countries that are far beyond 40,000 *li* away from China and near the sea, all tried to pay tribute to China through several successive interpreters”²². He especially emphasizes that the influence of Han Empire was so extended and powerful that Meng Qi (蒙奇) and Dou Le (兜勒), two distant countries, sent their envoys to China in order to submit their tribute and to request to be a vassal of China²³.

Although the kingdom of Tiaozhi (generally identified as the Seleucid Empire²⁴) had earlier been annexed respectively by Anxi (安息) and by Rome, the capital city of Antioch still existed. The countries far beyond 40,000 *li* (an unreliable figure implying a distance far away from China) should be located in the areas of the Eastern Mediterranean. Envoys from these countries necessarily must have brought some information about their culture to China. It might be the exotic influences that changed the style of stone carving-drawings during the Han Dynasty. The appearance of these amazing patterns, such as beasts with wings and with human faces, the Honeysuckle motif (忍冬纹) and the Grape motif (葡萄纹), may well be attributed to the influence of Hellenistic art (see Shen 1985, 67-73; Zheng 1926) which could only have been introduced from the former Hellenistic world.

The information about Buddhism in India and its introduction into China are also described in *Houhanshu* into great detail. The “People of Shen Du” (身毒, India) “practice the Buddhist way, not to kill any life, or to wage war. Gradually, all these taboos have become customary for the Indians” (Fan 1965,

²² Fan 1965, 2910. Undoubtedly, there is some exaggeration in these words, but certainly some of the most distant countries did have contacts with China. “Paying tribute” is just a way of communication and does not mean a real vassal relationship.

²³ Fan 1965, 2910. The problems surrounding the identities of Mengqi and Doule are complicated, and many different arguments have been put forward without general acceptance of any of them, which is why I will leave it at rest here, to discuss it in another article. However, in my provisional opinion, these two countries should be in the areas neighboring China. Otherwise they would not have asked the court of Han to accept them as vassals of China. The Emperor Hedi (漢和帝) responded to their requests and bestowed their kings the gold seal and purple ribbon (Fan 1965, 188). For the countries beyond the Pamirs, only the king of Jibin, a country neighboring to China, got this kind of honor and position (Ban 1962, 3886). Therefore, Mengqi and Doule might not be in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

²⁴ See Yu 2005, 17 note 78, 113 note 276, 271 note 162, note 166 and Leslie/Gardiner 1996, xviii, 260. For the details see Leslie/Gardiner 1982.

2921). It was the first time that Buddhism was mentioned in Chinese historical books. It is said that the Emperor Mingdi (漢明帝) had a dream in which a tall golden man with light above his head appeared. Then he questioned his ministers who that man might be. One of them told him: “In the West, there is a god called Buddha. His body is sixteen *chi* (尺) high (*ca.* 3.7 meters or *ca.* 12 feet) with a golden color”. The Emperor Mingdi even sent an envoy to India “to inquire about the Buddha’s doctrine. Thereafter, the images of the Buddha began to appear in China” (Fan 1965, 2922). In Early Buddhism there had been no icon of the Buddha and his personality was expressed only by his symbols, such as stupa, white elephant, and his footprint, and so on. The Indo-Greeks were the ones to introduce their sculptural art and anthropomorphic conceptions of deities into India and to create the statues of the Buddha and other figures of Buddhism. Some Greeks even converted to Buddhism²⁵. In fact, the essence of Gandharan art was to express the spirit of Buddhism through the Greek classical art. The spread of Buddhism into China, therefore, means the arrival of certain Hellenistic elements contained in the Buddhist art of Gandhara²⁶.

The information on the Kushans in “Xiyu Zhuan” is of great value. This chapter describes the historical evolution of the Kushans from the original nomads Dayuezhi to the Kushan Empire, and provides a reliable genealogy of the Kushan royal family. The well-known Rabatak Inscription and the commemorative coins issued by Vima Taktu for his father²⁷ also provide some important clues for Kushan history. But there are still arguments concerning the identity of Soter Megas. According to the Rabatak Inscription and the coins of the early Kushan kings, I presume that “Soter Megas” denotes a general of the Kushan

²⁵ Such as the Indo-Greek king Menander. See Davids 1894, 374 (No. 420). It is said that “taking delight in the wisdom of the Elder, he handed over his kingdom to his son, and abandoning the household life for the houseless state, grew great in insight, and himself attained to Arahantship”!

²⁶ Origins, backgrounds, features, and dates of the emergence of so-called Gandharan Art have been heavily debated in academia. However, some facts seem to be undeniable: on the one hand, quite some Indo-Greeks had believed in Buddhism and accepted its ideas. The Menander mentioned above is a representative example. Moreover, it is most probable that some of them took part in the creation of Buddha statues and other figures of Buddhism with their religious ideas and their sculptural talent. On the other hand, even if, as some scholars insist, statues of Buddha appeared in the Kushan period, the descendants of Indo-Greeks and their heritage undoubtedly still played important roles in this course. The new artists who came to India by sea from the Roman East also brought in the influence of Hellenistic culture. A lot of relics of original sculptures, dispersed in modern Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India, even in the Tarim Basin of China, have verified the Hellenistic elements in the Gandharan Art, which is why some scholars call it Greco-Buddhist Art. Recently, Jessie Pons provided a case study of the trays discovered in Gandhara displaying the development from Greek motif towards Buddhist art. See Pons 2011.

²⁷ British numismatist Joe Cribb considers these commemorative coins as fakes (personal communication, 2012).

King *Yangaozhen* (閻膏珍) rather than a formal member of the Kushan royal family. After Yangaozhen had conquered Tian Zhu (天竺) again, he sent this general to rule it. His coins had the distinct features of Greek coins issued by the Greek Kings in Bactria, so he might have been a descendant of a Greek king (see Yang 1999).

In the records about Anxi a famous episode occurs about Gan Ying, a Chinese envoy, who was sent to Daqin (大秦) by the Protector General Ban Chao. When he arrived at Tiaozhi city and tried to cross the sea to Daqin, he was persuaded not to go further by the sailors of the western frontier of Anxi, warned about a horrible life on sea. The story has been discussed by many scholars in China and abroad. Tiaozhi was the farthest area Chinese envoys could reach during the Han dynasty. There are different opinions as to where it was and what it was, either a kingdom or merely one city. If it was a kingdom, undoubtedly, it should denote the Syrian Seleucid kingdom with Antioch on the Orontes as its capital, which, however, had been annexed by Romans in 64 BC; if it was a city, could it have been Syrian Antioch, or Charax (Chavannes) at the Persian Gulf?²⁸ Or does it stand for the Susiana and the areas in the province of Fars to the east of the Persian Gulf? (Hill 2010, 216). Whatever it was, a kingdom or a city (or both, with the name of capital to indicate the country), it was certainly located to the west of Anxi and near the sea. This can be confirmed by another record in this chapter: “Gan Ying (甘英) arrived at Tiaozhi through Anxi and he was so near the sea that he was hopeful to see Daqin” (Fan 1965, 2931). Gan Ying (甘英) traveled Westwards in the ninth year of the reign of Yong Yuan of Emperor Hedi (漢和帝), namely AD 97²⁹. At that time, Antioch was no longer the capital of the kingdom of the Seleucids but the main city of the Syrian province of Rome. According to the record in this chapter the city was “on the top of a hill and more than 40 *li* (16.6 km) in circumference. It borders on the Western Sea, and the seawater winds around it on the south, east, and north. Thus, accesses are blocked on three sides. It is only to the northwest that there is communication by road on firm ground (Fan 1965, 2918). This means that the city was near the sea. But which sea was it? In my opinion, this sea should be the Mediterranean, and this “Tiaozhi” city should be Antioch on the Orontes in Syria. Gan Ying might have gone into this region and this city himself; otherwise the records about them could not have been so detailed. As we know, the report of Gan Ying is the only direct source of “Tiaozhi city”. The site of Antioch on the Orontes in Syria has been unearthed. Its topography and products, and climate there³⁰ largely concord with the Chinese records about

²⁸ The French sinologist E. Chavannes held this view (Hill 2010, 217), which was supported by Leslie/Gardiner 1982.

²⁹ It is a traditional way of numbering the years of the reign of one emperor, originating from Han Dynasty. “Yong Yuan”, starting from 89 AD, is the title of the reign of Emperor Hanhedi.

³⁰ Downey 1961, 15-23, 77-80, Fig. 11.

“Tiaozhi” in *Shiji*, *Hanshu* and *Houhanshu* to different degrees of certainty³¹. The Greek geographer Strabo (64/63 BC-AD 25) also described Antioch in his time: there were outer walls around the whole city and inner walls around every part of this Tetrapolis (sc. city consisting of four quarters). The city was 120 *stadia* (equal to 22.2 km) away from the exit to the Mediterranean. It only took one day from the port to the inner land (Str.16.2.4-7). If Gan Ying actually had visited Antioch on the Orontes in Syria, he must have seen the city Strabo described. The Chinese scholar Yu Taishan even assumed that the harbor of Antioch, Seleucia Pieria, might have been the Tiaozhi city mentioned in the *Houhanshu* (Yu 2005, 271). This should, however, be doubted: Gan Ying might have known the port of Antioch, but probably only regarded it as one part of Tiaozhi city or Tiaozhi country because he did not tell anything about this port city.

Of course, the hypothesis that Tiaozhi should be located on the Persian Gulf is not unreasonable, because the Persian Gulf could be considered the western boundary of Anxi. If one set off from the Persian Gulf by ship, turn round the Arabian Peninsula, pass through the Red Sea, and land in Egypt, one could get to Daqin (Lijian, 犁鞞) (Fan 1965, 2919). According to Pliny³², Charax on the Persian Gulf at the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates was founded on an artificial platform that was two miles in width (about 3.2 kilometers or 7.7 *li*)³³. That seems to be a little less than forty *li* (16.6 km.) in circumference. An English translator of Pliny’s *Natural History* suggested that the width of this city should be enlarged to three or six miles. He might think that the city referred to by Pliny was too small. The city had been rebuilt by Antiochus III (223-187 BC) and renamed Antioch after himself, from which the Chinese transliteration of Tiaozhi (條支) originates. Later the city was destroyed once again and rebuilt by its neighbour, Arab king Spasines. He constructed bulwarks for the city and raised adjacent lands. The length of the new city was with its six miles a little longer than its width. So its circumference seems to be much more than forty *li* (16.6 km). However, at that time the city had been renamed after the Arab king. Therefore, the evidence for “Charax/Tiaozhi” is insufficient. However, no matter at which city Gan Ying actually arrived, either the one on the Orontes or the one in the Persian Gulf, the information of a city founded by Greeks as a capital of the Seleucid Kingdom was spread over China.

The reason why Gan Ying gave up his trip to Daqin halfway may have been that he was deterred by the warnings about the length of the voyage and the unbear-

³¹ See in *Shiji*: “Tiaozhi is located in the west of Anxi (Parthia) for several thousands *li*. It is near the West Sea. The climate is humid; rice is grown in its land. There are big birds with big eggs as jar in it” (Sima 1959, 3163). In *Hanshu*: “It is near the West Sea. The climate is humid; rice is grown in its land. There are big birds with big eggs as jar in it” (Ban 1962, 3888).

³² For the details of Charax, see Plin. *Nat.* 6.31.138 & note a-140.

³³ In Han Dynasty, one *li* (里) is equivalent to 415.8 meters.

able homesickness³⁴. One Chinese scholar made a bold speculation: the story of the Greek mythical Sirens must have been told to Guan Ying by Anxi sailors, who lured sailors at sea with their enchanting music and voices, so that he became frightened and unfortunately abandoned his plan to travel to Daqin (see Zhang 2003). If this really were the case, it would suggest that an echo of a Greek myth reached China.

As for the land of “Daqin”, it is generally assumed that Egypt is meant, having become a province of the Roman Empire more than a century earlier. It was much nearer and more convenient to go to Egypt from Antioch on the Orontes than it would have been from the Persian Gulf. If it is assumed that Daqin denotes Rome in the Italian Peninsula, or any other region of the Roman Empire in the Eastern Mediterranean, it would appear more reasonable and easier for a traveler to set off from Syrian Antioch to these areas including Egypt. Naturally, all the hypotheses are based on the premise that Gan Ying was familiar with the orientation of Daqin.

According to “Xiyu Zhuan” of *Hou Han Shu*, Daqin is also called Li Jian, or “the Country in the Western Sea (海西国)” (Fan 1965, 2919). There is one popular hypothesis for long that “Li Jian” in *Houhanshu* might be identified with “Alexandria” in Egypt³⁵, and consequently Daqin in this period referred to Egypt under Roman rule. Nowadays, ideas about it differ. Some scholars think that Daqin should denote the Roman Orient or the Roman Empire including the former Syrian Seleucid kingdom and Egypt under the Ptolemaic Dynasty³⁶. As stated above, the most remote area reached by Gan Ying was either the Eastern coast of the Mediterranean or the head of the Persian Gulf. Wherever Tiaozhi was, it is certain that Gan Ying had arrived in the Western part of the former Hellenistic World, then under Parthian and Roman Empires respectively. The description of Daqin in this chapter should be based on his information which might have been gathered partly from his observations and partly from the hearsay about Daqin. Therefore it seems to be fragmentary, unreliable, and even have some idealized imaginations.

³⁴ According to the “Biography of the Western Regions” in *Houhanshu*, the Parthian sailors at the western frontier told Gan Ying that “The sea is huge. It would take at least three months for those who want to sail over it if the winds are favorable. However, if encountered unfortunately by dead winds, they would spend two years on this trip. That is why all the men who go by sea take stores for three years. The vast sea makes men easily to think of their country, and get homesick, and some of them die” (Fan 1965, 2918). According to “The biographies of Barbarians” in *Jinshu*, the sailors at the western frontier of An-xi (Parthia) said to Gan Ying: “There is something in the sea that make men homesick and feel grieved. If the Chinese envoys would not miss their parents, wives and children, they could go forward.” Thus Ying stopped (Fang 1974, 2545).

³⁵ This was first proposed by French sinologist Paul Pelliot in 1915. See Pelliot 1962b.

³⁶ See Leslie/Gardiner 1982; Hill 2009, 255-256.

For example, the description about the political and administrative system of Daqin could just be such a patchwork. The information about Daqin concurs with the reports in “Xirong Zhuan” (“西戎傳, the treatise on the Western Barbarians”) of *Weilue* (魏略). The latter is only a little more detailed than the former. Some clues in both of them seem to reflect the actual situation of the Roman Empire more or less. They mention the great country with more than four hundred cities built with stone, the public and private palaces and houses with two floors, the capital located on a river near the sea, the post stations along the ways, the council (or senate) of thirty-six generals, and the king who was not autocratic and could be dethroned or exiled by the council (Fan 1965, 2919; Chen 1959, 860-861). These messages can hardly be brought in accordance with the political system of the Roman Empire. Maybe it includes some features of Hellenistic monarchy, and at the same time some idealized fantasies about a distant country.

Even so, the Chinese clearly knew of the existence of Daqin being as vast as China, its people looking like themselves. It “issued golden and silver coins and ten silver coins equaled one golden coin” (Fan 1965, 2919), which indicates that the Chinese knew the relative value of gold and silver Hellenistic coins: one to ten³⁷. In the Roman Empire a golden *aureus* was valued at twenty-five silver *denarii*. Although the weight of gold and silver coins gradually diminished (the weight of a golden *aureus* fluctuated between 8 and 6.5 gr and a silver *denarius* between 3 and 3.9 gr), the relative values of gold and silver were still maintained at one to ten or a little higher³⁸. It has been shown that in the later Roman Empire, the relative value of gold versus silver seems to have been largely the same as in Hellenistic times³⁹.

Whether or not Daqin or the Roman Empire had direct contacts with China through the Silk Road, the answer is not beyond doubt. According to the records of *Houhanshu*, the kings of Daqin tried to establish direct relationships with China, but were stopped by Anxi, which was located on about the middle of Silk Road, struggling to monopolize the trade of silk. Daqin had to trade with Anxi and Tianzhu (天竺, India) on the sea. But finally the envoys of Daqin arrived at the most Southern prefecture (Rinan Jun, 日南郡) of China and contributed their gift to the Chinese emperor in the ninth year of the reign of Yanxi (延熹) of Emperor Huandi (桓帝), i.e. AD 166 (Fan 1965, 2919-2920). Actually these assumed envoys were Roman merchants from India because the gifts such as elephants’ tusks, rhinoceros horns, and tortoise shell seem to have been brought from India. These records verify the emergence of the Maritime Silk Road from Rome to China at least in the second half of the second century AD.

³⁷ <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stater>> (accessed on Feb. 17, 2015).

³⁸ <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aureus>>; <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denarius>> (accessed on Feb. 17, 2015)

³⁹ We could place a note here; e.g. Oxford Handbook of Numismatics.

Alexandria in Egypt and Centaurs in China in “Xirong Zhuan” in *Weilue* included in *Sanguozhi*

The introduction of the Western Regions in “Xirong Zhuan” in *Weilue*, is similar to those in the “Xiyu Zhuan” of *Houhanshu*. The author, Yu Huan, lived in the period from the last years of the Wei Dynasty (AD 220-265) to the Jin Dynasty (AD 266-316), i.e. the second half of the third century AD. As a book *Weilue* has been lost, but fortunately the scholiast Pei Songzhi (裴松之, 372-451) included the “Xirong Zhuan” in *Sanguozhi* as an appendix. It contains very important material for research on the historical relations between China and the Western Regions. However, as far as our topic is concerned, there is no much new information in it. But the book refers to a particular city in Daqin with various names: “Chisan” (遲散城), “Wudan” (烏丹城), “Wuchisan” (烏遲散城). According to Yu Taishan, all names are derived from the transliteration of the name of one and the same city: “Wuchisandan” (烏遲散丹), namely Alexandria in Egypt (Yu 2005, 344 note 106). Moreover, it is said that Daqin “issues gold and silver coins, and ten silver coins are valued at one gold coin”. Obviously, Yu Huan and Fan Ye used almost the same sources. However, the description of Daqin by Yuhuan is more detailed and informative than the one by Fan Ye. It is possible that the former might have got new material from other sources.

An unknown country was referred to by Yuhuan in this chapter: “The elder of Wusun says that there is a country named Ma Jing (馬脛國) in the Northern Dingling (北丁零); the voice of the people there sounds like that of a Banwu (which is a kind of bird similar to a goose). The upper parts of their body from the knees upwards are human, but they have shins and hoofs of a horse with fur below their legs. So they run as quickly as a horse. They are valiant soldiers (Chen 1959, 863)”. The image of half-human and half-horse people are more or less like the Centaurs in Greek myth⁴⁰. It is very well possible that the mythical figure was introduced in central China through Parthia, because in the site of Nisa, one of the capitals of the Parthian Kingdom (and extremely famous for its horses), about forty rhytons have been discovered, on some of which figures of centaurs were decorated⁴¹. Unexpectedly, in 1984, Chinese archaeologists discovered a fragment of woolen trousers in a tomb in the Tarim Basin, to be dated to between the third and first century BC, on which a galloping centaur blowing a horn or a trumpet resembling a Greek and Roman *salpinx* was depicted (Wagner *et alii* 2009). Of course, this indirect and scattered evidence is not enough to establish that there should be a link between them and the legend of the horse-like people. However, given the close relation between Parthia and

⁴⁰ There was a similar description of this monster in *Shanhaijing* 山海经 but here it is only mentioned that the people had hairy legs under the knees and could walk or run fast. Therefore it is doubtful that this might be related to Greek legend. For the original text see Yu 2005, 361 note 252.

⁴¹ See Masson 2008; Abdullaev 2008; Pappalardo 2008.

China, it is well-nigh possible that the story of Greek Centaurs was spread into China orally. The figure of Centaurs discovered in the Tarim Basin in fact heralds Hellenistic influence in China.

Conclusion

From the analysis above, we may safely conclude that some information about the Hellenistic world and the Roman East was spread into China, despite the difficulty to reconstruct the exact course in the present state of research. Zhang Qian displayed a new world to Chinese people. He followed, as it were, the traces of Greeks in Sogdiana and Bactria into Central Asia. Consequently, his description became a basic source for later historians. With the changes of rulers of those areas, some Greek cities developed, some ceased to exist, and new cities appeared. Greek-styled coins with Greek mythical stories, gods, language, sculpture, and architecture continued to be adopted or adapted in various degrees by new peoples and kingdoms. Despite the fact that the Hellenistic kingdoms disappeared in Eurasia, the influences of Hellenistic culture still played important roles in the interactions between Chinese and Western civilizations through the Silk Road. This is why we could gather some related clues in *Hanshu*, *houahnshu*, and *Sanguozhi* after *Shiji*. Of course, the people, who traveled through the Silk Road, hurried and threatened by perils of every sort, with various goals, aims and missions, should not be overlooked. As spokesmen, they had provided either directly or indirectly the material to the authors of Chinese Historical books. Envoys like Zhang Qian, Wen Zhong, and Gan Ying went into far and unknown lands and brought back more detailed and reliable material. Meanwhile, those foreigners who came to China as ambassadors or traders also brought in not only the tributes and goods but also exotic cultures. The generals in charge of the Western Regions, such as Ban Chao and Ban Yong, kept direct contacts with these countries West of the Pamirs as far as the Mediterranean so that they could update the knowledge about these areas in due time. Without them, we would not have known so much about the Kushan, Parthian, and Roman Empires. Moreover, the function of the officials who went to India and the foreign Buddhists who came to China were very important for the the spread of Buddhism as well as Greco-Buddhist Gandharan art into Chian. However, it is worth noticing that all the interactions between China and the Western countries entirely relied on the establishment of the Silk Road, which is both the result and the bridge of these exchanges.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that, despite persistent efforts for several generations of scholars both in China and abroad, there are many unsolved problems in the field of research about the Western Regions. My discussion is no more than a report of my own understanding of the topics addressed and the explanations I prefer. They are in fact not so much conclusions as they are hypotheses and introductions for further research.

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