

ANCIENT IRANIAN NOMADS IN WESTERN CENTRAL ASIA*

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THE territory of Central Asia, which consists of vast expanses of steppe-land, desert and semi-desert with fine seasonal pastures, was destined by nature for the development of nomadic cattle-breeding. Between the seventh and third centuries B.C. it was inhabited by a large number of tribes, called Scythians by the Greeks, and Sakas by the Persians.

The history of the Central Asian nomads is inseparable from that of the nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples of the Eurasian steppe zone. Their political and economic life was closely linked, and their material culture had much in common. It should also be noted that, despite their distinctive qualities, the nomadic tribes were closely connected with the agricultural population of Central Asia. In fact, the history and movements of these nomadic tribes and the settled population cannot be considered in isolation; each had its impact on the other, and this interdependence must be properly understood.

Literary sources on the ancient Iranian nomads of Central Asia

The term 'Tūra' is the name by which the Central Asian nomadic tribes were known in one of the earliest parts of the *Avesta*. The Tūras are portrayed as enemies of the sedentary Iranians and described, in *Yašt* XVII (prayer to the goddess Aši), 55–6, as possessing fleet-footed horses.² As early as 641 or 640 B.C. the nomads were known in Assyrian sources as the Sakas.³

* See Map 1.

1. Litvinsky, 1972, p. 156.

2. The mention of the Tūras' fleet-footed horses is possibly a hint at their link with the territory of Turkmenistan, which from time immemorial was famous for its splendid swift horses, the ancestors of the present-day Turkmen breeds (*Istoriya Turkmenskoy SSR*, 1957, p. 104).

3. Litvinsky, 1972, pp. 156–7.

Many Greek writers referred to all the nomads of Eurasia, including those of Central Asia, as Scythians; and the Persians designated all the nomadic tribes of the Eurasian steppes, including the Scythians, as the Sakas. These broad classifications were based on the similarity of the culture and way of life of all the nomads who spoke Iranian languages. The question of the actual distribution of the different nomadic tribes or tribal groups is debatable, largely because of the dearth of written sources. Moreover, it is well to remember that nomadic life characteristically entailed frequent migrations, with the result that different tribes successively occupied one and the same territory. When it is considered that these tribes were culturally very close to one another it is easy to understand why classical writers sometimes associated different tribes with the same historical events. For example, in their description of Cyrus' war against the Central Asian nomads, Cyrus fought against the Massagetae according to Herodotus; against the Sakas according to Strabo; against the Abiae according to Quintus Curtius; against the Derbices according to Ctesias; and against the Dahae according to Berossus.

It is now generally agreed that the ancient nomads of Central Asia were descendants of the Bronze Age cattle-breeding tribes who had inhabited the same territory,⁴ which does not exclude, however, the probability of considerable ethnic intermingling and movement within and beyond the borders of the region. These trends must have become particularly marked at the start of the first millennium B.C., when a number of tribes changed from cattle-breeding to a purely nomadic way of life.

This view is confirmed by anthropological studies. Between the seventh and fifth centuries B.C., the Sakas of the Aral Sea region seem to have a mixed population, consisting of a Europoid, mainly Andronovo stratum with a significant admixture of Mongoloid forms of Central Asian origin. Anthropological materials of the Saka period from eastern Kazakhstan are heterogeneous, showing genetic similarities with the population of the T'ien Shan and the Altai mountains with a Mongoloid admixture already apparent. The Sakas of the eastern Pamirs occupied a place apart, among the other Saka tribes or those akin to them.⁵

The question of the distribution of the Saka tribes is extremely complex. Current literature presents the most varied and contradictory points of view, due principally to the paucity of written sources. The location of the different tribes can only be determined from the extant archaeological data, and any picture of the distribution of the Central Asian tribes belonging to the Saka-Massagetae community remains tentative and incomplete. The Naqsh-i Rostam inscription of Darius I lists three Saka tribal confederations: (a) the *Sakā Hau-*

4. See Volume I, Chapters 14 and 15.

5. Litvinsky, 1972, p. 184.

mavargā, in Ferghana, where they began to change over to a settled form of life; (b) the *Sakā Tigraxaudā* in the region beyond the Syr Darya and in Semirechye; and (c) the *Sakā tayaiy paradraya*, or European Sakas (Scythians). In his list of Darius' satrapies, Herodotus also mentions the Caspians and Sacae as belonging to the fifteenth province. They are usually located along the southern and eastern shores of the Caspian Sea up to the mouth of the now-dried-up Uzboi. It is possible that the Dahae and a number of the other groupings of the Hellenistic period may have derived from the earlier Massagetian Confederation.

No kurgans or burial mounds of the Scythian period (seventh–fifth centuries B.C.) on the Uzboi are known so far, though the association of the Massagetae with the area seems to be well founded.⁶ The kurgans that have been investigated (dating from the fourth–second centuries B.C.) show that they are connected with Massagetian tribal groups of a later period, perhaps the Dahae. Their material culture is unquestionably of local origin and contains elements common to the Prokhorovo culture of the lower Volga and Ural regions.

Society and economy of the Iranian nomads of Central Asia

The eighth to sixth centuries B.C. witnessed the development of a class society both among the nomadic tribes and in the settled oases. The development of a specialized nomadic cattle-breeding economy obviously led to major economic and social changes, though the written sources throw little light on the social and economic relationships that existed among the ancient nomads. The transition to a nomadic way of life in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. occurred at much the same time over the whole of the Central Asian and southern Russian steppes, which were then populated by nomadic tribes showing many similarities in material culture, customs and mores. A nomadic cattle-breeding economy, in which cattle were put to pasture on a succession of different grazing grounds, led to a sharp increase in the number of cattle. This, in turn, led to more tribes shifting to a nomadic way of life. The basis of their prosperity lay in their large herds; horses now began to play a greater role; tribes living on the banks of the rivers engaged in fishing; and skilled craftsmen produced arms, ornaments, sumptuous carpets and other objects.⁷ The only indication of the political system of administration operating among the nomads is the mention made of the Saka-Massagetian kings, who were identified with the leaders of the nomadic confederations. The fact that these confederations constituted an

6. P'yankov, 1964, 1972; Yusupov, 1976.

7. *Istoriya Turkmenskoy SSR*, 1957, p. 69.

organized military force provides justification for speaking of an aristocracy in contrast to the rank-and-file of free nomads.

There may also have been slaves among the nomads, but they clearly did not take any significant part in productive life. The range of grave goods found in barrows also provides evidence for the existence of social differentiation among the Central Asian nomads. In some regions such differences are particularly marked in barrows from the Late Bronze Age, which contained basic types of arms, horse-harness fittings and artefacts typical of the time. Still more striking evidence of social differentiation is to be seen in the very rich mausoleum complexes of leaders – in the Tagisken and Uygarak cemeteries on the lower reaches of the Syr Darya,⁸ in the Chilik kurgan, the barrows in central Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and the huge royal sepulchre of Arzhan.⁹ Judging from the fact that, during this period, there was a shift from large burial mounds to smaller clusters of kurgans, we may presume that changes of some sort occurred in the family and tribal structure of nomad society.

Most scholars believe that the social organization of the steppe tribes was based on a clan and tribe structure. Based mainly on data in classical authors, this conclusion is confirmed by archaeological material – barrows in the steppe belt are usually sited in separate groups, representing the burial grounds of members of different clans. By this stage, however, the original equality of the steppe societies had already been lost, and there were considerable social and property distinctions.

The burial complexes of ordinary herdsman are found under small earthen or stone mounds, whereas grandiose structures, sometimes as high as 20 m, were erected over members of the tribal aristocracy. Complex burial structures have been found in tombs of nobles, with different layouts in different parts of the steppe zone. Among the European Scythians they normally took the form of deep complex catacombs with several chambers. In Semirechye and the Altai regions, the excavated graves of aristocrats contain monumental timber tombs. Thus, in the Besshatîr burial ground in the Ili river valley, log-built burial vaults were found, consisting of three parts: a corridor, an antechamber and the burial chamber proper. The walls rose to a height of 4 m and were built of horizontal trunks of Schrenk spruce, strengthened by timber uprights dug into the ground.¹⁰

A large number of people must have been employed to erect these complex structures. Obviously the persons buried in them were the chiefs of large tribes or even tribal confederations. The Arzhan tumulus (Fig. 1), already mentioned, is of interest in this connection. Its stone-built mound, 120 m in diam-

8. Vishnevskaya, 1973; Vishnevskaya and Itina, 1971; Itina, 1981.

9. Gryaznov, 1975.

10. Akishev and Kushaev, 1963, p. 35.

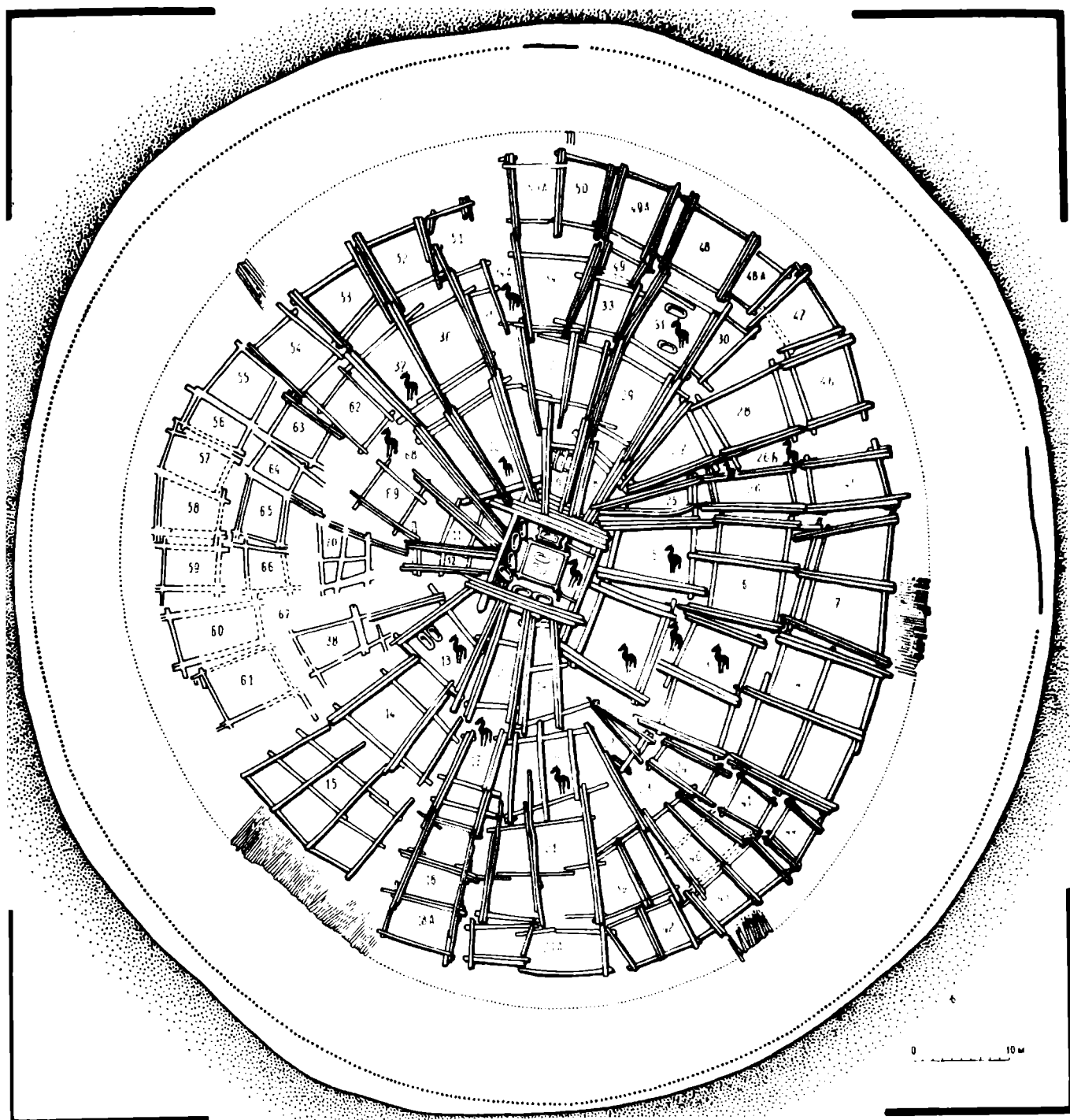


FIG. 1. Arzhan: plan of a royal tomb.

eter, covered a timber burial structure consisting of seventy radially arranged chambers. In the central chamber the leader and his close companions were buried, while the other chambers held the remains of representatives of subject tribes and possibly the offerings of friendly tribal groups. Each of the burials

was accompanied by many different articles, but a considerable proportion of these were unfortunately plundered in antiquity. It has been calculated that about 160 saddle horses were buried in the kurgan and another 300 horses eaten at the funeral feast.¹¹

Social differentiations between steppe tribes of the Scythian period are also mentioned by classical authors. For instance, Lucian states that the Pontic Scythians were divided into a royal clan, *pilophoroi*, thought to be members of the military aristocracy or priests and the 'eight-legged ones' – ordinary herdsmen with a pair of oxen and a cart. Some believe that this division corresponds to the division of society into three class or caste groups that characterized all the ancient Indo-Iranians.¹² A similar division can also be traced in the distribution of graves in archaeological sites, for example, in the Saka burial ground at Uygarak on the lower Syr Darya.¹³ Classical sources bear witness to the existence of slaves among the Scythians and the use of slave labour in the economy. In the Scythian world, however, slavery did not develop to any considerable extent, remaining mostly domestic and patriarchal, and 'slavery never became widespread among the nomads' as a basis of production.¹⁴ Written sources also suggest that women held a comparatively high position among the nomadic Saka-Massagetae. For example, Herodotus describes Queen Tomyris as their leader in the war against Cyrus. It is not, however, clear whether a parallel can be drawn in this respect between Saka-Massagetic society and its western neighbour, the matrilineal Sarmatian society.

Culture of the Iranian nomads of Central Asia

Archaeological remains of the first millennium B.C. in the Eurasian steppes have been studied since the nineteenth century. Initially it was thought that this evidence supported the idea, based on an acquaintance with classical tradition, that the whole population of the steppe belt belonged to the same ethnic stock. They seemed to demonstrate cultural uniformity throughout the area. Everywhere burials were found in barrows (kurgans) containing similar weapons, horse trappings and works of art. The choice of motifs and their style – known as the 'animal style' – pointed to a uniform cultural pattern. All this helped to give rise to the concept of a single Scythian culture, present throughout the Eurasian steppes, which had spread from a single centre and belonged to one tribe or

11. Gryaznov, 1980.

12. Grantovskiy, 1960, pp. 14–15.

13. Vishnevskaya, 1973, pp. 67–8.

14. Markov, 1976, p. 303.

people. This interpretation seemed to be in conformity with the statement of Herodotus (IV.11) that the Pontic Scythians came from Asia. On this evidence, the original homeland, common to all peoples who displayed this culture, should be sought somewhere in the Asian part of the steppe-lands.

Some modern scholars share this point of view and are paying special attention to dating the archaeological remains in various parts of the steppe zone. They hope to find the area where Scythian culture had its origins in those places where the forms of weapons, horse furniture and objects worked in the animal style appeared earliest. It has thus been suggested that one of the earliest complexes of this type is the famous Chilik barrow in eastern Kazakhstan.¹⁵ In recent years the Arzhan barrow in Tuva has also attracted close attention. Its dating is a moot point but supporters of an earlier date (ninth–eighth centuries B.C.) believe that it is precisely this site that points to Central Asia as the zone in which the Scythian culture that spread across the Eurasian steppes first took shape.¹⁶

However, as new material accumulates and is carefully scrutinized there seems to be increasing evidence in support of a different concept, that is, that in the Scythian epoch there existed in the steppe zone not one but rather a whole series of distinctive cultures belonging to different peoples. Even the features that stamp these cultures as similar show appreciable local variations, while their other characteristics are equally specific. The common features are due not only to their having come from a single source or to ethnic affinities but also to close contacts between the steppe tribes. These factors account for similar economic structures, bringing in their train an outward unification of life-style, and leading to the formation of a Scytho-Siberian cultural entity. Within this entity, every culture pattern is ‘completely distinct and original by virtue of its own particular historical past and the particular conditions ruling in the country in which it is found’.¹⁷ This of course in no way rules out the existence also of ethnic ties between some of these peoples.

A whole range of such Scythian-type cultures in the Eurasian steppes has already been studied. In addition to Scythian remains in the Black Sea area, these studies have covered Sarmatian complexes in the country round the lower reaches of the Don and Volga¹⁸ and various groups of Saka sites in Central Asia: on the lower Syr Darya,¹⁹ in the Pamirs²⁰ and in Semirechye,²¹ and a whole series of cultures whose assignment to any particular people mentioned in the sources

15. Chernikov, 1965.

16. Terenozhkin, 1976, pp. 210–11.

17. Gryaznov, 1978, p. 18.

18. Smirnov, 1964.

19. Tolstov and Itina, 1966; Vishnevskaya, 1973.

20. Litvinsky, 1972.

21. Akishev and Kushaev, 1963.

is problematical, that is, the Tasmol culture in central Kazakhstan,²² the Pazîrik culture in the Altai,²³ the Tagar culture in southern Siberia.

Among the steppe peoples of the Scythian group the predominant economic activity was nomadic herding, but in some areas the economy was of a more complex nature.

Herodotus (IV.17–18) describes the Pontic Scythian tribes partly as sedentary agriculturalists but he says (I.216) that the Massagetae of Central Asia ‘sow no grain but live by keeping herds and fishing. . . . They also drink milk.’ Investigation of the large fortified settlement of Chirik-Rabat, on the north-western confines of the Kyzyl Kum Desert, a settlement connected with the Massagetae, certainly contradicts the statement that they led a purely nomadic life and shows that in their economy the ancient traditions of fishing were combined with tillage of the land and semi-nomadic stock-raising.

Close ties between the nomadic and agricultural societies of Central Asia can be traced not only in the political and ethnic but also in the cultural and productive spheres. As is usually the case with nomads in general, craft production among the nomads of Central Asia was not so well developed as in the settled agricultural provinces, from which they obtained the wares they needed. A social division of labour thus grew up between the nomads and the settled agriculturalists and craftsmen.

Classical writers were much impressed by the excellent quality of the arms of the Central Asian nomads. Quintus Curtius (IV.9.3) noted that they had coats of mail made ‘of iron plates’. According to Arrian (III.13.4), the Central Asian warriors went into battle ‘carefully covered’ with a metal coat of mail. They also used metal helmets and shields of various shapes and sizes. According to Herodotus (I.215), the Massagetae’s horses were protected by breast-plates. It has been suggested that it was in Central Asia that equine armour first appeared.²⁴ In the absence of any archaeological evidence for the advanced production of weapons by the nomads themselves, it may be supposed that some of their arms, especially defensive armour which required much workmanship, were imported from the provinces inhabited by a sedentary population.

On the other hand, evidence of ceramic production by the nomads themselves is provided by the so-called ‘barbaric ceramics’, distinguished by an extremely coarse texture. Typical of the tribes in the Uzboi region, in particular, were the large trough-shaped vessels, used as ossuaries; in the oases, they were unknown. Another point suggesting that they were locally produced is their usually large size (over 1 m in length), which would have made it difficult to transport them over long distances on account of their fragility.

Judging by Herodotus’ account of the religion of the Massagetae, they

22. Margulan, 1966, pp. 303 et seq.

23. Rudenko, 1953.

24. Gafurov, 1972, p. 92.

practised the cult of the supreme sun god – Mithra – associated with various forms of fire- and horse-worship. Some scholars are of the opinion that as Zoroastrianism spread, some of the Sakas adopted its teachings.²⁵ The question of the Sakas' religion may be approached, it would seem, in the same way as that of their culture. There could not have been only one religion in such a vast region. The chances are that there were local interpretations of similar beliefs and rites, these being reflected in varying burial ceremonials in different provinces.

Some information about the religious view of the nomads of north-west Turkmenistan is provided by the Ichîanlî,²⁶ a monumental stone building dating from the fifth to second centuries B.C. This was, in all likelihood, a cult centre for the nomadic tribes of the plateau beyond the Uzboi.²⁷ The plan of the building is rectangular (35 × 40 m) with rounded corners to the south-east and south-west. The upper part of the building is topped by a thick and intricately constructed stone structure on which a hot fire had burned for a long time. The eastern and western part along the slope of the central elevation is traversed by parallel arched rows of vertically standing slabs, the gaps between which are filled with ashes of the 'sacred' fire that were brought here. South of the central high ground were outbuildings and passageways lined with large stone slabs standing on their edges. The surviving walls are as much as 2 m high. On the northern side, there is a semi-enclosed right-angled area with two altars. Other buildings contain large hearths or altars.²⁸ Traces of the prolonged action of fire are visible everywhere, and slag, the bones of animals (predominantly horse skulls and hooves), and a considerable number of bronze arrow-heads have been found. Two distinct types of pottery have been discovered in the complex: the local Daha-Massagetian earthenware and the roundware brought in from the south-western and southern regions. The large quantity of horses' bones inevitably brings to mind Herodotus' observation that the only god the Massagetae worshipped was the sun, to which they sacrificed horses (I.216). The horse, reflecting the ideology that was taking shape among the nomadic peoples, was widely represented in the distinctive Scytho-Saka-Massagetian art known as the 'animal style'. Tacitus (VI.37) also noted the ideological significance of the horse image in speaking of the sacrificial slaughter of horses as a Parthian custom; so did Philostratus, who observed that the Parthian king Vardanes sacri-

25. Litvinsky, 1972.

26. Almost in the centre of the burial ground containing barrows of different periods located on a hill to the south of the Dordul heights (a plateau beyond the Uzboi river) dominating the sands of the Kara Kum lowlands, the ruins of a stone building were discovered, which excavations showed to have no connection with the burial ground.

27. Yusupov, 1976, p. 42.

28. The fact that Ichîanlî had a number of peripheral 'altars' in addition to a central altar suggests that the former, unlike the latter, were directly associated with burial grounds.

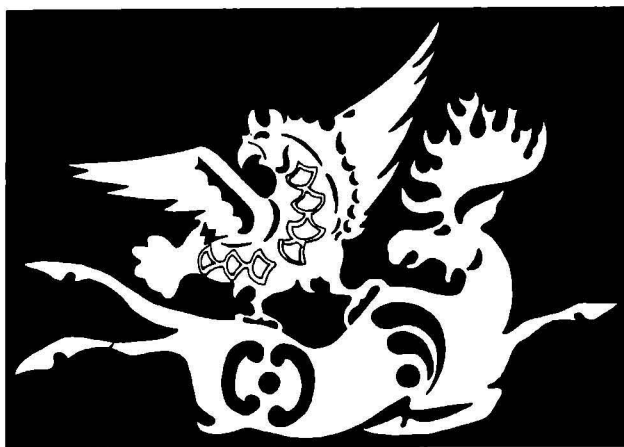


FIG. 2. Decoration cut out from leather of a saddle covering: first kurgan at Pazîrîk (mountainous Altai). (After Rudenko, 1953.)

ficed a white horse of the best Nisa breed. The horse was equally popular in both Scythian and Saka art.²⁹

The art of the Achaemenids also owes much to the nomadic art from which it borrowed so many features. At the same time, Achaemenid works in turn had a strong influence on the culture of the nomads. Evidence of the cultural and trade relations between Achaemenid Iran and Central Asia and the regions to the north-east of it is provided by various objects (everyday and ceremonial) discovered in the excavations of kurgans, such as the Arzhan burial mound (eighth–seventh centuries B.C.) and the Tuva and the Pazîrîk barrows (sixth–fourth centuries B.C.) in the Altai. Here, due to the permanent layer of ice, articles of leather (see Fig. 2), wool and thick felt have survived in an excellent state of preservation. Of considerable interest are pieces of woollen cloth and a short pile carpet with woven designs which suggest that they were of Iranian origin, though a Middle Asian provenance is not altogether excluded.³⁰ It seems reasonable to infer that their basic type of dwelling was the portable yurt. Burial sites at different localities show differences in form of construction, the objects they contain and the manner of burial. In the vicinity of the Sarîkamîsh delta of the Amu Darya, in the lower reaches of the Syr Darya and in Semirechye, alongside shallow-ditch graves were the huge barrows of the aristocracy, with complex wooden constructions or sophisticated structures in unbaked brick typical of the architecture of the seventh to third centuries B.C. In north-west Turkmenistan and in the eastern Pamirs, monumental stone vaults built at ground level were quite common and widespread, serving as family or tribal tombs. Such tombs have yielded a rich variety of articles – weapons, ornaments (including some in the animal style), and horse trappings very

29. *Skifi i Sarmati*, 1972, pp. 96–7.

30. Gryaznov, 1975, p. 10; *Istoriya Turkmenskoy SSR*, 1957, pp. 69–71.

similar to those found in the Sarmatian monuments in the Ural region. Besides local earthenware, they contain bronze weapons and ornaments, imported beads (carnelian and lazurite) and pottery vessels brought in from the oases, providing further evidence of the links between the Saka-Massagetae and the Central and Western Asian worlds. The lion and panther motifs in the art of south Tagisken and Uygarak locate the Sakas of the Aral Sea region in the area to which the Scytho-Siberian animal style had spread.³¹ Overall the nomadic tribes made a very significant contribution to the development of the Central Asian peoples. Military and political vitality, vigorous economic development, fostered by the commerce essential to the nomadic way of life, and strikingly original art were their characteristic features.

31. Vishnevskaya, 1973; Vishnevskaya and Itina, 1971; Itina, 1981.

NOMADS IN EASTERN CENTRAL ASIA*

N. Ishjamts

Early Mongolia

In the first millennium B.C. Mongolia and the adjoining regions of Central Asia, unlike China and other countries with a settled way of life, constituted a distinctively original nomadic world inhabited by aboriginal tribes and clans, who kept sheep, goats and cattle. One of their principal occupations was the breeding of horses, in particular the Przewalski horse – which had been domesticated earlier – a small, stocky animal with unusual endurance, widely used by the Huns, Türks and Mongols. The two-humped Bactrian camel was of great importance in the climatic conditions of the Gobi Desert. South of the Gobi Desert, a small number of donkeys and mules were bred. It is interesting to note that the wild ancestors of these horses, camels and asses were still found at that time in the south-western part of the Mongolian Gobi east of the Altai, in Dzungaria and Kazakhstan. In the period under review – 700–300 B.C. – the territory of Mongolia and other parts of Inner Asia knew a fully developed nomadic way of life, often referred to as Central Asian nomadism.

The people who then lived in the territory of what is now Mongolia, Inner Mongolia, Dzungaria and southern Siberia have left behind them an enormous number of 'stone-slab' graves, 'reindeer stones' and other material vestiges of their existence.

The stone-slab graves are so described because at ground level they are bordered by a rectangular wall of stone slabs sunk edgewise into the ground. At one corner of a stone-slab grave there is often a stone column, sometimes decorated with the images of animals. The skeletons found in these graves lie on their backs, usually with their heads turned towards the east, and are accompanied by the bones of domestic animals, clay vessels and other articles. Some of the vessels are made of reddish clay with handles; others are of brownish-grey

* See Map 4.

clay and are covered with hatchings like the clay vessels of the following Hsiung-nu period.

The peoples buried in these graves had fully mastered casting techniques. Their graves contain beautiful bronze objects and iron articles (or vestiges of them). The Scythian-type bronze pots, axes, daggers, arrowheads, bronze and iron horse's bits from the stone-slab graves of Mongolia bear a striking resemblance to similar articles found in the graves of the region beyond the Baikal and in Ordos. Mongolia also boasts many specimens of reindeer stones – stone columns decorated with images of galloping reindeer, sun discs and weapons, which in technique and design have much in common with the 'animal style' of the ancient monuments of representational art found in other parts of the steppe belt of Europe and Asia.

In addition, large numbers of cowries from the Indian Ocean, white cylindrical beads made of prophyllite, fragments of Chinese three-legged vessels, and ornaments of nephrite (rings, discs and half-discs) and mother-of-pearl have been found in the stone-slab graves of Mongolia.¹ For the most part, these objects reached Mongolia through trade with China, Central Asia, Khotan and Afghanistan. The country's cultural links extended through Sogdiana to India and across Kazakhstan as far as the Black Sea and eastern Europe.

The various tribes of the zone, who undoubtedly spoke different languages and were ethnically and culturally different, possessed many articles that were similar in shape. This is especially true of the weapons, horse harness and ornaments. Initially the predominant type of weapon was the bronze-socketed arrowhead with a flat tip (striking area), oval or rhomboid in shape. This was subsequently replaced by the socketed trihedral or pyramidal arrowhead. Horse's bits showed striking similarities. At first, bits with stirrup-shaped end rings were exclusively used, but were later supplanted by bits with rounded rings. With the introduction of bridles and metal bits it became possible to ride on horseback over long distances, and this led to much closer relations between tribes and significantly strengthened economic and cultural contacts between far-flung provinces of the steppe.

In terms of the general level of development, the culture of stone-slab graves and reindeer stones of Mongolia and other parts of the Eurasian steppe belt of the seventh to third centuries B.C. coincided with the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages. Already by 400–300 B.C. iron articles were widespread in Mongolia and throughout Inner Asia and heralded the beginning of the next stage in development.

According to the ancient Chinese bone inscriptions, the famous *Shih-chi* (Historical Records) of the scholar Szü-ma Ch'ien, and other sources, the territory of present-day Mongolia, Inner Mongolia and Dzungaria was in times long past inhabited by the Hsien-yün, the Hsiung-nu and other nomadic cattle-

1. Okladnikov, 1955, p. 261.

breeding tribes. In the first millennium B.C., these territories were successively inhabited by the Hu, the Tung Hu, the Hsi Hu and the Hsiung-nu.² Amongst the above-mentioned peoples, the Hu and the Hsiung-nu occupied the territory of Mongolia. The Tung Hu (which means 'the Eastern Hu' in Chinese) lived in eastern Mongolia and western Manchuria, whereas the Hsi Hu ('the Western Hu') lived in the area to the south-west and west of Mongolia.

The Hsiung-nu Empire

Archaeological evidence from the seventh to the third century B.C. provides a picture of nomadic societies with a patriarchal-clan organization, using slaves obtained through capture or purchase. With the further spread of horse-breeding and the development of bronze culture, the tribal-clan élite grew in strength, while the rank-and-file members of the tribal community were more constricted. The development of property and social differentiations in society led to the disintegration of the clan structure, and with the onset of the Iron Age, quite large nomadic tribal unions came into being.

In the period from the seventh to the third century B.C., more powerful tribal unions arose in Inner Asia – the Hsiung-nu in Ordos and central Mongolia, the Tung Hu in eastern Mongolia and western Manchuria and the Yüeh-chih in Gansu and the lands between Dzungaria and Ordos. To the south, Tángut-Tibetan tribes led a nomadic way of life in the vicinity of Koko Nor (Qinghai). The Central Asian nomadic world was increasingly becoming a military and political power.

Relations between China and the nomads were at times anything but peaceful. China of the Ch'in dynasty (246–207 B.C.) built the famous Great Wall,³ a military fortification running along the length of its frontier. In 214 B.C. the Ch'in court sent an army of 100,000 men against the Hsiung-nu, captured Ordos from them and then the foothills of the Yin-shan. Towards the close of the third century B.C., as a result of their rising prosperity from cattle-breeding, the development of their iron industry and military skill, the twenty-four Hsiung-nu tribes increased considerably in strength; and from their tribal union the powerful Hsiung-nu Empire emerged.

The dramatic events that attended the emergence of the nomadic Hsiung-nu state find literary, albeit somewhat legendary, expressions in the sources. At the close of the third century B.C., a certain tribal chief, T'ou-man by name, with the title of *shan-yü* – which meant 'the greatest' or 'the best' – headed the Hsiung-nu tribal union. According to legend, he had two sons from different wives. To secure the throne for his favourite younger son, he handed

2. Sima Qian, 1931.

3. Bai Shouyi, 1980, p. 116.

over his elder son, Mao-tun, as a hostage to the Yüeh-chih. T'ou-man then attacked the Yüeh-chih, hoping that they would kill their hostage, but Mao-tun managed to steal a horse and return home. His father put 10,000 families under his control. Mao-tun forthwith set about training his cavalry in the arts of war and ordered all his horsemen to shoot their arrows only in the wake of his whistling arrow. Failure to comply with the order was punishable by death. When he saw that his warriors were adequately trained, Mao-tun, while hunting, shot his father with an arrow and killed him on the spot.

After 209 B.C., when Mao-tun proclaimed himself *shan-yü*, the Hsiung-nu state rapidly became a powerful nomadic empire. Lung-chêng, 'The Dragon Site', the nomadic tribal encampment and headquarters of the Hsiung-nu *shan-yü*, was located in the south-east spurs of the Khangay mountains, in a region where Karakorum and other political centres of the Turkic and Mongol peoples were later to come into being. The leader of the Hsiung-nu became the keeper of the nephritic seal which was inscribed with the words: 'The state seal of the Hsiung-nu *shan-yü*'. The rise of a Hsiung-nu state system, with a capital for the *shan-yü*, a seal, flag, border guards and the other attributes of sovereignty, marked the beginnings of a distinctive nomadic power.⁴

The Tung Hu, who heard that Mao-tun had killed his father, decided to take advantage of the resulting confusion and demanded that Mao-tun should surrender to them his treasured *argamak* (a fleet-footed horse) and his beloved wife. Mao-tun agreed to both demands. They then demanded an uninhabited strip of the desert, unsuitable for cattle-breeding, but Mao-tun answered: 'Land is the foundation of a state. How can it be surrendered?' He then launched a military campaign against the Tung Hu, who were taken completely unawares and routed. On his return, he attacked the Yüeh-chih, driving them westward, subjugated the Wu-sun of Semirechye and recaptured Ordos.

In 198 B.C., a treaty of 'peace and alliance' was concluded between the Hsiung-nu and China. The Han emperor officially recognized that the Hsiung-nu Empire enjoyed power comparable to that of his own empire, and that its sovereignty extended over all the northern lands beyond the Chinese borders. The ruler of the Hsiung-nu, in turn, recognized the sovereignty of the Chinese emperor over all territory behind the Great Wall.⁵ The treaty further provided that the Han court should give the emperor's daughter in marriage to the *shan-yü* and should send him every year a lavish quantity of gifts – silks, fabrics, handicrafts, rice, gold and money, which was regarded by the Hsiung-nu as a form of tribute. The Hsiung-nu also received tribute from the Wu-huan and subjugated other peoples; they sent their royal daughters to the Wu-sun and held hostages.

Controlling a key section of the Silk Route, the caravan trade link

4. Konovalov, 1976, p. 3.

5. Taskin, 1968, pp. 25, 42, 47, 48.

between China and the West, the Hsiung-nu reaped great profits from its international trade. They zealously fought to maintain control of these routes and successfully vied with China for the hegemony of Central Asia.

From the time of Mao-tun, there was regular trade between the Hsiung-nu and the Chinese, the Hsiung-nu exchanging cattle, wool and furs for Chinese goods. Between 129 and 90 B.C., however, the Han emperor Wu-ti changed the policy of his predecessors and launched a number of major military campaigns against the Hsiung-nu, but he was unsuccessful. When the Han court proposed that the Hsiung-nu should become a vassal state, they detained the Chinese ambassador and refused to discuss the matter, decapitating their own master of ceremonies who had allowed the ambassador to enter his yurt.

Between 70 and 60 B.C. there was internecine war between various factions of the Hsiung-nu leadership seeking the throne. When Hu-han-yeh became *shan-yü*, one of his brothers proclaimed himself *shan-yü* and attacked him. Hu-han-yeh was obliged to acknowledge his subordination to China in 53 B.C., but managed to preserve Hsiung-nu statehood with all its symbols of sovereignty. When he finally crushed his rival, Hu-han-yeh was able to act more and more independently and transferred his headquarters to the Ulan Bator region, where it remained after his death. But in A.D. 48, as a result of worsening internal dissension, the Hsiung-nu split into two factions. The elders of the eight southern tribes proclaimed the aristocrat Pi as *shan-yü*, migrated to China, fell under the sway of the Han court and moved to Ordos, north and west Shaanxi.

The Northern Hsiung-nu stubbornly defended their independence, but eventually, in A.D. 93, they were attacked by an alliance of the Chinese and Southern Hsiung-nu from the south, by the Ting-ling, red-bearded, blue-eyed giants from the north, and by the Hsien-pi from the east. The last Northern *shan-yü*, descended from Mao-tun, was killed, and Mongolia was taken over by the Hsien-pi. Some of the Hsiung-nu, notably those of the western branch, did not surrender.

The Hu-yen, an ancient Hun tribe, assumed leadership and marched westward. In contrast to the Southern and Northern Huns, they may be described as Western Huns, whose descendants would later reach Afghanistan, India and the Roman Empire.

The Hsien-pi state

The Hsien-pi, who took over control of Mongolia after the fall of the Hsiung-nu state, had emerged as a powerful tribal union as early as the first century B.C. The main clan of the Hsien-pi had set up their nomadic camp in south-east Mongolia and lived along the middle course of the Liao-ho river. A large number of Hsien-pi now settled in central Mongolia and over 100,000

Hsiung-nu families, who had settled there earlier, adopted their tribal name. T'an-shih-huai, leader of the Hsien-pi tribal union, in A.D. 155 established the Hsien-pi state, which rapidly became one of the most powerful empires of its day, as powerful as the previous Hsiung-nu Empire. The Han court considered that the Hsien-pi's horses were swifter and their weapons sharper than those of the Hsiung-nu, and the Hsien-pi, too, managed to acquire good-quality iron from the border regions of China. Their political centre, the headquarters of T'an-shih-huai, was in the south-east near the Darkhan mountains but was later moved to the former *shan-yü*'s headquarters in the Khangay mountains.⁶

Between A.D. 155 and 166, T'an-shih-huai conducted a series of major military campaigns that led to the extension of Hsien-pi power over the Great Steppe as far as southern Siberia and from Ussuri to the Caspian Sea. Until the third decade of the third century A.D. the Hsien-pi state was the leading power in Central Asia.

Under their rule Mongolia saw a complex ethnocultural development. From the mixing of the Huns and Hsien-pi a new culture emerged with its own linguistic particularities, which was later to serve as the point of departure for the formation of the early Mongolian ethnic group with its distinctive language and culture.⁷

Subsequently the Hsien-pi state split into several parts. Until the close of the third century, it only effectively controlled central and south-east Mongolia. The Mu-yung, T'o-pa and T'u-yü-hun, kindred tribes of the Hsien-pi, seceded to set up separate states in the south. At about the same time another Mongolian-speaking people appeared on the scene in central Mongolia – the Ju-jan, who were destined to play a key role in the history of the period following that of the Hsien-pi.⁸

The economy, social structure and state organization of the Hsiung-nu

The major achievement of the ancestors of the Hsiung-nu was the opening up of the steppes and the Mongolian Gobi. Until then, the Great Steppe and the desert, like the sea, had divided the inhabited wooded steppe into two distinct and separate belts. The inhabitants of each belt – agriculturists, sedentary cattle-breeders and forest hunters – had no way of crossing the Gobi, and the steppe grasslands went to waste unused. The Hsiung-nu bred a large number of horses and draught oxen and introduced as a mobile home the covered wagon on high wheels. They were the first to engage in nomadic cattle-breeding (Fig. 1) and in organized hunts – infinitely more productive than individual hunting – and by the third century B.C. were practising falconry.⁹

6. Perlee, 1961, p. 21.

7. Bira, 1977, pp. 379–80.

8. Ishjamts, 1974, pp. 24–6.

9. Gumilev, 1960, p. 96.

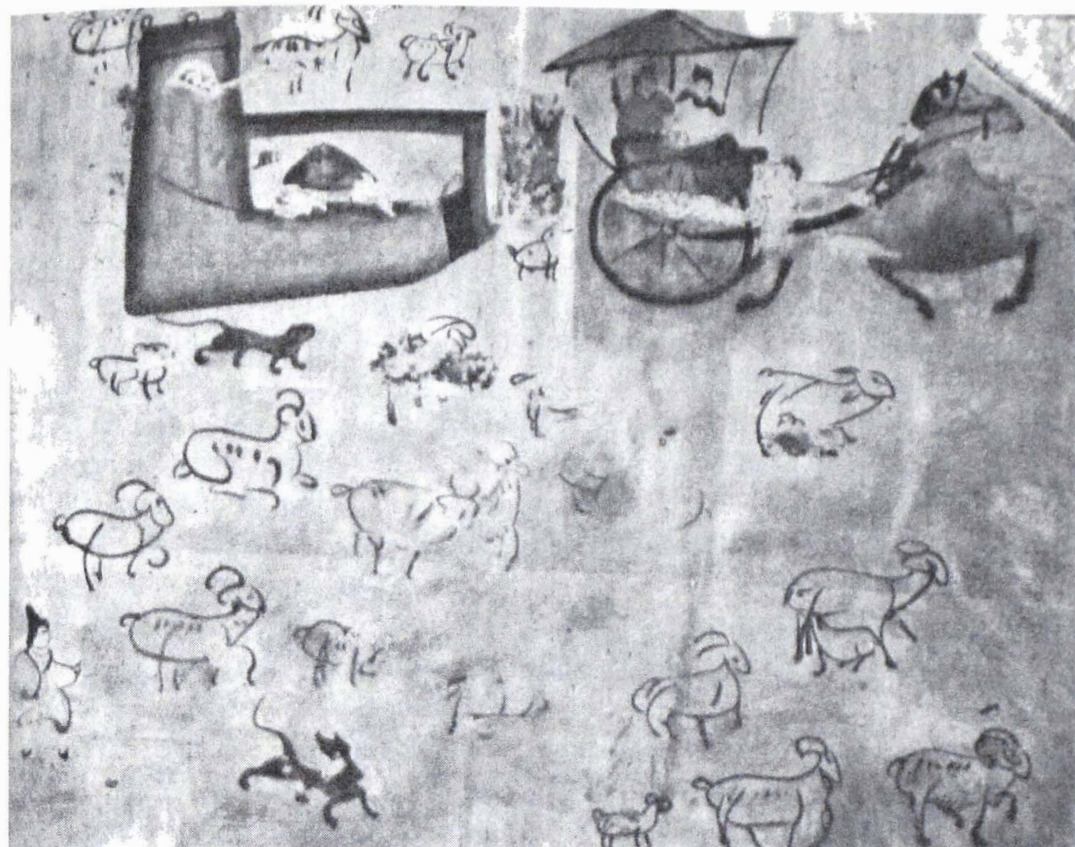


FIG. 1. Nomadic cattle-breeding of the Hsiung-nu.
Drawings from cemeteries of Inner Mongolia (China).

Apart from cattle-breeding and hunting, they engaged in agriculture, as can be seen from the grain hullers found in Mongolia and in the regions of the Great Wall. War prisoners and deserters from China and other settled countries were widely used as agricultural labourers.

Their covered wagons on high wheels, in which they lived, were comfortable, providing good protection from wind and frost, and more security, because in the event of danger, the wagon-dwellers could flee with all their possessions to other encampments.

Although the Hsiung-nu Empire was made up of a large number of different peoples, the Hsiung-nu themselves were divided into twenty-four major tribes, each consisting of kinship groups, clans and patriarchal families. The Hu-yen, Hsü-pu and Lan were regarded as the oldest and most prominent, but from the time of Mao-tun, the Hsiung-nu *shan-yü* came from another noble family, the Lüan-ti, that became the most distinguished of them all.

The tribal nobility formed the aristocratic élite, while the rank-and-file members of the tribe were relatively poor. There were quite a number of slaves engaged in agriculture, handicrafts and cattle-breeding,¹⁰ but they were more like domestic servants. It will be seen that Hsiung-nu society was in a state of transition from a tribal to a class system, and the Hsiung-nu Empire represented a particular form of class-based state organization.¹¹

The ruler of the empire was the *shan-yü*. He called himself '*ch'eng-li ku-t'u*' (Son of Heaven).¹² His power was considerable and hereditary but by no means absolute. In their administration it is even possible to identify several classes of officials or, to be more precise, nobles divided into eastern and western groups, terms which also signify 'senior' or 'junior'. The first class consisted of the Chu-ch'i princes ('*chu-ch'i*' meaning 'wisdom'). The Eastern Chu-ch'i prince was supposed to be the heir apparent, but at times his right to succeed to the throne was disregarded. The second class consisted of the Lu-li princes; the third class, the Great Leaders; the fourth class, the Great Tu-yü; the fifth class, the Great Tang Hu. In addition, the Eastern and Western Chu-ch'i princes and the Lu-li princes were called 'four horns' and the 'great leaders', Tu-yü and Tang Hu were called 'six horns'. These high-ranking figures were always members of the *shan-yü*'s clan.

Alongside this aristocracy of blood there grew up an aristocracy of talent – the service nobility (not related to the *shan-yü*'s family). They were known by the name of Ku-tu-hou, and were aides of the highest-ranking nobility, performing all the administrative tasks. Apart from this top-level aristocracy, there was the clan nobility – princes affiliated exclusively with the clans, *sui generis* clan chiefs or elected elders.

10. De Guignes, 1756–58, Vol. I, Part 2, p. 15.

11. Harmatta, 1952, p. 287.

12. Ban Gu, Vol. 13, Chapter 97a: 7a.

Hsiung-nu society possessed its own customary legal system and Chinese authors have noted that 'their laws were simple and easily executed'. Major crimes, such as the drawing of a sword, were punishable by death and theft was punished by confiscation not only of the thief's property but also that of his family. Minor crimes were punished by cuts on the face. Trials lasted no more than ten days, and at no one time were there ever more than a few dozen people under arrest. Apart from the customary law a system of public law began to emerge under Mao-tun. Violation of military discipline and evasion of military service both carried the death penalty. These extraordinary laws contributed greatly to strengthening the cohesion of the Hsiung-nu, turning them into the most powerful state in Central Asia.

Hsiung-nu burials and the finds from Noin-Ula

The main sources for the study of the Hsiung-nu are their graves and settlements, the latter to a lesser degree in view of their nomadic way of life. Many of them are to be found in Mongolia, southern Siberia and Ordos. There are four major Hsiung-nu burial sites: two in central Mongolia and two in the south beyond Lake Baikal. The largest, the Khunui-göl, is located in a remote area of the Khangay mountains, in the basin of the River Khunui. It was here, in 1956, that T. Dorzhsuren and other Mongolian archaeologists counted over 300 burials.¹³ In the mountains of Noin-Ula, 122 km north of Ulan Bator, 212 burial grounds have been recorded. At the end of the last century, the Russian archaeologist Y. D. Tal'ko-Grintsevich located 214 graves at Sudzhinsk beyond the Baikal, 10 km east of Kyakhta. He also excavated the Derestui burial ground in the former Selenga District beyond Lake Baikal, with some 260 burials. It seems likely that these four large burial grounds belonged to the four noble clans of the Hsiung-nu, and that Mao-tun and other early *shan-yü* were interred in the Khunui-göl burial ground, which contains some of the most magnificent Hsiung-nu tombs, while Hu-han-yeh and his descendants were buried in Noin-Ula.

Of particular interest are the contents of the burial chamber of a tomb in the Noin-Ula mountains accidentally discovered in 1912 by a Mongol Gold engineer and scientifically excavated in 1924. Like other tombs nearby, Noin-Ula Tomb No. 6 was square, with sides measuring 24.5 m and an embankment 1.62–1.95 m high. On the south side it was also protected by a long bank. The sides of the square and the bank were faced with stone and aligned to the points of the compass. In the inner chamber stood coffins, pointing south, on a floor of planks which showed faint traces of lacquer and paint. Among the objects found was a woollen canopy covering the ceiling of the outer chamber and a

13. Dorzhsuren, 1958, p. 6.

heavy felt carpet, with scenes of animals locked in combat, lying under the coffin. A woollen cloth with embroidered plant motifs and figures of different animals was affixed to the ceiling of the outer chamber, covering practically its whole surface. The fortunate discovery of a Chinese lacquer cup with two inscriptions made it possible to date Tomb No. 6 quite closely to the beginning of the first century A.D. It is, in fact, the tomb of Wu-chu-lü, the *shan-yü* of the Hsiung-nu Empire.

To judge from the finds in the Noin-Ula tombs, permanent dwellings of the Hsiung-nu were equipped with plank beds, and their mobile dwellings were furnished with low tables on short legs. The height of these tables indicates that people sat round them on the floor, which was covered with heavy felt. It is interesting to note that such small, low tables were extensively used by Central Asian cattle-breeding peoples.

The Noin-Ula tombs contained a large variety of Hsiung-nu vessels of wood, metal and clay. The most remarkable metal vessel was a bronze oil-lamp mounted on three legs with a conical stem for a wick in the centre. There were fragments of a big bronze kettle for cooking meat, and a smaller kettle, notable for its handles in the shape of animal heads. Among other finds were minute pyrite crystals, pierced with holes and used as dress ornaments, beads of malachite and glass of different colours and amber beads of various shapes and sizes. Of particular interest was an amber bead in the shape of a lion's head. Apart from the beads contained in Hsiung-nu graves of ordinary type, mainly of women, bronze mirrors and various dress ornaments that belonged to the various *shan-yü* have come to light.

Their main form of transport was the saddle-horse. Horse bridles, bits and saddles resembled those of the Altai in Scythian times. Saddles generally consisted of two leather cushions padded with wool, but a few had a wooden frame with pommels at the front and back, and stirrups. The stirrured saddle represented a major step forward.

In spite of the fact that iron and smelting techniques were known to the Hsiung-nu and that they could produce various kinds of iron objects, they did not strike fire from a flint, but obtained it by rubbing two sticks together or, more exactly, by boring one into the other. The Noin-Ula graves, thanks to the fine state of preservation of the wood found there, provide a full range of articles used for fire-making.

The most remarkable piece of bone jewellery work was a carved cylinder representing a winged and horned mythical wolf. Especially notable were the embroidered felt carpets of local manufacture found in the Noin-Ula tombs. The seams of the middle section of the carpets were embroidered in a distinctive spiral pattern, and their borders were covered with a design in which scenes of fighting animals alternated with tree patterns.

The Hsiung-nu were in direct and close contact not only with China but with neighbouring peoples to the east and west, who were culturally very much

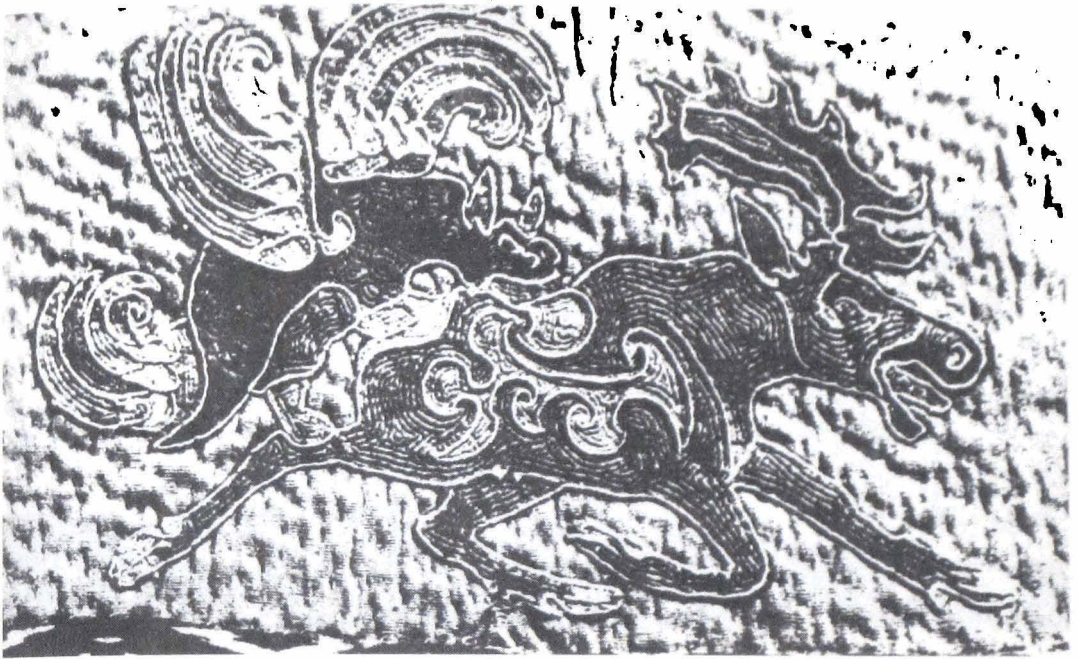


FIG. 2. Hsiung-nu felt carpet from Noin-Ula (Mongolia).

like them. A remarkable bronze crown in the shape of a wolf's head from Noin-Ula may be compared to the figures of wolf heads in the art of the Altaic Scythians. Other Hsiung-nu articles in Mongolia and Ordos display striking similarities with southern Siberian works of art. Animals are portrayed with protruding haunches – a style very characteristic of the art found here.

Of particular interest are the scenes of combat between a yak and a horned 'lion' and a griffin attacking a deer, on the felt carpets of Noin-Ula (Figs. 2–4). The yak is highly stylized with an abnormally large head hanging low and a protruding tongue. Scenes of beasts of prey attacking artiodactyla have been characteristic of the art of the peoples of Western Asia since early times – a motif that entered Asia Minor from Mesopotamia and spread through the Sakas to southern Siberia and then to the Hsiung-nu.

Motifs borrowed from the plant kingdom are exceedingly rare in the art of Eurasian nomadic tribes, such as the Hsiung-nu. All the more interesting, therefore, are the conventional representations of trees on the Noin-Ula carpets in the spaces between the animal combat scenes. Here we have a replica of the 'sacred tree', a typical feature of Assyrian art. Hsiung-nu felt carpets were decorated with borders of squares, crosses, 'battle-axes' and other figures. The most widespread motif on the seams of the felt carpets consisted of rhomboids or spirals arranged in two varieties. It is interesting to note that this Hsiung-nu motif later found widespread application in the art of the Mongolian and Turkic peoples and can still be seen today on the felt carpets and the protective covers of the Buryats, Kyrgyz and Kazakhs.

While there is no real trace of the influence of Chinese art on objects

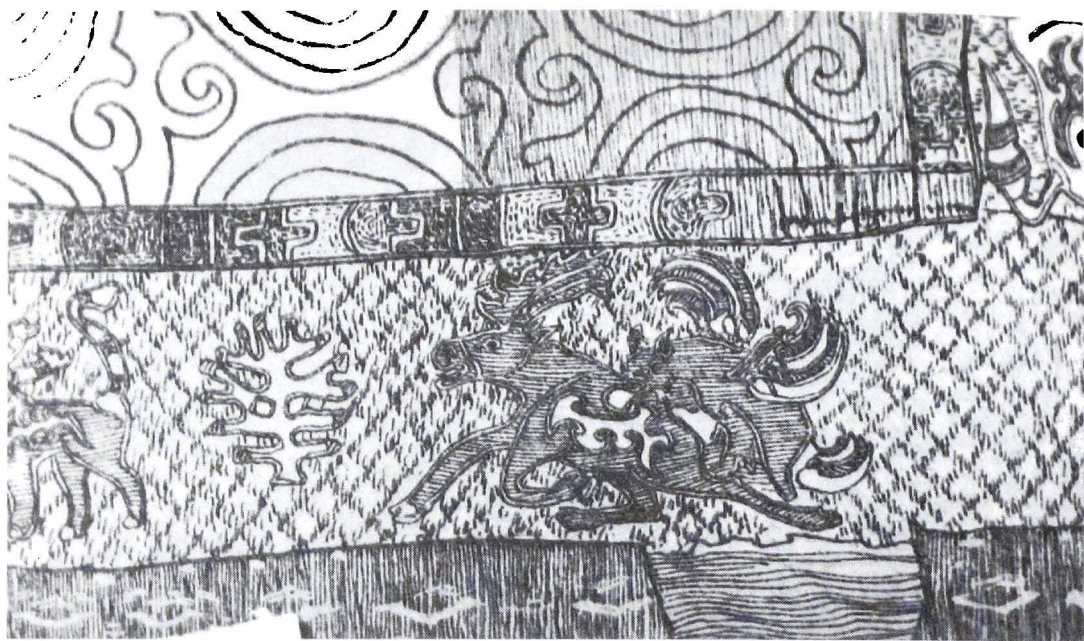


FIG. 3. Hsiung-nu felt carpet from Noin-Ula (Mongolia).

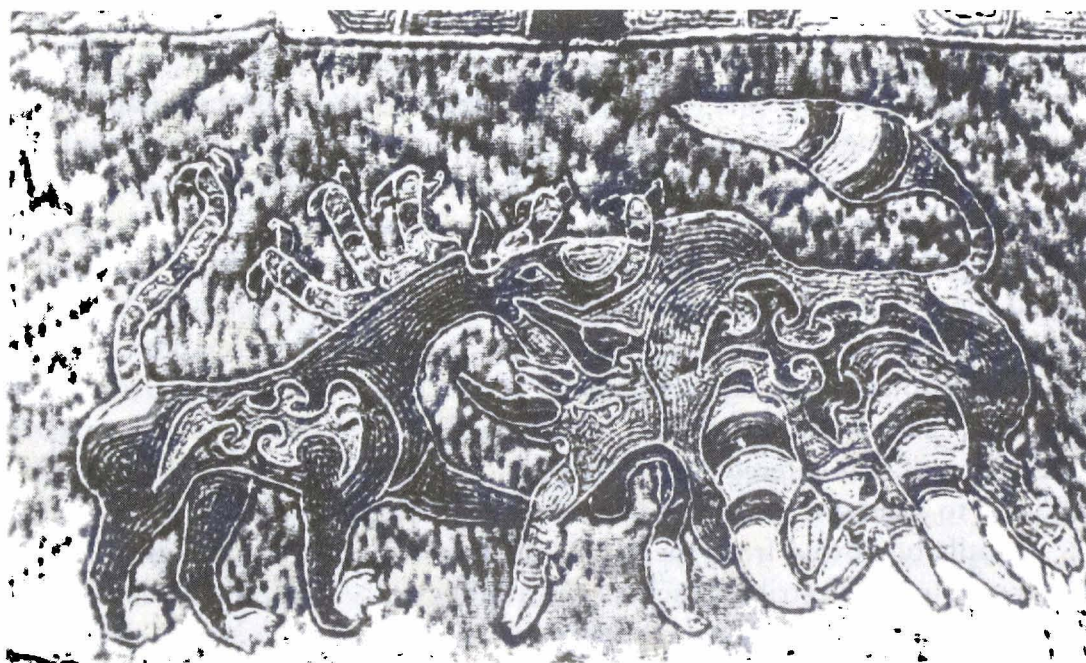


FIG. 4. Hsiung-nu felt carpet from Noin-Ula (Mongolia).

found in the graves of common people, traces are to be found in those of the nobility. The mythological animal embroidered on the silk fabrics found in Noin-Ula is essentially Chinese in character. Its body resembles an eagle with upraised tail, of which the tuft is abnormally large. The animal's paws are like the tiger paws in the art of the Altaic and southern Siberian tribes of Scythian date. The front of the chest is represented by a succession of superimposed

scales, and the wings are in the Persian style of the Achaemenids. Thus we have here an example of the influences of Hsiung-nu, Altaic, Scythian and Persian art on fabrics of Chinese character.

Hsiung-nu customs, religion and culture

The influence of the Hsiung-nu and also of Middle and Western Asia on China was especially great in the military field. As early as 307 B.C., Wu Ling Wang, a prince of the Chou dynasty, introduced the use of the dress of the nomadic Hu into China and began to instruct his subjects in the art of shooting with bow-and-arrow. The Emperor Ch'in Shih-huang-ti introduced large cavalry detachments into the Chinese army and thereby ensured the success of his operations against the Hsiung-nu at Mên Ch'ien Yang. His cavalymen were heavily armed and armoured, like those of the Assyrian army which had introduced cavalry as an arm of their military organization, and already used chain mail, plate armour and protective armour for horses.¹⁴

When Mao-tun reorganized the Hsiung-nu army, he replaced its heavily armed horsemen by light cavalry, armed with long composite bows, creating a military force with much greater manoeuvrability. He reorganized his army, subjected it to strict discipline, and introduced major improvements in military strategy and tactics. These developments in military science and weaponry were of great importance both for China and other countries. The composite bow and the stirrured saddle were widely adopted throughout the Eurasian steppe, Parthia and Syria; and the descendants of the Hsiung-nu with their traditional bows later became one of the most dangerous adversaries of the Roman legionaries in Pannonia.¹⁵

The emergence of its powerful empire had a great influence on the Hsiung-nu's material and spiritual life. Although it could not radically change their nomadic ways, it led to the establishment of an entirely new central headquarters for their *shan-yü* in the Khangay mountains where, in addition to his residence, they erected a sanctuary and other buildings. Settlements appeared in the steppe – fortified places for agricultural and craft communities like Gua-dov (367 × 360 m), Baruun dereegiin kherem (345 × 335 m) in Mongolia and the settlement at Ivolginsk (348 × 200 m) beyond Lake Baikal. In the Talas valley under the rule of Chih-chih a fortress showing distinct Roman influence was built, and more than 100 foot-soldiers were garrisoned there. It has been suggested that they may have been Roman legionaries from the defeated army of Crassus who had surrendered to the Parthians after the battle of Carrhae in 53 B.C. and been sent to serve on their eastern frontier at Merv, from where they

14. Laufer, 1914, p. 217; Kiselev, 1951, p. 321.

15. Uray-Köhalmi, 1974, p. 148.

became mercenaries of the Hsiung-nu. Nevertheless, the *shan-yü* of the Hsiung-nu did not alter their way of life. They continued to receive ambassadors in their yurts which were now more presentable than in earlier days. The overwhelming majority of the Hsiung-nu, especially the rank-and-file, also continued to live in yurts. The image of a yurt of that period, a covered wagon on high wheels drawn by oxen, found on one of the south Siberian stone sculptures, and the miniature images of a harness yoke found among the south Siberian and north Chinese bronze articles, need not cause any surprise.¹⁶ In these yurts of the Hsiung-nu, as later in those of the Mongols and Türks, the left side of the entrance was for men and the right side for women.

Hunting and archery played a major role in their daily life and existence; and a reference in the *Shih-chi* shows that they actively encouraged their children to learn hunting from an early age: 'As soon as a boy is able to ride a ram, he shoots birds and small game with a bow, and when he gets to be a little older, he shoots foxes and hares.'¹⁷ The Hsiung-nu women were not only remarkable horse-riders but had bows and arrows, and assisted their husbands in defending children and old people from enemy attack. On the wall of the Talas fortress they fought valiantly beside their husbands and the Romans against the Chinese troops, and they were the last to leave their posts. The participation of women in defence and the training of children to handle the bow-and-arrow were evidently dictated by the necessities of life. Only in this way could the nomadic Hsiung-nu, a numerically small group, defend their independence and way of life.

The Hsiung-nu practised exogamy, but their *shan-yü* could only take wives from a limited number of noble clans. They practised polygamy and levirate marriage was customary, that is, on the death of a father or elder brother, a wife was transferred to a surviving son or younger brother, provided that she was not that man's mother. The *shan-yü*'s court also complied with this practice.

The *Shih-chi* says that on the death of a Hsiung-nu emperor his close relatives and concubines were buried with him, but archaeological excavations do not bear this out. If such a custom had ever been practised by the Hsiung-nu, the actual burial of people had long been replaced by symbolic actions. After the death of her husband, a Hsiung-nu woman would place a lock of her hair in her husband's grave as a sign of mourning, symbolizing her journey to the next world to accompany him.

The Hsiung-nu initially believed in animism, totemism and in life beyond the grave. From the time of Mao-tun, Shamanism became the state religion. The chief shaman was chosen from the sorcerers and served the *shan-yü*, his clan and relatives. The head-dress of a shaman was found in one of the graves of

16. Bira et al., 1984, p. 48.

17. Bichurin, 1950, Vol. I, p. 40.

Noin-Ula and was very reminiscent of the Mongol darkhans' head-dress, the only difference being in the frontal representation of the totem spirits. On the Hsiung-nu head-dress there is a bird, which may represent the face of the anthropomorphic spirit of an ancestor.

The Hsiung-nu worshipped the sun, the moon and other heavenly bodies and made sacrificial offerings to the heavens, the earth, spirits and their ancestors. The *shan-yü* described himself as 'born of heaven and earth, brought forth by the sun and moon'. The *Shih-chi* says: 'At daybreak the *shan-yü* sets out from camp to worship the rising sun, at nightfall to worship the moon.'¹⁸ The Hsiung-nu nobles gathered at the *shan-yü*'s headquarters in the fifth lunar month and made sacrificial offerings to their ancestors, the heavens, the earth and the spirits. Three times a year they congregated at the shrine of the moon where, on the day of the 'dog' of the first, fifth and ninth months, they offered sacrifices to the heavenly spirit.

It is not known whether the Hsiung-nu had images of their ancestors or spirits. Of great interest, in that regard, was the discovery, in the Noin-Ula tomb, of a translucent stone 5 mm thick, with a schematic incised representation of a human figure. Three holes bored into the figure indicate that it was attached to something. It may have been some kind of anthropomorphic amulet. The Hsiung-nu prince who ruled over the region of Koko Nor and Gansu worshipped a huge 'golden idol'.

In reckoning time the Hsiung-nu used a duodecimal animal cycle in which the days of the 'dog' and the 'snake' were regarded as auspicious for worship. This duodecimal cycle, which reached the Hsiung-nu from India or Babylon via Sogdiana, remained in force for as long as the Hsiung-nu existed. Their basic system of calculation, however, was decimal, and they used this in their military organization. They customarily launched a military expedition at the time of the full moon, but its outcome hinged on the prophecies of the shamans, sorcerers and soothsayers. Like the Mongols, they used a ram's shoulder-bone to predict the future, placing the bone in a fire, and reading the future from the lines which appeared on it.

The Chinese sources say that the Hsiung-nu did not have an ideographic form of writing as the Chinese did, but in the second century B.C. a renegade Chinese dignitary by the name of Yue 'taught the *shan-yü* how to write official letters to the Chinese court on a wooden tablet 31 cm long, and to use a seal and large-sized folder'. But the same sources indicate that when the Hsiung-nu noted down something or transmitted a message, they made cuts on a piece of wood (*k'o-mu*) and they also mention a 'Hu script'. The fact is that over twenty carved characters were discovered among the objects at Noin-Ula and other Hun burial sites in Mongolia and the region beyond Lake Baikal (Figs. 5 and 6). Most of these characters are either identical or very similar to letters of the

18. Ibid., p. 50.

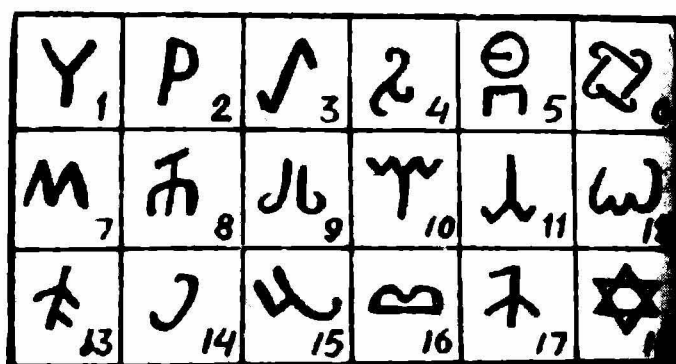


FIG. 5. Runic characters of Hsiung-nu-Hsien-pi script (Mongolia and Inner Mongolia).

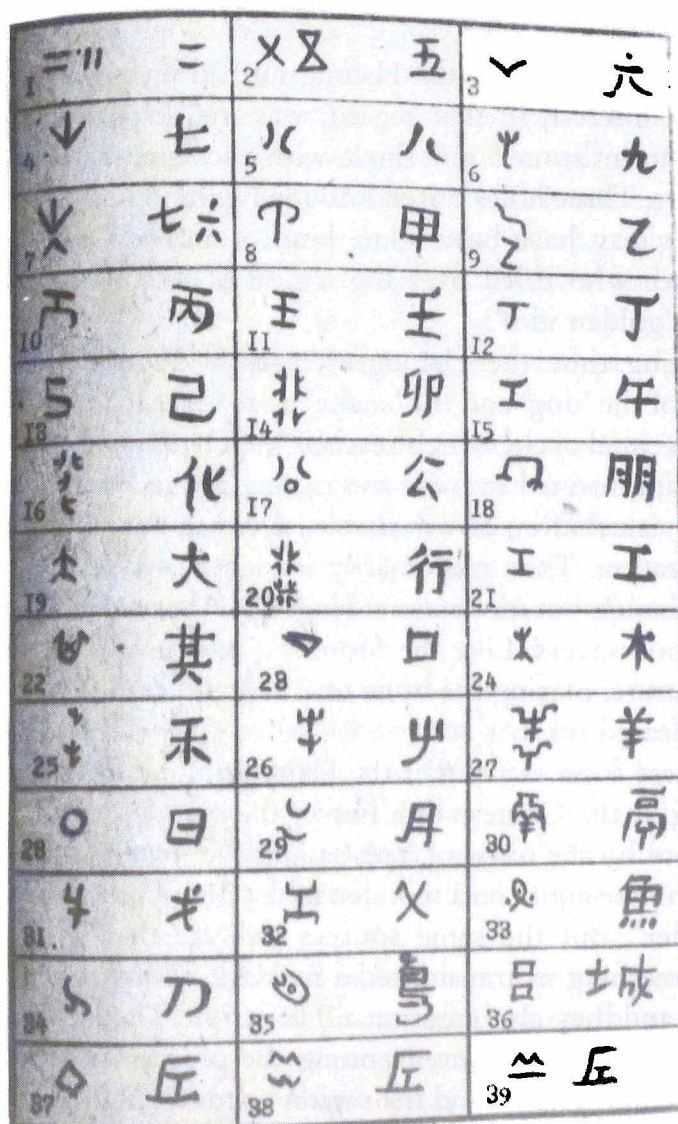


FIG. 6. Runic characters of Hsiung-nu-Hsien-pi script (Mongolia and Inner Mongolia).

Orkhon-Yenisey script of the Türks of the Early Middle Ages that occurs now and again in the Eurasian steppes. From this some specialists hold that the Hsiung-nu had a script similar to ancient Eurasian runiform, and that this alphabet itself later served as the basis for ancient Turkic writing.

Myths, legends and other forms of oral literature occupied an important place in Hsiung-nu spiritual life. Tradition has it that in front of the headquarters of the *shan-yü* there was an artificial pool, the dwelling place of a dragon who had fallen from heaven and become an object of worship. It was not only the Chinese who worshipped the dragon. While the sources portray the Hsiung-nu as a redoubtable nation of fierce warriors, they were actually fun-loving people. They would gather before the headquarters of the *shan-yü* and the temple of their ancestors to organize amusements like horse-jumping and camel races and other festivities. They would sing slow songs, a custom that later became widespread among the Mongolians. The sounds of flutes and drums and the strains of a few types of string instruments were heard throughout the steppes. As early as the beginning of the second century B.C. Hsiung-nu music and dances were favoured by the Han emperor. The *k'ung-hou* and the fife, which had come at an earlier time to Inner Asia from Sogdiana, were adopted by the Chinese from the Hsiung-nu.

Many Chinese silks and embroidered fabrics as well as cloth of Western origin were found in the Noin-Ula tombs. There was one woollen wall carpet of Western manufacture and two of Yüeh-chih or Wu-sun origin, a series of embroideries provisionally described as 'Graeco-Bactrian', two portraits displaying similar workmanship and, finally, a tapestry from Parthia or Asia Minor. There were also some remarkable fragments of wall hangings, decorated with patterns representing horsemen, a child warrior flinging a spear or a trident at an eagle, lion griffins and garlands of flowers that have been described in detail by K. V. Trever.¹⁹ The two horsemen depicted on the largest fragment are of Europoid type, with moustaches and tufts of hair over their foreheads reminiscent of Gandhāran sculpture. Their dress and head-dress are typically Iranian. The horses are notable for their coats of different colours, their cropped manes, their elegant long-necked heads and their long slender legs. They were probably the famous thoroughbred Parthian war-horses or the remarkable 'thousand-li' horses of the Hsiung-nu. Along the lower edge of the fragment, between two broad bands, is an embroidered garland of palm leaves interspersed with acacia flowers, their tendrils entwined – a border that is Greek or Graeco-Indian in design.²⁰ Of the two portraits found on the fragments, one has preserved the face of a man whose features are not Mongolian, but bear a much closer resemblance to the Turanian type found in Central Asia and Persia. Trever compared this portrait to the heads found on the bas-reliefs of Gand-

19. Trever, 1940, pp. 141–3, Plates 39–44.

20. Rostovtzeff, 1929, p. 87.

hāran art and concluded that it represented one of the peoples of Central Asia whose culture was in contact with the Hellenized culture of Central Asia, such as that of the Graeco-Bactrians. It is clear that these works are representative of a great artistic culture and consummate craftsmanship.

This nomadic civilization of the Hsiung-nu exerted an influence even on the more advanced cultures of China.²¹ We might mention in this context the Hsiung-nu treatment of the tiger, one of the prototypes of the Chinese *tao-tê*, of winged wolves, goats and horses and, finally, of the bizarre 'aquiline griffon', a fabulous animal with the body of a winged lion and the head of a phoenix.

Hsien-pi culture

Hsien-pi culture was also suggestive of Hsiung-nu culture in many ways; but so far it has not been adequately studied. Between the first and third centuries A.D. it attained a similar level to the culture of the Hsiung-nu. According to historical sources, the Hsien-pi also recorded events by incising wooden tablets. In their practice of Shamanism, they initially worshipped a wooden idol. However, later on, the casting of idols from iron and other metals (Fig. 7) became widespread among the Hsien-pi, as among many other nomadic peoples of Central Asia. In later centuries, other branches of the Hsien-pi tribe, the Mu-yung, T'o-pa and T'u-yü-hun in Inner Mongolia and northern China, created a more advanced form of culture, inheriting many elements from the Hsiung-nu and also borrowing a great deal from the neighbouring countries of Central Asia, China, East Turkestan and southern Siberia. In turn, the Hsien-pi also exerted an influence on them.

The original and distinctive culture of the Hsiung-nu and of the Hsien-pi together constituted the first important stage in the formation of the nomadic civilization of Central Asia, playing an important role between East and West and linking China and Central Asia, while, at the same time, remaining distinctive – a very significant contribution to world culture.

21. Serodzhav, 1977, pp. 4, 22, 106, 109–11.

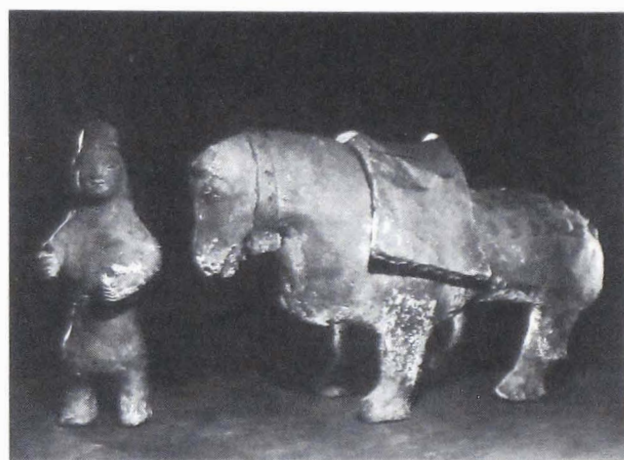


FIG. 7. Hsien-pi terracotta from Inner Mongolia.

THE YÜEH-CHIH AND THEIR MIGRATIONS*

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The Yüeh-chih in Gansu

The Yüeh-chih are the people who, from the latter half of the second century B.C. to the beginning of the first century A.D., occupied and ruled what is now Middle Asia and Afghanistan. They destroyed a country called Ta-hsia – usually identified with the Bactrian kingdom under the Greeks. Their original home is said to have been in the western part of Gansu Province in China, from which they migrated via the northern part of the T'ien Shan mountain range. They were forced to migrate because of the invasion of the Hsiung-nu, who became predominant in Central Asia. The Yüeh-chih settled to the north of the Amu Darya and ruled the country of Ta-hsia, which lies south of the same river. There they established five *hsi-hou* (*yabghu*) or governor-generalships. At the beginning of the first century A.D., the Kushans, one of the five *yabghu*, became powerful and took the place of the Yüeh-chih. This is an outline of the history of the Yüeh-chih. Nothing more is known about them except that the Chinese emperor Wu-ti (140–87 B.C.) of the Former Han sent Chang Ch'ien to the Yüeh-chih to negotiate a military alliance against the Hsiung-nu, but this was not concluded.

Many theories have been published about who the Yüeh-chih were. The oldest theories were based solely on the resemblance of the name of the Yüeh-chih to that of the Goths or Massagetae. But the Goths could have had nothing to do with a people in Central Asia in the second century B.C. Nor can the identification of the Yüeh-chih with the Massagetae, who lived in the plain east of the Caspian and Aral Seas in the fifth century B.C., be maintained.

The identification of the Yüeh-chih with Casia¹ is also based on the simi-

* See Map 4.

1. Egami, 1948, pp. 84 et seq., 1951, pp. 123 et seq.

larity of the names Yüeh-chih and Casia, but there is some additional positive evidence to support it. 'Casia' is the name given by the Greeks in the first century A.D. to the Kunlun mountain range in the south of the Tarim basin and to the region stretching north of it, which is famous even today for the production of jade. According to the *Book of Kuan-tzŭ*, jade was produced either in the country of the Yü-chih, who are considered to be identical with the Yüeh-chih, or in the mountains on their frontier. The *Book of Kuan-tzŭ* is some time before the third century B.C., when the Yüeh-chih dominated the greater part of Mongolia. So it is quite possible that 'Yü-chih', 'Yüeh-chih' and 'Casia' represent the same name; and that the Yüeh-chih were known to the Chinese to be associated with jade.² Presumably jade was known by the name of *casia* because it was produced in the country of the Yüeh-chih, or the Yüeh-chih were known by the name of Casia because of their jade. In a place near modern Khotan in the ancient region of Casia, jade is still called *gutscha*; and 'gutscha' is very similar to the old pronunciation of Yüeh-chih, which may have been 'zguja' or something like that. If the jade was called *casia* because of the Yüeh-chih, the country of Casia might have been the place where the Yüeh-chih originated. But the Yüeh-chih were a great horde of pastoral people, and had 100,000 or 200,000 cavalymen, according to the *Shih-chi* (Book 123), when they reached the Amu Darya. This makes it unlikely that they could have originated in a place such as Casia where the oases could only support a population of a few thousand at the time of the Han dynasty. It must also be remembered that no other nomadic people has ever risen to power in any part of the Tarim basin where Casia was situated. If the Yüeh-chih were called by the name of Casia, because of the *casia* or jade they produced, they must also have had another name of their own. What is certain, however, is that the region of Casia and other countries in the Tarim basin were under the control of the Yüeh-chih; although it is most likely that Casia was the native place of the Yüeh-chih.

Recently Yang Hsien-i⁴ has identified Chü-chih in the *Tso-chuan* under the fourteenth year of Duke Hsiang (559 B.C.) with the Yüeh-chih. There is indeed a resemblance between the two names, and there is the statement of Wu-li, the ancestor of Chü-chih, who was deported to Kua-chou, which the

2. Concerning the Yü-chih as described in the *Book of Kuan-tzŭ*, see Matsuda, 1939, and Kuwabara, 1940, pp. 8-9, 71. See also Wang, 1927, and Pelliot, 1929, p. 150. The latest publication on the *Book of Kuan-tzŭ* concerning the parts in which references are made to the Yü-chih is Ma, 1979, Vol. 1, p. 255; Vol. 2, pp. 411, 429, 460, 462, 560, 569-70. According to Professor Ma, these parts of the *Kuan-tzŭ* were compiled in its present form at various times from the beginning of the Former Han to the reign of Wang Mang, that is to say, from 200 B.C. to A.D. 12. Professor Ma also tries to establish the identity of the Yü-chih with the Yüeh-chih in his other book (Ma, 1982, pp. 476-7).
3. Reconstruction made by Haloun, 1937, p. 316. See also a new reconstruction made by Pulleyblank, 1966, p. 17.
4. Yang, 1983a, pp. 232-3. Another book of the same content was published by the same author (Yang, 1983b, pp. 232-3).

Yüeh-chih occupied in a later period. But Chü-chih is called Jung-tzū, or a barbarian of the West, in the *Tso-chuan*, and the tribe to which he belonged Ch'iang-jung, or the Ch'iang barbarians of the West. In other words, Chü-chih is not a tribal name, but a personal one. Moreover Kua-chou, to which the ancestor of Chü-chih was exiled, was not the place where he lived permanently. For these reasons, even if Chü-chih (a personal name) can represent the same sound as Yüeh-chih (a tribal name), Chü-chih cannot be regarded as identical with the Yüeh-chih.

According to Strabo, the Bactrian kingdom was destroyed by the invasion of four peoples: the Asioi, the Pasianoi, the Tocharoi and the Sakarauoi, all of whom came from beyond the Syr Darya. According to Pompeius Trogus, the Asiani were lords of the Tocharians and conquered the Sacaraucae. Szū-ma Ch'ien, who undoubtedly derived his information from the report of Chang Ch'ien, states that the Yüeh-chih conquered and ruled Ta-hsia. Attempts have been made in the past to reconcile the three statements by identifying the Yüeh-chih with one of four peoples, in the belief that 'Ta-hsia' meant the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom and that Szū-ma Ch'ien tells us of the conquest of that kingdom. Some scholars think that the Asioi, the Asiani and the Pasianoi are one and the same people, who are to be identified with the Yüeh-chih, 'Pasianoi' being a corruption of 'Gasianoi'. Others suggest that the Tocharoi should be identified with the Yüeh-chih because the Yüeh-chih occupied the western part of Gansu Province, which is called Thogara in the *Geography* of Ptolemy; because Tocharistan was where the Bactrian kingdom was situated; and because the Asiani, as described by Pompeius Trogus, were the ruling family of the Yüeh-chih.

It is, however, uncertain whether the country of Ta-hsia in Szū-ma Ch'ien means the Bactrian kingdom under the Greeks. According to Szū-ma Ch'ien, the country of Ta-hsia had no big or powerful king but only small chiefs in a number of cities. If the country of Ta-hsia was the Bactrian kingdom, it must have been under a king who controlled the whole of Bactria. Szū-ma Ch'ien also states that the people of Ta-hsia were skilled traders, but their soldiers were weak in warfare and disliked battle, and, for these reasons, Ta-hsia was conquered by the Yüeh-chih. These statements are not applicable to the Greek kingdom of Bactria, whose soldiers seem to have been skilful in fighting. As 'Ta-hsia' is an exact transcription of 'Tochara' (which was the central part of the Bactrian kingdom), if the Yüeh-chih were the Tocharians, the conquest of Ta-hsia by the Yüeh-chih means the conquest of the country of Tochara by the Tocharians, which seems rather strange. The evidence of Szū-ma Ch'ien shows that Ta-hsia cannot be the Bactrian kingdom, but was the country of Tochara divided into several small political units at the time of the Yüeh-chih invasion. In other words the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom had already been destroyed or divided when the Yüeh-chih arrived. Therefore, there is no need to accept the identification of the Tocharas with the Yüeh-chih.

A third group of scholars maintain that the Yüeh-chih were the Kushans. As already mentioned, the Kushans were originally one of the five *yabghu* (governorships) established by the Yüeh-chih. This view therefore holds that the other four governorships were also of the same stock. It seems convincing when the word 'Kushan' is explained as a genitive plural form of the root '*Kuša*', which means 'Yüeh-chih'. But the statement in the *Han-shu* (Annals of the Former Han) about the establishment of the five tribal chiefs suggests that they were natives of Ta-hsia who were conquered by the Yüeh-chih.⁵ Moreover, if the name '*Kušan*' is identical with 'Yüeh-chih', we wonder why the author of the *Han-shu* uses different Chinese characters with different sound values to represent the two names.

The Yüeh-chih and the Scythians

It seems most plausible to identify the Yüeh-chih with the Scythians – a solution that fits the situation of Central Asia in the third and second centuries B.C. better than any other theory. The name of Yüeh-chih in Archaic Chinese, '*zngi-wāt-t'ia*', the barbarian prototype of which might have been **Zguja*, can be considered as a transcription of the name of the Scythians. This suggestion was first made in 1935 by Haloun, who held that the Chinese knew the Tocharian people under the name of the Yüeh-chih or Scythians. It may also be proposed that the Yüeh-chih were not only called Scythians, but were Scythians themselves. According to Szü-ma Ch'ien, up to the beginning of the third century B.C., it was the Yüeh-chih and the Tung Hu, the two dominant powers in the Mongolian plain, who pressed the Hsiung-nu from the west and east respectively. At that time, the Hsiung-nu were a small community of tribes. Only when they were unified under the able leader Mao-tun could they push the Yüeh-chih further westwards and the Tung Hu eastwards. Mao-tun himself was taken as a hostage by the Yüeh-chih in his early days.

Mao-tun was inspired by the unification of China by the Emperor Ch'in Shih-huang-ti in 221 B.C.; the first blow of the Hsiung-nu against the Yüeh-chih was given about this time. It resulted in the withdrawal of the Yüeh-chih to the western part of Gansu Province. The Hsiung-nu were originally a pastoral people in the steppes north of the Yin-shan mountain range. Szü-ma Ch'ien states that the Yüeh-chih were the only people who pressed the Hsiung-nu from the west. This may mean that the Yüeh-chih were seeking to control the greater part of the Mongolian plain.

5. Kuwabara, 1940, pp. 42–6.

The Yüeh-chih Empire

About 204–200 B.C. Mao-tun conquered Mongolia and subjugated several peoples. In 176 B.C. he defeated the Yüeh-chih in the western part of Gansu Province. In his letter to the Han, Mao-tun said that the Hsiung-nu had destroyed the Yüeh-chih; and Lou-lan, Wu-sun, Hu-chieh and twenty-six other countries in the neighbourhood were subjugated to the Hsiung-nu. It is an exaggeration to say that they destroyed the Yüeh-chih, but it is clear that the Yüeh-chih were driven from the west of Gansu and probably moved from the north of the T'ien Shan mountains. What is important is that all these countries were subjugated as a result of the defeat of the Yüeh-chih, that is, they had been under the control of the Yüeh-chih up to that time.

Lou-lan, later called Shan-shan, is a country near Lop Nor in the eastern part of the Tarim basin. The Wu-sun were a pastoral people in the region of the River Ili and Lake Issik-köl, north of the T'ien Shan mountains. The twenty-six other countries seem to have been small states in the Tarim basin, probably including Casia mentioned above. As regards Hu-chieh, no definite identification has been made. The late T. Fujita was of the opinion that it is identical with the Uighur of a later period.⁶ According to the *Han-shu*, in the mid-first century B.C., five kings competed with each other for the leadership of the Hsiung-nu Empire, one of them named Hu-chieh-wang, or King of Hu-chieh, which lies to the west of the Hsiung-nu Empire. A few years later Chih-chih *shan-yü* became independent from the Hsiung-nu Empire, occupied the north-west part of the Mongolian plain and successfully defeated the army of the Wu-sun. Subsequently he marched northwards, subjugated the U-chieh, and, turning to the north, conquered the Ting-ling. The U-chieh are said to be identical to the Hu-chieh. Taking these statements into consideration, the Hu-chieh may be placed in what is now Dzungaria or the upper waters of the River Selenga. Fujita's view, therefore, seems to be quite close to the truth.

The dominion of the Yüeh-chih also extended as far south as the upper waters of the Yellow River. Szü-ma Ch'ien states that a small part of the Yüeh-chih, who could not follow the migration of the main horde towards the west, settled themselves in Nan-shan, the southern mountains, which separate the upper waters of the Yellow River people from the Mongolian plain.

The date of migration of the Yüeh-chih to Ta-hsia is not clearly known. The Hsiung-nu gave a third blow to the Yüeh-chih during the reign of Lao-shang *shan-yü* (c. 174–161 B.C.). But it is generally believed that the conquest of Ta-hsia was made some time between 139 and 128 B.C., that is, between the departure of Chang Ch'ien and his arrival at the court of the Yüeh-chih. So it is not certain when the small part of the Yüeh-chih settled in Nan-shan, though it is quite likely that it was in 176 B.C. when the Yüeh-chih were forced to evacuate the

6. *Tôzai Koshôshi no kenkyû*, Saiiki-hsu, 1943, pp. 61, 64.

western part of Gansu Province. In any case, it is generally understood that this small part of the Yüeh-chih asked the Ch'iang (or Tibetans on the upper waters of the Yellow River) for protection and whether they could stay with them. It may, however, be suggested that these Ch'iang people had been under the rule of the Yüeh-chih and that the small group of the Yüeh-chih who were later called the Little Yüeh-chih, to distinguish them from the Great Yüeh-chih (or Ta-Yüeh-chih) in Ta-hsia, were earlier rulers of these Ch'iang people. They never asked for protection, but actually lived with the Ch'iang who were their subjects.

When China was unified by Ch'in Shih-huang-ti, the upper waters of the Yellow River (modern Gansu Province) did not form part of the Chinese Empire, but were under the domination of the Yüeh-chih. According to the late S. Wada, the Yüeh-chih realm included the north-western Mongolian plain and the upper waters of the Yellow River.⁷

Szū-ma Ch'ien locates the original place of the Yüeh-chih between Tun-huang and Ch'i-lien, which is a mountain in the Nan-shan range. He believes that the Yüeh-chih migrated from this restricted locality into the country of Ta-hsia or Bactria (*Shih-chi*, Book 123). Further, as pointed out earlier, the Yüeh-chih need not be looked upon as a small community of people located in a small area. They ruled the greater part of the Mongolian plain, possibly Dzungaria, the north of the T'ien Shan where the Wu-sun lived, countries in the Tarim basin and the upper waters of the Yellow River. Their principal territory may have been between Tun-huang and K'ang-chü, which were two of the most important places on the so-called Silk Route, but we should not consider that this region was the only territory held by them.

The position of the Yüeh-chih as a predominant power in Central Asia, before being pressed by the Hsiung-nu, is also evident from the statement of Szū-ma Ch'ien. He records that the authority of the Yüeh-chih ruler was accepted by the countries in Central Asia. They provided free food to envoys moving through their territories, but messengers from China had to pay for their food as well as their horses. This was one of the reasons why the Emperor Wu-ti decided to send an expedition to the country of Ta-yüan (present-day Ferghana)⁸ in order to demonstrate China's military superiority over the Central Asian countries. This could also mean that the countries between the Wu-sun and Parthia had been under the sway of the Yüeh-chih until they were displaced by the Hsiung-nu.

It may be suggested that the Yüeh-chih in the third century B.C. were similar to the T'u-chüeh (Türks) of the sixth and seventh centuries A.D. in territory and power; and that the migration of the Yüeh-chih was not that of a group of people from one place to another, but a withdrawal from the eastern and northern frontiers of the Yüeh-chih Empire.

7. Wada, 1939, pp. 236-7, 1942, p. 278; see also his personal remark to the author.

8. Pulleyblank, 1966, pp. 25 et seq.

The Yüeh-chih and Pazîrîk

We know that southern Siberia, Mongolia and Middle Asia were in the sphere of the so-called Scythian civilization, and it is in southern Siberia that most archaeological sites of the Scythian period have been found, chiefly in the northern part of the Altai range. The tombs at Pazîrîk, excavated by Professor S. I. Rudenko, are very well known, and are dated between the fifth and third centuries B.C.⁹ The third century B.C. coincides with the date when the Yüeh-chih were at the apex of their power, before they were challenged by the Hsiung-nu. The Altai region in fact was part of the Yüeh-chih Empire, and the sites at Pazîrîk should be related to the Yüeh-chih.

It is stated in the *Shih-chi* (Book 123), that, when Chang Ch'ien was captured by the Hsiung-nu on his way to the Ta-yüeh-chih in about 129 B.C., he was told by Chün-ch'en *shan-yü*, the King of the Hsiung-nu at the time, that the Yüeh-chih were to the north of his domain and it was not possible for the Han to contact them without crossing his territory, which required his permission and approval. At that time, the authority of the *shan-yü* extended to the north of Tai and Yü-chung or, roughly speaking, the northern part of the province of Shan-hsi. Chang Ch'ien and his party were, however, captured near Lung-hsi (in Gansu Province), and it is not clear whether they were brought to the court of the *shan-yü* or to the western part of the territory of the Hsiung-nu, where the *shan-yü* happened to be staying. In any case the region of Ili, where the Yüeh-chih are usually believed to have settled at that time, lies west of the place in which the *shan-yü* is supposed to have been. But if the *shan-yü* meant the direction of the Altai mountain range, this may be more likely than the Ili region. This could be supported by another reference from the *Han-shu* (Book 52) in which is recorded the controversy between Han An-kuo who opposed the expedition against the Hsiung-nu and Wang Hui who insisted on the necessity of it. The Emperor Wu-ti accepted Wang Hui's opinion and dispatched more than 300,000 troops to Ma-i in the present province of Shan-hsi. The expedition ended in failure, and Wang Hui committed suicide in 133 B.C. According to Wang Hui, if the expedition had succeeded, the Han would have been able to subjugate the Yüeh-chih in the north. Here, the Yüeh-chih are placed to the north of the Han a few years later than the departure of Chang Ch'ien to the Yüeh-chih. These examples show that the region of the Altai range is better suited than the Ili valley as the dwelling-place of the Yüeh-chih.

The ethnic identity of the Pazîrîk people is still to be established. It is not yet known if they were of the same stock as the Scythians in south Russia. But, in this connection, it may be pointed out that the so-called 'Detached Scythians' are described by Herodotus as having lived in the vicinity of the Altai region.

9. Potapov, 1953, p. 16; Kiselev, 1951, pp. 361-92, especially 391, cf. *MIA*, 1949, Vol. 9, p. 216; Rudenko, 1953, pp. 346 et seq.; cf. Rudenko, 1951, p. 90; Rice, 1957, p. 200.

Again according to Herodotus, these Detached Scythians were rebels against the Royal Scythians in south Russia, but they were of the same stock. One wonders if they were the Pazîrîk people and the ancestors of the Yüeh-chih.

The Yüeh-chih and the Detached Scythians

According to Herodotus, there was a great migration of peoples in the seventh century B.C., which resulted in the occupation of south Russia by the Scythians who had originally lived further east and were pushed westwards towards the Issedones. Could not the Detached Scythians be considered as those Scythians who did not move west with their main horde? It may be proposed that the Detached Scythians built up a large empire which included a greater part of the Mongolian plain, regions to the north of the T'ien Shan range, the Tarim basin and the upper waters of the Yellow River. They were known to the Chinese as the Yüeh-chih (i.e. Scythians). A portion of them migrated into – or removed their centre to – Middle Asia, while the rest were destroyed by the Hsiung-nu or stayed in Nan-shan with the Ch'iang.

If the Yüeh-chih were Scythians, then what was the relationship between them and the four peoples who are said to have come down from beyond the Jaxartes (the present Syr Darya) to destroy the Bactrian kingdom? If the explanation given above is correct, the country of Ta-hsia, which was conquered by the Yüeh-chih, cannot have been the Bactrian kingdom, which had already been destroyed before the arrival of the Yüeh-chih. Therefore, the invasion of these four peoples must have taken place some time before the coming of the Yüeh-chih. In the third and second quarters of the second century B.C. the Greeks in Bactria were fighting with the Greeks in India as well as with the Iranians of Parthia. According to W. W. Tarn, Bactria was up to about 141 B.C. under the control of Heliocles, who is believed to be the last king of the Bactrian kingdom.¹⁰ So the invasion may have taken place in that year or some time later and it must have been before the coming of the Yüeh-chih who occupied the Sogdiana-Bactria region between 136 and 129 (or 128) B.C. Strabo tells us that the Bactrian kingdom was destroyed by the Tocharians and three other peoples, and, according to Szü-ma Ch'ien, the country which the Yüeh-chih conquered was Ta-hsia. As 'Ta-hsia' is believed to be a transcription of 'Tochara', and if these two statements are accepted, it cannot have been the Yüeh-chih who conquered the Bactrian kingdom.

10. Tarn, 1938, pp. 272–3; Narain, 1962, p. 141.

The Yüeh-chih conquest of Bactria

In the history of Central Asia, the third and second centuries B.C. constituted a period in which the nomadic peoples inhabiting its northern and north-eastern borderlands made a great impact on the course of political events. The mid-third century B.C. saw the emergence of the Graeco-Bactrian and Parthian kingdoms. It was the period when Diodotus in Bactria and Andragoras in Parthia freed themselves from Seleucid rule. In Bactria this gave rise to the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom, but events took a different course in Parthia, where the nomadic tribe of the Parni, under the leadership of Arsaces, overthrew Andragoras and laid the foundations of the Parthian kingdom (see Chapter 5). In his eastern campaign, the Seleucid ruler Antiochus III had besieged Bactra, the Graeco-Bactrian capital. The Graeco-Bactrian king, Euthydemus, offering peace on honourable terms, put forward a number of arguments that included the following (Polybius XI.34.5):

If Antiochus does not accede to my request, the situation of both parties will become insecure. Huge hordes of nomads are massed on the border, posing a threat to both of us, and should the barbarians cross the border they will undoubtedly conquer the land.

Euthydemus suitably impressed the Seleucid ruler, peace was concluded, and the border between Graeco-Bactria and the nomadic tribes remained intact. The incident is most significant because it clearly demonstrates the strong pressure exerted by the nomads on the political borders of the sedentary states in the late third century B.C.

Euthydemus' warning was to prove no hollow utterance, for events soon occurred which led to the downfall of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom and altered the entire political situation in Central Asia. These were triggered off by the conflict of two nomadic tribes, the Hsiung-nu and the Yüeh-chih. It is clear from Chinese sources that the Hsiung-nu ruler Mao-tun (206–174 B.C.) attacked the Yüeh-chih tribe, whose leader was killed in battle. The Yüeh-chih were forced to retreat westwards. The Hsiung-nu pursued them and the son of the Yüeh-chih leader was also killed in an encounter with them.¹¹ The movement of the Yüeh-chih set off a whole series of displacements of nomadic peoples in Central Asia. One such 'secondary' displacement caused by the movement of the Yüeh-chih is mentioned in Chinese sources. They moved into the Ili basin, from where they drove off the Sai (Archaic Chinese *Sak*) people; but the Yüeh-chih were in turn attacked by the Wu-sun and compelled to resume their westward migration.¹² The diversity of peoples involved in these migrations is also

11. Bichurin, 1950, Vol. II, pp. 147, 151.

12. Narain, 1962, pp. 133–5.

confirmed by ancient writers. The movement of the Yüeh-chih finally came to a halt in Bactria. Although the political events and migrations that led up to the nomadic conquest of Bactria remained unknown to Greek and Roman writers, the fact itself did not escape their attention. It is very significant that the classical writers in question mention the participation of several peoples in the conquest of Bactria. Describing the situation in the nomadic zone of Central Asia, Strabo enumerates the tribes that 'took Bactria from the Greeks': the Asioi, the Pasianoï, the Tocharoi and the Sacarauoi (Strabo XI.8.2). A little later he mentions the Sakai in connection with the conquest of Bactria (XI.8.4). In connection with this event, Pompeius Trogus (Trog. Comp., *Prolog.* XLI) speaks of the Scythian tribes of the Sacaraucae and the Asiani and subsequently (XLII) of the Asiani – 'kings of the Tochari' – and the Sacaraucae. Scholars have taken great pains to correlate Chinese and Greek ethnic names and determine the role of the various peoples in these movements. What remains apparently in dispute is identification of the Chinese Sai with the Greek Sakai and the Indian Sakas. More problematic, though highly plausible, is the identification of the Yüeh-chih with the Tochari.

During the eighties of the second century B.C. the migration of the Yüeh-chih eventually displaced the Saka tribes of the eastern part of Central Asia. They migrated south and crossed the Pamirs, having touched on eastern Bactria. This stage in the migration of the Sakas was apparently completed in the early first century B.C.

The Yüeh-chih proper, having drawn into their orbit a number of other nomadic peoples, passed through Ferghana (Ta-yüan) and reached the borders of Bactria. The completion of the first stage of their migration is recorded in the Chinese sources.¹³ Chang Ch'ien, who had been sent by the Chinese to persuade the Yüeh-chih to join China in attacking the Hsiung-nu, stayed among them for some time during the period 130–125 B.C. The situation he recorded¹⁴ was that the Great Yüeh-chih lived a nomadic life, ranging over the area immediately north of the Oxus river, while the country south of the Oxus (southern Bactria) was subordinated to the Great Yüeh-chih but retained its political autonomy, divided into a large number of city-states each with its own ruler. It can thus be supposed that at the time northern Bactria and Sogdiana were fully under the control of the Yüeh-chih while in southern Bactria towns persisted under the supreme suzerainty of the nomads.

The nomads and Parthia

Almost simultaneously the nomads began migrating westwards from Bactria and came into conflict with the Parthians. This clash sprang from a particular

13. Davidovich, 1976, pp. 56 et seq.

14. Bichurin, 1950, Vol. II, p. 151; Pulleyblank, 1968; Zürcher, 1968.

event. The Parthian king Phraates hired some nomads (Justin calls them Scythians) to do battle with the Seleucid king, Antiochus VII Sidetes. They arrived late when the Parthians had already routed the Seleucid forces and King Phraates refused to pay them the agreed sum. In retaliation, the nomads devastated the eastern half of Parthia. Phraates marched against them, with an army that included Greek soldiers who had been taken prisoner by the Parthians. In the heat of the battle against the nomads in 128 B.C., the Greeks went over to the enemy, the Parthian army was annihilated and Phraates was killed (Justin XLII.1.5). The nomad detachments then left Parthian territory. The new king, Artabanus (Phraates' uncle), tried to mount an offensive against them. It came to nothing, and in a battle with the Tochari (here Justin gives a precise ethnic name instead of his previous vague 'Scythians'), Artabanus was mortally wounded (Justin XLII.2.2), dying in 124 or 123 B.C.¹⁵ His son Mithradates II succeeded to the Parthian throne and put a final stop to the nomad incursions. He waged many valiant wars against his neighbours and joined many peoples to the Parthian kingdom. He also several times vanquished the Scythians and avenged the wrongs done to his forebears (Justin, XLII.2.4-5).

By the turn of the first century B.C. the Saka tribes had settled in Gandhāra and the Great Yüeh-chih in northern Bactria. South Bactria, though still under the authority of minor Greek rulers, was also under the control of the Saka tribes; and on the eastern borders of Parthia (Margiana, Aria and Drangiana) military operations were under way against them. Subsequent political developments involved a Parthian offensive to the east. This is the historical context that must be borne in mind for a proper understanding of Strabo's report that the Parthians also 'seized part of Bactria, having driven away the Scythians' (Strabo XI.9.2). The course of those wars is attested by three unique series of Parthian coins with the Greek inscription 'ΚΑΤΑ ΣΤΡΑΤΕΙΑ' (On campaign) and the name of three regions: Aria, Margiana and Traxiana. The dating of these coins has been disputed for many years. The most plausible view, however, seems to be that of David Sellwood, who attributes them to the seventies of the first century B.C. and to the mint of an unknown Parthian ruler.¹⁶ It is reasonable to suppose that as a result of these campaigns, the Parthians gained control of Aria (Herat oasis), Margiana (Merv oasis) and possibly the area of Mashhad. Sellwood thinks that this was the region called Traxiana. The further conquests of the Parthians in the east are attested in Isidore of Charax's *Mansiones Parthicae*. After 'Areia' and the 'Anauōn chōra' (part of Aria), the author names the Parthian possessions Zarangiane, 'Sakastane Sakōn Skythōn' (Sakastan of the Saka Scythians) and Arachosia (Kandahar

15. Debevoise, 1938, p. 38.

16. Sellwood, 1980, pp. 97 et seq.

region).¹⁷ In modern works it is thought that as a result of these military operations the Parthians halted the nomads, brought them under control and settled them on the land. After these events Drangiana was called Segistan, modern Sistan. The Sakas seem to have retained some form of their political organization under Parthian sovereignty while beyond the confines of Parthia there were some minor nomad possessions dependent on the Parthians; there is, for instance, numismatic evidence for a ruler Sapadbises.¹⁸ Such was the situation of the advance of the nomads in the western zone at the turn of the Christian era.

Further east, in the central regions of Bactria, the situation is described in the Chinese chronicle, the *Han-shu*. It was already markedly different from that recorded by Chang Ch'ien.¹⁹ The whole of southern Bactria had already been occupied by the Yüeh-chih, so that now the Great Yüeh-chih bordered on the south with the land of Chi-pin. The supreme leader of the Great Yüeh-chih had his residence in a town north of the Oxus river. The entire territory dependent on the Great Yüeh-chih was divided into five *hsi-hou*. The state of the Great Yüeh-chih represented a confederacy of five tribes. These were the five former territories for nomadism which had been transformed into five minor vassal states dependent on the central authority personified by the King of the Great Yüeh-chih. At the same time, it must be remembered that the state that had been formed was still very unstable and loose-knit.

Archaeological remains of the nomads in northern Bactria

In northern Bactria the burial places investigated by Mandel'shtam at Tulkhar, Aruktau and Kokkum²⁰ are thought to be those of nomads who conquered Bactria. Material from the graves indicates that tribes of various origins took part in the conquest. Very significantly, the material culture suggests northern links, in particular with the Sarmatian tribes. This is borne out by evidence from nomadic graves in the Zerafshan valley in Sogdian territory.²¹

A very important point, deduced mainly from nomadic graves in Bactria, is that the graves are situated on the edge of the valleys and do not encroach on the irrigated and tilled areas. The very plausible suggestion has been made that the nomadic conquest left no havoc in its wake because the nomads did not destroy the irrigation systems and did not take up irrigated land for grazing. We

17. Sarianidi and Koshelenko, 1982, pp. 307 et seq.; Masson and Romodin, 1964, pp. 135 et seq.

18. Sarianidi and Koshelenko, 1982, pp. 310 et seq.

19. Davidovich, 1976, pp. 60 et seq.; Zürcher, 1968, pp. 367 et seq.

20. Mandel'shtam, 1966, 1975.

21. Obel'chenko, 1974.

can safely surmise that having moved into the conquered territories, they took over land not used by farmers, and preferred to exploit the subjugated population, leaving the existing economic structure intact.

A close link is to be noted between the nomads and the settled oases. The vast majority of ceramic vessels found in the nomad graves were made in craft workshops and came to the nomads from the oases. We do not of course know how this happened; perhaps the nomads received the manufactured items (including pottery) as tribute exacted from the farmers or acquired them through barter. The fact remains that very close ties existed between the nomads and the farmers.

The sensational discoveries of the Russian-Afghan expedition (led by V. I. Sarianidi) at the necropolis of the ancient town of Tillya-tepe in northern Afghanistan²² have shed light on the upper social stratum in the period when state-like formations, headed by the descendants of leaders of the nomadic tribes, emerged in the conquered territories. The coins from Tillya-tepe enable it to be fairly accurately dated between the second half of the first century B.C. and the first half of the first century A.D.²³ Six excavated graves yielded some 20,000 objects made of precious metal (Fig. 1). The huge riches that accompanied the dead contrast with the more than modest sepulchral structures. It is particularly significant that there is no mark over the graves indicating a burial site. Sarianidi assumes that these were secret burials.

Archaeological evidence from the Pamirs and its comparison with other material confirm the evidence of written sources that in migrating to India the Sakas did pass through this mountain region. Another important point is the sharp decline in the population in the Pamirs in the subsequent period, doubtless due to the fact that the bulk of the population moved south.²⁴ Excavations at Ay Khanum have shown that the fall of the Graeco-Bactrian city was indeed the result of the nomadic conquest; the population that settled on its ruins was very different culturally from its predecessors. There is unfortunately very little archaeological material from the more southerly parts of the region to throw light on nomadic migration.

Indian historical tradition is of no help, since it merely brushes over these events.²⁵ There is also insufficient material to throw light on the history of the cities and inhabited rural localities in the region during this 'dark age'. No doubt a number of cities such as Ay Khanum perished in the course of the nomadic conquest. But it is equally clear that the nomads did not make a special effort to wreck the irrigation systems and the towns and villages. So far as we

22. Sarianidi, 1984.

23. Sarianidi and Koshelenko, 1982.

24. Litvinsky, 1972.

25. Sharma, 1980; Serditikh, 1983, pp. 84-8.

can judge, the nomads sought to exploit rather than destroy the existing economic structure.

Material from northern Bactria indicates that the nomadic conquest was soon followed by fresh material prosperity and, in particular, urban development. On archaeological evidence from the Surkhan Darya valley, V. M. Masson concluded that the rapid rise in the number of settlements there began in the first century B.C.²⁶ Yüeh-chih times saw the rise of what was later to become the major centre of Dalverzin-tepe,²⁷ as well as many smaller centres such as Zar-tepe. Furthermore, significant reconstruction operations at the ancient town site of Khalchayan²⁸ can be ascribed to the Yüeh-chih period; the renowned Sistan sanctuary of Kuh-i Khwaja also seem to have been rebuilt.²⁹ The most revealing material regarding the history of the Central Asian city in those 'dark ages' has been obtained, however, in the course of archaeological exploration at Taxila.³⁰



FIG. 1. Gold necklace. Tillya-tepe. (Courtesy of V. Sarianidi.)

26. Masson, 1974; Masson, 1976.

27. *Dal'verzintepa*, 1978.

28. Pugachenkova, 1966.

29. Gullini, 1964.

30. Marshall, 1951; Il'in, 1958.

The 'dark ages'

The scarcity of sources makes it hard to trace political and social development in the countries of Central Asia during the so-called dark ages. It is clear from what has been said earlier that the states that were formed in the period of nomadic conquest were insufficiently stable, their frontiers were constantly changing, and some states were emerging as others declined. There was no clear-cut structure within the states. One reason for this was the character of statehood that emerged as a result of the nomadic conquests. The best-known instance was the state of the Yüeh-chih, which was divided into five *hsi-hou* (*yabghu*). It can be assumed that this division into five possessions represented a division of the territories for the nomadism of the five tribes that took part in the conquest of Bactria. It may be supposed that the situation was similar in other regions conquered by the nomads.

Another factor that weakened these new emergent states was the frequent co-existence of two political structures – an old one retained from earlier times and a new superimposed nomad structure. One example of this was the situation in Bactria during the first stage of the Yüeh-chih conquest, when the territories north of the Oxus were under the direct rule of the Great Yüeh-chih, while southern Bactria was divided between a number of minor rulers of individual cities.

An important role in the political structure of the new states was played by satraps, an institution inherited from the Achaemenids. However, at this time many satraps, while nominally plenipotentiaries of the central government, were in fact almost or fully independent rulers who founded dynasties of their own, and the title 'satrap' or 'great satrap' was often the mark of an independent ruler. The nomadic conquest clearly had an effect on the development of social relations in the countries of the region.

A number of Indian works describing the calamities which befell the country in the 'Kali Age' include among these disasters the disruptions of the established social order, the flight and liberation of slaves, the increased wealth of the Śūdras and the general weakening of caste (*varṇa*) stability. It is perhaps significant that the texts concerning these changes are usually set in the context of foreign conquest – Greek, Saka, Parthian and Kushan.³¹

Despite political instability, economic relations in the Saka-Parthian period developed very successfully. Busy sea-routes were opened up between Egypt and India, the first direct contacts between Egypt and India dating back to the late second century B.C. (apparently between 120 and 115). In about 100 B.C., Hippalus discovered the mechanism of the monsoon winds, and thereby made it possible for ships to sail regularly to and from the shores of India (*Periplus* 57). Trade between Egypt and India was most actively developed in the late

31. Yadava, 1978/79.

first century B.C. When in the twenties of the first century B.C. Strabo journeyed in Egypt, he 'learnt that some 120 ships complete the voyage from the Straits of Hormuz to India' (Strabo II.5.12). He also observed in that connection that 'great fleets now set off as far as India' (Strabo XVII.1.13) and, further, that 'present-day merchants sailing from Egypt via the Nile and the Arabian Gulf to India . . . have been going as far as the Ganges' (Strabo XV.1.4). In the first century A.D. knowledge of the coasts of India and the ability to use the monsoon winds had attained such a standard that many new Indian peoples and cities were discovered, trading links were established with them, and ships from the ports of southern Arabia and the Horn of Africa went to particular ports of India with particular goods (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* VI.101–6).³² Large vessels carried a detachment of armed guards (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* VI.101; Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* III.31.1 c.). This was clearly why the rulers of Indian states permitted merchant ships to moor only in particular places (*Periplus* 52) and introduced a number of other limitations (Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* III.35.1 c.). The Indian trade yielded huge profits for the merchants from Egypt since the goods were resold a hundred times dearer (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* VI.101). The overall trade balance was negative for the Romans, who ruled Egypt from 30 B.C. Pliny wrote: 'India annually swallows up from our state no less than 55 million sesterces' (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* VI.101). In the second half of the first century A.D. Indians were fairly frequent visitors to Egypt. On one occasion in the theatre of Alexandria in Egypt some time in the period A.D. 71–75, Dio Chrysostomus said (*Ad Alexandr.* 40):

I see before me here not only Hellenes, Italics and even people from Hither Syria, Libya, Cilicia and distant Ethiopians and Arabs, but also Bactrians, Scythians, Persians and a number of Indians, all of whom customarily come together and form the audience here with you.

In the territory of India the Roman trading station at Arikamedu³³ was well known; and in Egyptian territory, in the 'White Haven', Indian ceramics and fragments of pottery with Tamil inscriptions in Brāhmī script have been found.³⁴

Overland caravan trade was actively developed during this period. The 'royal way' passed through Parthian territory, starting from Zeugma on the Euphrates. It is described by Isidore of Charax. Cutting across Mesopotamia and passing through the territory of Iran it reached Merv. From there it turned south and led on through Aria, Drangiana and Segistan to Arachosia (in the Kandahar region), then through Ghazni to the Indian subcontinent. Another

32. Berzina, 1982, pp. 31 et seq.

33. Wheeler et al., 1946.

34. Whitcomb and Johnson, 1980.

important branch of the highway ran from Merv to Amul on the Oxus and then to Samarkand, where it merged with the Silk Route from the oases of Tarim basin. The Chinese sought to establish permanent trade links with Parthia as early as the second century B.C. The official Chinese annals contain an account by Chang Ch'ien of his visit to Parthia,³⁵ from where he brought vines and alfalfa seeds to China. From the late second century B.C. the Silk Route functioned more or less regularly, passing through Central Asia and playing an important part in its economic ties. The Parthians protected trade along the route, deriving considerable profit from the payment of taxes, and did everything they could to prevent direct links between China and Rome since their intermediary role was extremely profitable.³⁶ The Parthians also carried on maritime trading with India via the Persian Gulf ports, notably Spasinu-Charax. There were north-south caravan routes from Bactria to India; and many routes via the Hindu Kush linked the northern and southern parts of Central Asia. Central Asia was thus provided with a network of maritime and overland routes, both international and local, which ensured the development of international and local trade. Control over the trade routes procured financial resources for the state treasury, and could be used as a political weapon. Thus, the Parthian government tried to ensure that caravans from Palmyra (a major centre of the caravan trade) went not to Seleucia on the Tigris, a city hardly notable for loyalty to the Arsacids, but to the cities more closely connected with the central authority, such as Ctesiphon, Vologaesocerta and Spasinu-Charax.³⁷

The expansion of international and domestic trade was obtained by means of a developed system of monetary circulation. Coins of many dynasties circulated in Central Asia and, with growing international trade and political upheavals, were often to be found far from the place of minting. Much of the money in circulation was accounted for by coins issued by the early Graeco-Bactrian kings. Minted from high-standard silver in accordance with the Attic system of weights and issued in large quantities, they remained in circulation for a number of centuries. Another major part of the total amount of money in circulation was constituted by the so-called Indo-Greek coins issued by the Graeco-Bactrian kings who had conquered part of India. Beginning with Demetrius, a number of these kings had possessions both north and south of the Hindu Kush, and some ruled solely in the territory of the Indian subcontinent. These coins usually followed the Old Indian system of weights. One side of the coin carried a Greek legend and usually a typically Greek portrait; the other side bore a reverse type with a Kharoṣṭhī legend. Also in circulation were coins of the last Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek kings, issued when the bulk of the region was already under nomad control.

35. D'yakonov, 1961, p. 204.

36. Colledge, 1967, p. 80.

37. Koshelenko, 1971.

Very soon after reaching the settled oases of the region, the rulers of the nascent nomad states began issuing their own coinage. This was often dictated not by economic necessity but by the desire to proclaim to the world a new independent state. The first local coins in the region north of the Oxus were various types of imitations of Seleucid and Graeco-Bactrian coins.³⁸ We know of coins modelled on the Seleucid drachms portraying Alexander (place of minting unknown); imitations of Antiochus I drachms (in the Zerafshan valley); imitations of tetradrachms of the Graeco-Bactrian king Euthydemus (western part of the Zerafshan valley); imitations of the tetradrachms of the Graeco-Bactrian king Eucratides (in Chorasmia or the middle valley of the Jaxartes); imitations of the obol of Eucratides (in the Kafirnigan basin); silver and subsequently bronze imitations of the tetradrachms and drachms of Heliocles. These stages in the development of coinage in that part of the region correspond to the second and first centuries B.C.

Subsequently coins of another type began to be minted on behalf of the new authorities. One of the most striking examples of these new coins are those of Heraus, who was evidently one of the predecessors of the Great Kushan kings. In Sogdiana, coins began to be minted in the first century A.D. depicting, on the reverse, a standing archer and, on the obverse, the profile of a king with the name 'Aštam'.

The period of the 'dark ages' was one of the most fruitful in the development of Central Asian art, when the previously rather isolated artistic schools came into close mutual contact. As the Greeks from Bactria campaigned and settled in India, they became familiar with Indian art but they also brought with them forms of their known and customary art. In Bactria there was evidently little interaction between Greek and local art before the nomadic conquest. Greek art was that of the conquerors and was alien to the bulk of the population, who maintained their own traditions. Neither, on the other hand, did local art have any significant effect on the art of the Greeks. The nomadic invasion abruptly changed the situation. The social barriers dividing the world of the Greeks from that of the Bactrians were swept away, there being then no longer anything to prevent contact between the two artistic traditions. The nomads also brought with them their art, which spread in their wake in Bactria, Sogdiana and the Indian subcontinent. As the power of the Indo-Parthian rulers extended, so the Parthian art forms that had already taken shape at this time began to affect the artistic life of many parts of Central Asia. In a word, the 'dark ages' constituted a time of intense interaction between many trends in art.

This is most clearly seen in the works of decorative and applied art, found in the excavations of the Tillya-tepe necropolis.³⁹ Among mass items brought to

38. Zeimal, 1978.

39. Sarianidi, 1984.

light, a number of distinct trends are clearly evident. The first thing that strikes the eye is the large quantity of works of clearly nomadic origin (scenes of animals seizing their prey are vigorous and expressive). There is undoubtedly a very close similarity between these works and those from the burial mounds of the Altai mountains. The genetic link between this category of work and the 'Siberian animal style' is beyond doubt. Another trend is represented by typically Greek objects connected with Hellenistic art traditions. Chinese items or items displaying Chinese influence occur in small quantities. Some works of art clearly reflect ancient Bactrian traditions in which Parthian influence makes itself felt. Finally, there are specimens representing a synthesis of various traditions.

In the case of Bactria, the best-known relic of monumental art of the period of the 'dark ages' is to be found at Khalchayan.⁴⁰ Pugachenkova regards the building in Khalchayan as a palace. A more plausible view, however, is that the palace in Khalchayan represents a temple of deified ancestors. The opinion is sometimes expressed that the Khalchayan palace must date from Kushan times, but this can hardly be so. The palace clearly dates from the 'dark ages' though the exact point has not yet been determined.⁴¹ What arouses the greatest interest in Khalchayan is the relief compositions, including depictions of representatives of the local dynasty and a carved frieze of Dionysian character. The carving is in clay and has been thought to represent the dynasty of Heraus, but this is hard to accept when the possessions of Heraus very probably lay south of the Oxus.

40. Pugachenkova, 1966, 1971.

41. Koshelenko, 1974.

THE CULTURE OF THE XINJIANG REGION*

Ma Yong and Wang Binghua

The Xinjiang region

The Xinjiang region of China lies in eastern Central Asia to the north and south of the T'ien Shan mountain range. South of the T'ien Shan mountains lies the Tarim basin, bounded on the west by the Pamir plateau, 'the roof of the world', and on the south by the Kunlun and Altyn Taq mountain ranges. These three sides consist of high mountain peaks permanently covered with snow and ice, with few passes by which they may be crossed. The east side of the Tarim basin, however, is comparatively low and gives access to the Gansu corridor. The basin is rather like an inverted trapezium, with its centre occupied by the wide Taklamakan Desert. The melting snows of the Kunlun, T'ien Shan and Pamir mountain ranges flow from different directions towards the desert, forming short inland streams. These give rise to a number of oases, but each is relatively small; and the desert that separates them makes communications difficult. From antiquity it has been impossible for people to live anywhere but in these oases on its borders.

North of the T'ien Shan mountains lies the Dzungarian basin, shaped like an isosceles triangle, with the Altai mountains to the north-east, and a few low mountain ranges to the north-west, but no major barrier to the east or west. South of the basin in the T'ien Shan range there are many valleys with flourishing vegetation. The lands near the Urungu and Irtish rivers, with the upper reaches of the Ili, are all suitable for nomadic grazing.

The principal evidence for the history of Xinjiang in the centuries before the Christian era comes from archaeology. There are few reports in Chinese written records and these seem to be largely derived from hearsay. It has been suggested that the tribes living in the remotest east, mentioned by Herodotus (IV.13)

* See Map 6.

quoting the poet Aristeas, were the ancient peoples of the Altai mountains, but this is mere conjecture.¹

The Xiangbaobao graves, Tashkurgan

The grasslands in the valley of the River Tashkurgan, some 4,000 m above sea-level, but still suitable for nomad grazing, have a large number of ancient graves still visible on the surface covered with blocks of stone. Forty graves of this type excavated at Xiangbaobao yielded Carbon-14 dates between the seventh and fourth centuries B.C.² In spite of varied methods of burial – sometimes inhumations in various positions with a wooden cover over the grave pit and sometimes cremations with no wooden cover – their funerary contents are basically uniform and belong to a single cultural type. Four graves contain the remains of human sacrificial victims. Most bones are decayed, but one well-preserved skull is of a Europoid type. The tombs contain few funerary objects, suggesting a poor, unostentatious life-style. Finds are mostly everyday utensils with hand-made pottery made from clay containing coarse sand and mica flakes, fired at a low temperature. Most of it is undecorated, with an uneven red-brown or grey-brown surface colour. Cooking implements and containers – cauldrons, jars, dishes, bowls and cups – predominate. This pottery has distinct marks of use, even to the extent of repair after breakage, and is found with metal objects such as iron knives and bronze arrows. The ornaments found include gold plaques, bronze or iron rings, earrings, buttons and terracotta, stone, bone and agate beads. A few bronze ornaments shaped as a pair of sheep's horns (Fig. 1) represent quite a high level of craftsmanship. Besides, these the graves have also yielded cloth woven from sheep's wool, sheepskin clothes, bones of animals (mostly sheep) and birds, and a wood-drill fire kindler of the type commonplace at oases in the Tarim basin. It is clear that these localities once supported fixed settlements of inhabitants who raised livestock, particularly sheep, as their principal economic support.

Hunting was an important supplementary occupation; the level of craftsmanship was quite low, but the use of metal was developed. Distinctions between rich and poor had already appeared in this society. It is not clear whether the variation in styles of burial was due to racial differences or chronological factors, but the coexistence of inhumation and cremation suggests that there may have been an amalgam of cultures. This locality borders Saka territory to the west and adjoins districts where the Ch'iang people lived to the south. The Europoid skull from an intact burial may represent the Sakas. The prevalence of cremation among the Ch'iang tribes may be seen in written records of the

1. Sun, 1984.

2. Chen, 1981.

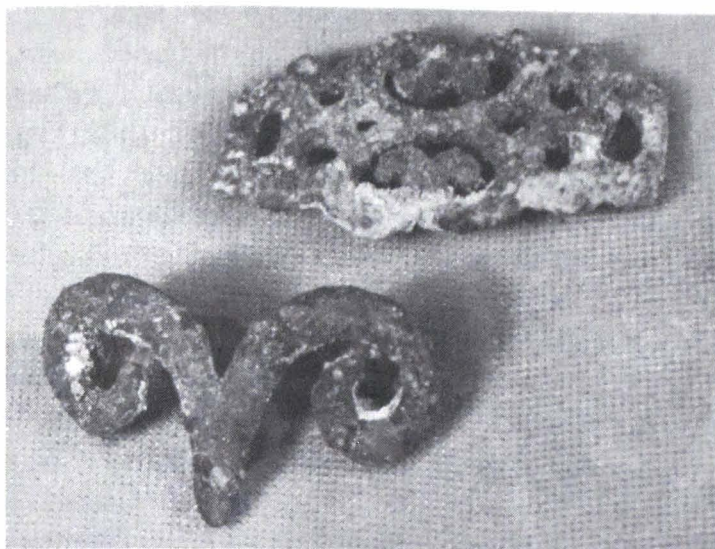


FIG. 1. Bronze ornaments: one is shaped like a pair of sheep's horns.
Xiangbaobao, Tashkurgan.

pre-Chin period.³ These graves of the Tashkurgan region may therefore represent a mixed culture of the Saka and Ch'iang tribes.⁴

The Lou-lan graves at Lop Nor

In antiquity Lop Nor was a large salt lake at the hub of communications between the Gansu corridor and the Tarim basin, but changes in the course of rivers have caused it to dry up and become a salt marsh. The famous Lou-lan site lies on the north-west bank of the Lop Nor marsh, where the Kongque river now flows into the marsh. In the first century B.C. it was the capital of the state of Shan-shan. The graves found near by used to be considered as graves of the Western Han period, but recent Chinese excavations have yielded material from the seventh to the first century B.C.⁵ These graves have a coffin chamber of wooden planks in a shallow pit. The corpse, laid in an extended position, was wrapped in a woollen cloth, and wore hide boots and a peaked brown felt hat

3. *Mo-tzu*, Chapter 6; *Chieh-tsang* b; *Hsun-tzu*, Chapter 19; *Ta-lueh Lu-shih ch'un-ch'iu*, Chapter 17; *Hsias-lising-lau*, 1.

4. Russian archaeologists have excavated ancient graves, similar to this culture, in the Pamir region in the former Soviet Union. See Bernshtam, 1952. These scholars believe that they belong to the Saka culture.

5. In the past there were many reports of this culture type in the Lop Nor region. See Stein, 1974; Huang, 1948. In recent years the Archaeological Research Institute of the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences has made three surveys near the Lop Nor, and on the lower reaches of the Kongque river, and has gathered a collection of fairly complete scientific materials. They are currently being collated and a report will soon be published.

with bird feathers. The borders of the women's hats were often embroidered. The woollen cloth was gathered into a pouch on the upper chest and filled with fragments of branches of the medicinal herb ephedra. They also contained a small basket woven from hemp or grass containing up to fifty grains of wheat.

Due to the extreme aridity, many of the corpses have been preserved. Their physical features are very clear. They have golden hair slightly curled, a high nose, deep-set eyes, rather long eyebrows and narrow cheeks. Anthropological measurements suggest *Homo Alpinus* features, similar to the ancient peoples of the Pamirs and Hindu Kush regions. The graves also contain wooden and stone female figurines, with long, round faces. They have clothes woven from wool and wear a pointed hat, with long hair falling in plaits over their shoulders. Their physique presents an interesting study, depicting the physique and dress of the people of the time. Most of the funerary objects found are articles of everyday use and include ornaments. In early tombs there is no pottery, and utensils are made of woven grass, wood, bone or horn. They used wild hemp and tamarisk branches to make cups, jars and baskets, utilizing varying textures to create patterns. Occasionally the exterior of a basket is daubed red.

Wooden basins, cups and spoons, as well as horn cups, are quite common in finds. Felt was used widely for clothes and everyone had a felt hat. Woollen clothes are almost all of plain pattern and are generally coarse, of relatively good quality. The hides have been tanned, craftsmanship is quite high, and there are many varieties of attractive leather boots. Beads, strung together and hung around ankles and neck – some of amber, agate or jade, but mostly made from the bones of small animals or birds – were used as ornaments. Groups of bone tubes about 10 cm long were sometimes linked together and worn round the waist. Among the funerary objects there were also large numbers of sheep and ox bones.

It is easily seen that raising of domestic animals, fishing and hunting were the principal economic activities of the inhabitants. Their life-style depended primarily on their animals but they also made use of local wild plants. A small quantity of wheat grain was found among the funerary objects but no agricultural tools have been found and there are no traces of agricultural fields or irrigation works of the period in the vicinity. This clearly suggests that they did not follow an agricultural economy and probably received the grains of wheat in exchange from neighbouring tribes who were engaged in agriculture.

The Lou-lan sites lie within the ancient territory of Shan-shan, where the soil is both sandy and saline. In describing the state of Shan-shan, the *Han-shu* says that 'the earth is sandy and salty and its fields are few. It has to rely for grain on neighbouring states.' Grain was a particularly precious commodity and its scarcity, because there was no local production, accounts for the low living standard of the area. The ornamentation employed, however, points to quite a developed aesthetic taste in an inhospitable climate.

The pebble graves of Alagou (Turfan County)⁶

At Alagou, below the southern slopes of the T'ien Shan mountains near the Ordos grasslands, many ancient graves have been found. There are two principal types, suggesting two different cultures. One group has a very distinctive pebbled burial chamber. After a pit was dug, its perimeter walls were lined with pebbles to form a tomb chamber 2 m deep with a diameter of 2 to 3 m. Tombs of this type with similar contents have also been found at Lake Ayding-köl and Subashi in Shan-shan County,⁷ suggesting an extension of this culture into the Turfan basin. Carbon-14 testings date the graves between the eighth and second centuries B.C. The early graves have multiple burials. Each grave contained between ten and twenty bodies of men and women, old and young, piled on top of each other. They all lay face upwards with the head in a westward direction. Funerary objects were placed near the head and at the waist. Below the waist was placed a considerable quantity of bones of sheep, horses, oxen and camels, apparently intended to reflect the deceased's material prosperity.

In some instances, hair arrangements were preserved in a recognizable style. They had all worn their hair long, parted centrally, with each half combed into plaits and kept in place at the back of the head by a bone or wooden hairpin. A delicately woven silk hairnet was then put over the top (Fig. 2). Many short wooden combs were found in the graves which had presumably been used for combing out the plaits. There were a great variety of woven materials, much rather coarse and loosely woven, but some heavy woollen cloth was of a high standard. Some cloths were plain woven, others interwoven. Light blue, light red and deep black dyes were employed, and striped, criss-cross and triangular patterns were used. All this is clear evidence of a developed weaving industry of a high standard (Fig. 3). In fact several wooden and clay spinning whorls, used for twisting woollen thread, were found.

The inhabitants clearly practised animal husbandry, but there is also evidence of agriculture. Some pottery jars were found to contain crop seeds such as flax. There is also evidence of hunting in the wooden arrow-shafts and three-edged arrow-heads filed from hard wood.

There were some bronze objects, but most implements for everyday use were made of wood and pottery, often painted with a light black pattern on a grey-red body – vessels such as jars, dishes, bowls, jugs and cups all being made by hand. They are decorated with triangular, net, whorl and pine-needle pat-

6. The excavation work of the Alagou pebble-grave sites was directed by Wang Binghua of the Archaeological Research Institute of the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences, and altogether eighty of these graves were excavated. For a brief survey see Archaeological Research Institute, 1979.

7. The excavation of the ancient graves of Lake Ayding-köl and Subashi was undertaken by the Cultural Observation Unit of Turfan, Xinjiang. The materials have been kept in this unit and are currently being arranged.

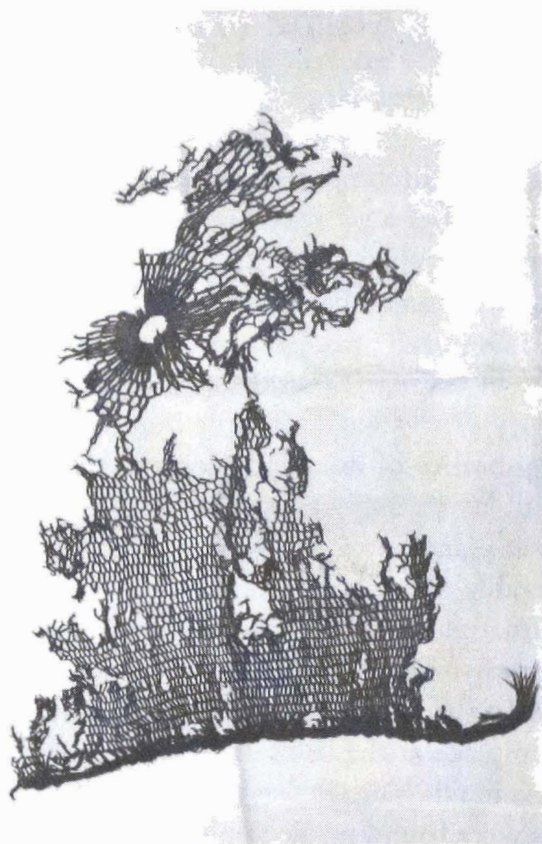


FIG. 2. Silk hairnet. Alagou, Turfan County.

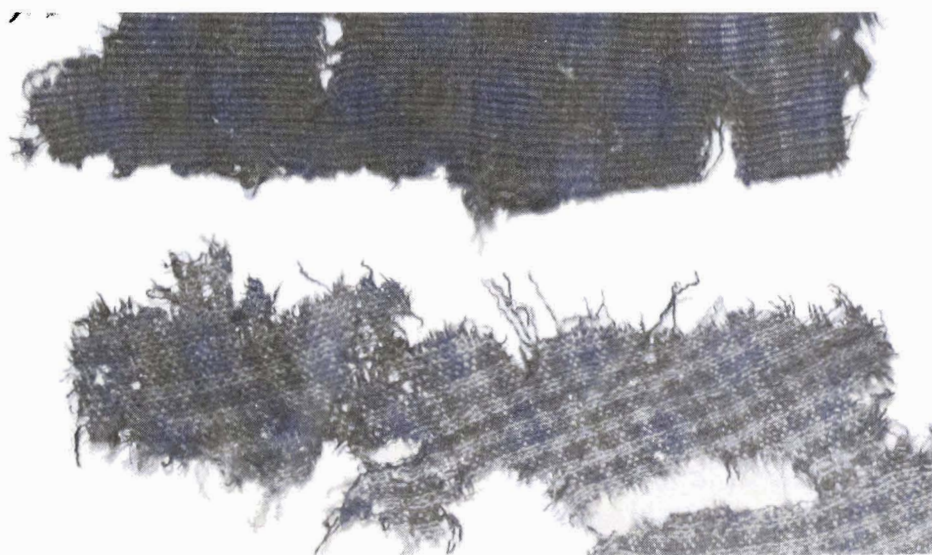


FIG. 3. Woollens. Alagou, Turfan County.

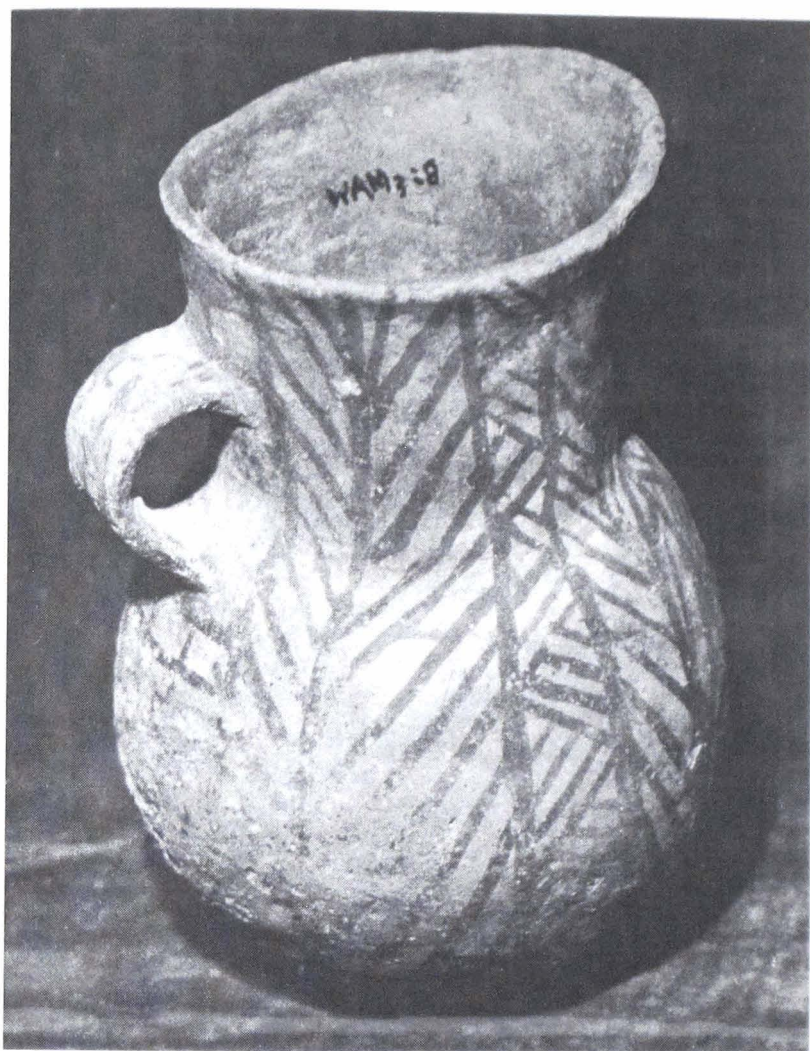


FIG. 4. Painted ceramic jar. Alagou, Turfan County.

terns (Figs. 4 and 5). Wooden objects including trays, bowls, spoons, cups and plates with engraved designs (Fig. 6) point to the skill of the artisans. There are a considerable number of bronze objects, primarily round bronze plates and small bronze knives; and wooden fire drills are found in virtually every grave. It must have been the normal method for obtaining fire at the time (Fig. 7).

In craftsmanship the ornaments have great individuality. There are many strings of beads of bone, agate and jade, and both bronze and gold earrings. There are also ornaments made of cowrie shell. Some bone ornaments are carved with the heads of animals such as wild boars or bears, in a vigorous style. Graves of the later period are rather different. The practice of multiple burials was replaced by single or double burials, suggesting a change in social structure. Graves are still pebble-lined, but now contain a wooden bench supported by four pillars. Funerary objects now include iron tools and weapons and craft products such as silks (Fig. 8), phoenix-pattern embroidery and lacquer cups,

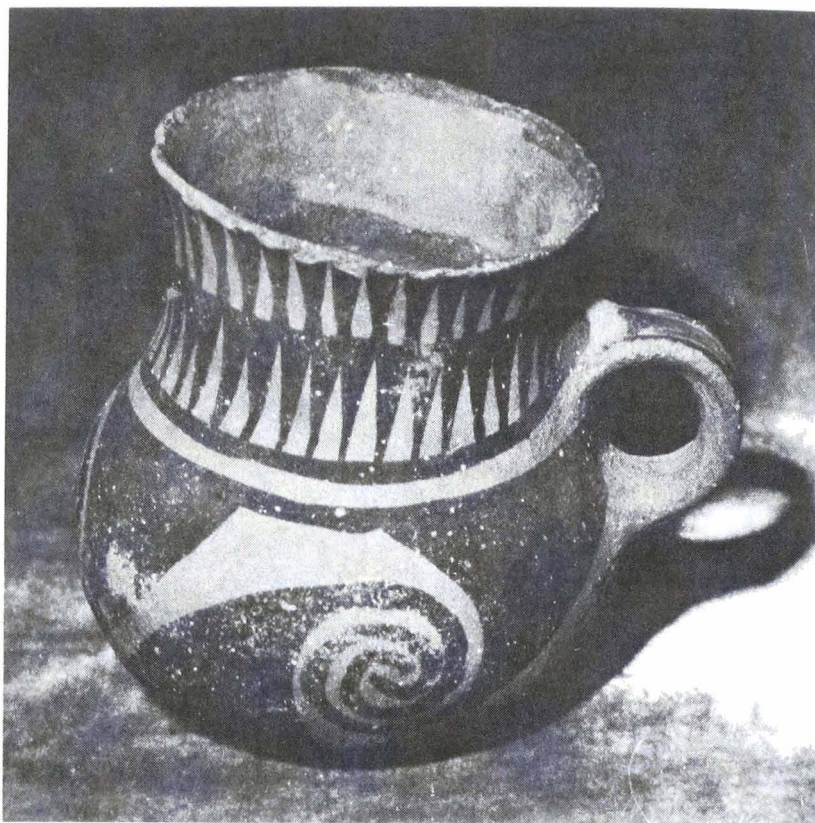


FIG. 5. Painted ceramic jar. Alagou, Turfan County.



FIG. 6. Carved wooden plate. Alagou, Turfan County.

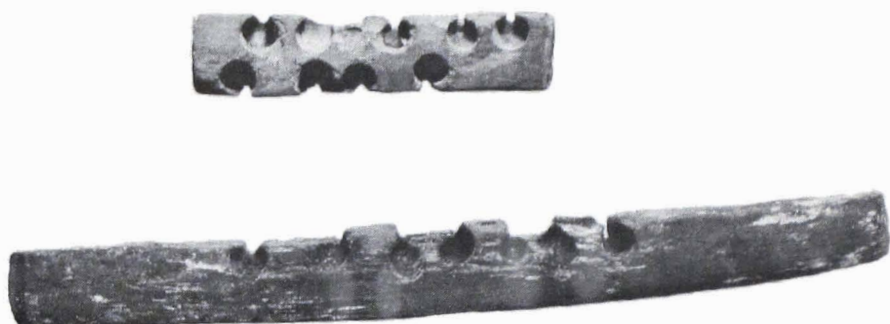


FIG. 7. Wood-drill fire sticks. Alagou, Turfan County.

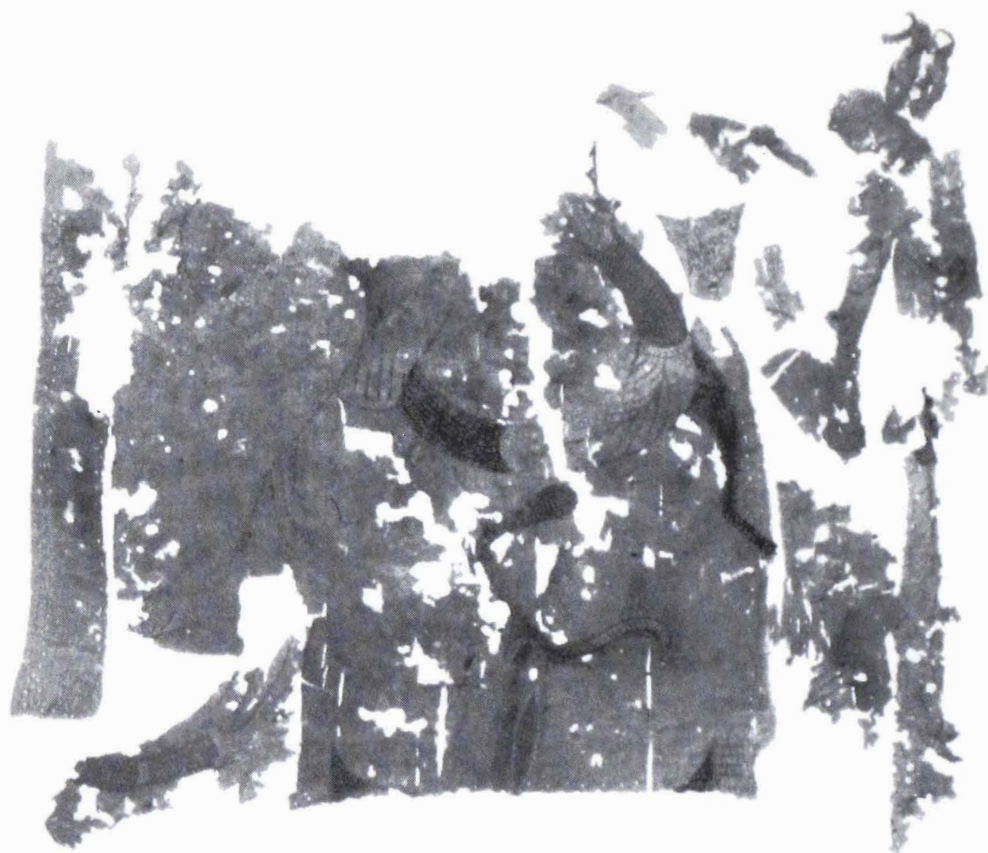


FIG. 8. Fragments of embroidered silk. Alagou, Turfan County.

imports from China. The proportion of plain pottery (mainly of a red-brown and grey-brown colour) greatly increased. Some new vessel forms are introduced, particularly the high-footed pottery cup and wooden dish. All these changes show that the inhabitants were increasingly subject to the influence of the culture and economy of China. The early graves of the Chü-shih people from the north of Yaerhu in Turfan County have funerary objects, other contents, and pottery basically similar to those of the Alagou pebble-grave culture,⁸ and this suggests that the pebble-graves at Alagou also belong to the Chü-shih.

The wooden chamber graves at Alagou (Turfan County)

Not far from the pebble-grave sites at Alagou, ancient graves belonging to a different cultural type have been found.⁹ These graves appear as heaps of stones at ground level. Beneath there is quite a large vertical pit with a volume of some 200 m³. The pit is filled with sand and piled stones which seem to have been brought from the nearby river bed. In the centre is a wooden coffin-chamber constructed of pine, which abounds in T'ien Shan. The wood, cut to size, is arranged in a criss-cross manner, vertically and horizontally, to line the four walls of the pit, and the roof is also covered with wood to form a coffin-chamber. The dead were buried singly or in pairs, always lying flat with the face upwards. It appears that some sort of red pigment was applied before burial. In most graves the chamber had caved in due to the collapse of stones above, when the wooden roof decayed. The skeletons are generally poorly preserved, but enough survive to suggest that they had a well-built physique. Carbon-14 dating places these graves between the fourth and second centuries B.C. The funerary objects found are rich in quantity and equally refined in quality. Many are gold luxury items such as beads. There are also round gold plaques, rather thick and heavy, beaten into a tiger pattern by a hard moulding tool. The tiger's body curves in a semi-circle in an active and expressive pose. These plaques, originally fixed in leather, seem to have been used to decorate belts. There are more than 100 gold-foil flakes, no thicker than a sheet of paper. Some are in the form of animals, others are shaped as willow leaves, or formed into diamonds or circles. The animals on these gold-foil flakes may be leaping lions or a pair of tigers crouching face to face. There are holes at the edges and at the two ends to enable them to be sewn as ornamentation onto clothes. Serving the same purpose were similar plaques in silver, also pressed into a range of animal designs (Fig. 9). There was also a remarkable bronze tray consisting of three separate parts – a square stand, the main body and two lion-like animals standing in the centre of the tray. The three sections had been cast separately, and then welded together by pouring liquid bronze on to the joints (Fig. 10). This unusual type of bronze

8. Huang, 1933.

9. Wang Binghua, 1981, pp. 18–22.



FIG. 9. Silver plaque from a wooden chamber grave. Alagou, Turfan County.

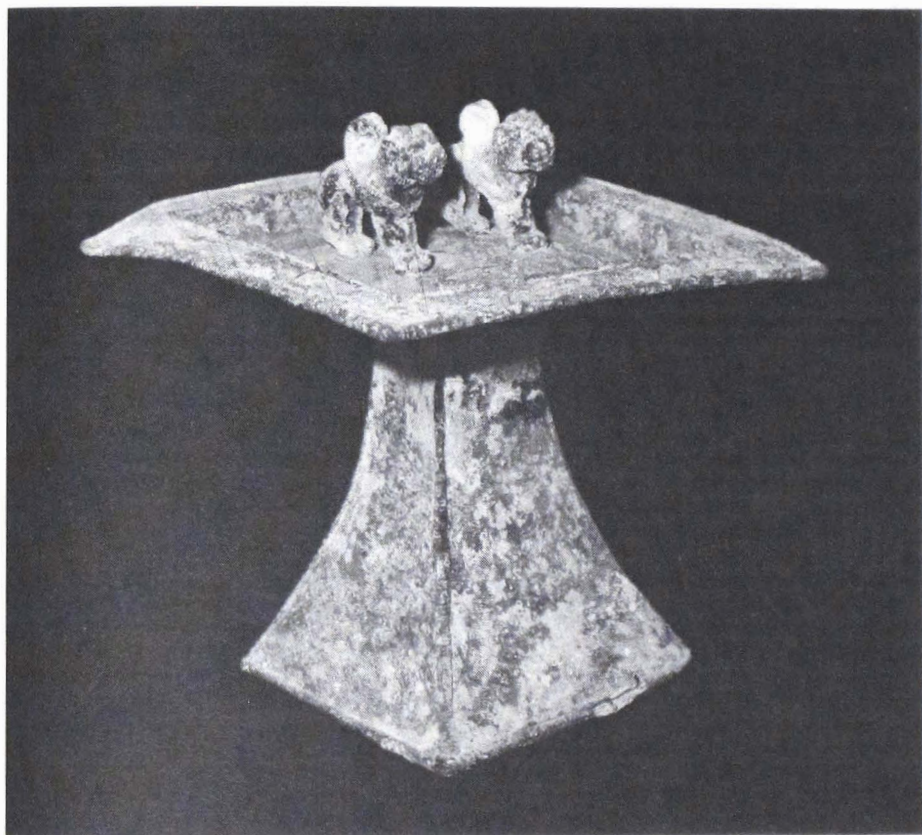


FIG. 10. Bronze tray with two statues of lion-like animals from a wooden chamber grave. Alagou, Turfan County.

tray with animal figures has also been found in ancient graves in the Ili valley in Xinyuan County. There were also a few iron knives and arrows intended for domestic use. The standard of smelting of the gold, copper and iron objects is good and the metal, except for objects in silver, is relatively pure.



FIG. 11. Lacquer tray *in situ* in a wooden chamber grave. Alagou, Turfan County.

Other luxury goods are agate beads, pearls, silk goods (such as a diamond-pattern gauze), lacquerware, trays (Fig. 11) and cups which came from the Yellow River region and provide evidence for trade links with China. Everyday household utensils include articles in a fine smooth pottery burnished to a glossy surface. The pottery objects are generally hand-made of fine craftsmanship, and have been fired at quite a high temperature. They include bowls, dishes, trays and small cups. Some vessels have three flat feet affixed to the base of the bowl – an unusual feature. These objects are very different from the pottery vessels recovered from the pebble-graves in the same locality.

Most of the funerary objects from the wooden chamber graves are household utensils and superior luxury goods, rarely production tools. It is clear that the persons buried in these graves must have been the chief nobles, not ordinary members of the nomad tribes.

The north-south orientation of these graves, the wooden coffin-chambers and their contents suggest an intimate connection with the Wu-sun culture in the Ili river basin.¹⁰ Similar graves, also aligned from north to south, have been found between Zhangye and Tun-huang in the Gansu corridor. The *Han-shu*

10. The Archaeological Research Institute of the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences has undertaken many excavations of the Ili river valley Wu-sun graves of the Han period, the successive directors of this work being Yi Manbo, Wang Mingzhe and Wang Binghua. Parts of the materials have already been published. See Archaeological Team, 1962; Ma and Wang, 1978, pp. 14–15; Archaeological Research Institute, 1979. The majority of materials has not yet been published and is stored in the Archaeological Research Institute of the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences.

says that the Wu-sun tribe originally lived in the western part of the Gansu corridor together with the Yüeh-chih, but escaped to the Hsiung-nu when the Yüeh-chih killed their chief. A generation later, the Yüeh-chih were defeated by the Hsiung-nu and forced to migrate west to the Ili valley. To avenge this ancient wrong, the Wu-sun attacked the Yüeh-chih, drove them out and occupied their land. These events took place in the first half of the second century B.C. (*Han-shu* 61, Biography of Chang Ch'ien; *Han-shu* 96, Record on the Western Regions.)

It may be recorded that the years in which the Wu-sun tribes depended on the Hsiung-nu, after they had been driven out of their homeland in the western part of the Gansu corridor by the Yüeh-chih, represented a period of greatness for the Hsiung-nu, with their power and influence possibly extending over the Altai mountains to the west. This was the time when the Alagou District of Turfan was under the control of the Hsiung-nu; and it can therefore be suggested that the Wu-sun tribes perhaps lived here under their protection, and the wooden chamber graves might be attributed to the Wu-sun. This context is consistent with the Carbon-14 dating, the geographical situation and the period of time covered by the wooden chamber-grave culture at Alagou.

The T'ien Shan settlements

Below the northern slopes of the T'ien-Shan mountains, where grass grows in profusion, there is excellent grazing and land suitable for cultivation. Many sites that were associated with settled cultures have been discovered. In the east, scattered through Tuergan, are a series of sites usually between 1,000 and 2,000 m², while the largest is 7,000 m².¹¹ The remains of houses with thick walls of earthen bricks and stone built to resist the severe winters of the region are still visible. The most interesting objects found are the large number of stone-mill trays. At Kuisu thirty to forty were found, several being worn from long use. At a number of sites painted pottery, stone axes, stone adzes, heavy bronze axes and bronze knives have been found. These sites lie between Lake Tuer-köl in the east and Lake Bar-köl (the famous Pu-li Sea of antiquity) to the west. The *Hou Han-shu* says that the state of Pu-li was called after a tribe of that name that engaged in agriculture, while some of its members led a nomadic life. When the Hsiung-nu controlled the western region, the King of Pu-li offended the Hsiung-nu ruler, the Pu-li tribe were expelled and their land was occupied by a people devoted to animal husbandry who knew nothing of agriculture. It may therefore be suggested that the sites of the ancient settled culture to the east of Lake Bar-köl may belong to the early period of the Pu-li tribe.

11. For relevant material, see Li, 1959; Wu, 1964; and Archaeological Research Institute, 1979.

The ancient village site of Sidaogou, 10 km west of Mulei,¹² has traces of habitation in the form of post-holes, kitchen ranges and ash pits. Carbon-14 dating suggests an early occupation of around 1000 B.C. and a later one from around the fourth century B.C. There are few funerary objects from the associated graves, but the habitation site finds included pottery, stone, bone and bronze articles. From the later period new articles have been found such as cups, cauldrons, pallets and container vessels, and the proportion of painted pottery increased, with vermilion colouring making its appearance. Most tools are of stone in good craftsmanship – mill quarries, mortars and pestles, spindle whorls, hoes, adzes, etc. There are bone spindle whorls, needles, combs and arrows, as well as bronze knives, hairpins, rings and ornaments. The bones of horses, oxen, sheep and dogs suggest the involvement of these animals in the economic life of the time.

It is clear that the people living in these areas led a sedentary life and were engaged in agriculture and domestic animal husbandry, with hunting as a supplementary activity. The appearance of terracotta knife moulds suggests that they had already grasped the art of casting bronze objects, while their painted pottery resembles that of the Shajing culture to the west of Gansu.

Grave sites on the slopes of the Altai mountains

The zone between the Altai mountains and the Dzungarian basin provides ideal grazing throughout the year. The nomadic peoples who lived there have left behind them many rock carvings of large-horned sheep, horses and deer, and men with taut bows and flying arrows. But it is difficult to suggest either the time or the people responsible for them.

Three principal types of grave have been found in the zone. The first type is the large stone tumulus found near Huahaizi in Qinghe Province. The largest example of this type of tumulus has a circumference of 230 m, encircled by a ring of stones, with a square polished granite stela 300 m to the north. The stela has carved running deer engraved on two sides. A second stela 10 m to the east has a carved circular and rhomboid pattern, with the carving of a lamb and a short sword. No graves of this group have yet been excavated.¹³

The second type is the 'stone-warrior' grave, which has an engraved figure of a man standing in front, sometimes represented by a human face carved on the upper part of a large boulder. Some have merely a stone bar symbolizing the human form. Behind the stone warrior there is a square stone coffin made from

12. Yang, 1982.

13. This type of large stone mound was surveyed in 1965 by the archaeological team of the Institute of Nationalities of the Xinjiang branch of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. For materials from the former Soviet Union and Mongolia, see Savinov and Chlenova, 1978.

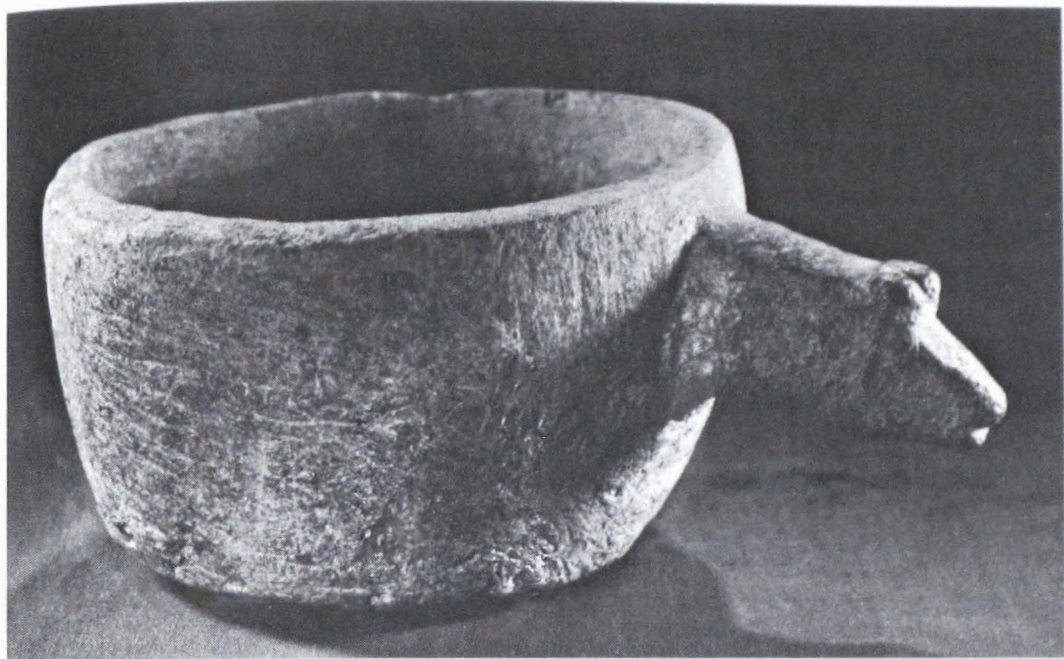


FIG. 12. Stone cup with handle in shape of cow's head from a stone-warrior grave.
Keermuqi, Altai County.



FIG. 13. Coupled stone cups from a stone-warrior grave. Keermuqi, Altai County.

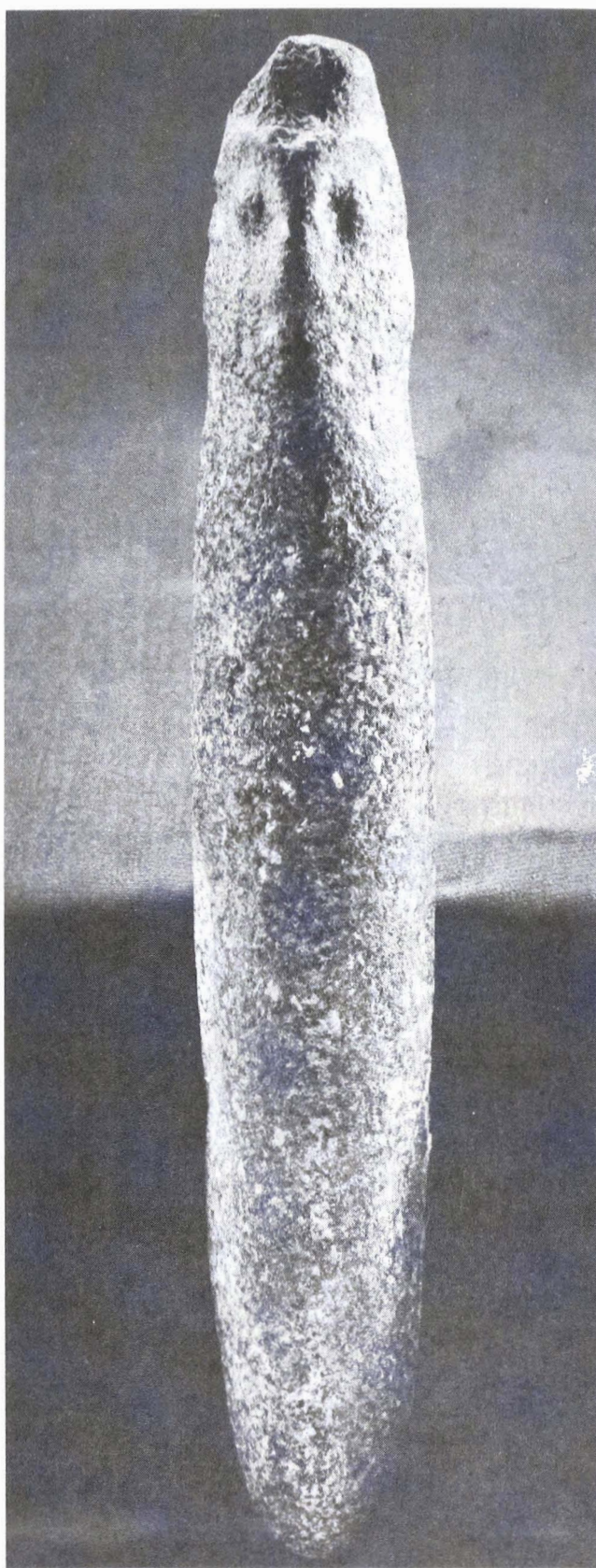


FIG. 14. Small stone figurine from a stone-warrior grave. Keermuqi, Altai County.

four enormous slabs of granite, capped by another slab. Inside the coffin the bones were found in complete disorder. There were multiple burials; and the objects found include stone arrows, stone cups, stone jars and pottery vessels with some bronze and iron objects (Figs. 12–14).¹⁴

The third type is the earth-pit vertical shaft grave, a type often discovered in the same region as the stone-warrior graves, but there is no evidence for any relationship between the two.

The three types of grave clearly belong to three different cultures, but the absence of full-scale excavations precludes any detailed discussion of their characteristics and historical backgrounds; also the absence of written records makes it impossible to give any clear answers to questions of ethnic identity. Such a broad study of the different grave-culture peoples of Xinjiang would be incomplete without reference to classical Greek literature, which mentions some of the tribes who might be associated with these areas. Literary works in both China and the West seem to focus primarily on the area to the north of Xinjiang – the slopes of the Altai mountains and the grasslands north of the Dzungarian Desert. This is probably because between the seventh and second centuries B.C. the principal route across Eurasia ran north-west from the Inner Mongolian grasslands near Hetao over the Altai mountains along the Irtîsh river. Having crossed the south Siberian grasslands, it again went west to reach the land of the Scythians on the northern shores of the Black Sea, as archaeological finds seem to confirm. The evidence from the epic *Arimaspea*, referring to the Issedones as neighbours of the Massagetae (Strabo XV.1.6), speaks for their nomadic identity but it is difficult to identify them with the tribes noted in the Chinese annals. Some Chinese scholars have identified the geographical location of the territory of the Issedones with the Yüeh-chih or Wu-sun on the upper reaches of the Ili river and in Xinjiang, but this remains uncertain. What is clear is that between the sixth and fourth centuries B.C. there was a powerful confederacy of nomadic tribes under the name of Yüeh-chih living on the steppes to the south of the Altai mountains; and the graves excavated in different areas of Xinjiang confirm the existence of several nomadic groups and throw light on some of their cultural and political relations.

14. Wang Mingzhe, 1981, pp. 23–32.

THE WESTERN REGIONS UNDER THE HSIUNG-NU AND THE HAN*

Ma Yong and Sun Yutang

The triangular clash

The second century B.C. had a profound influence on the history of Central Asia.

This was the century in which the clash between two great powers, the Hsiung-nu and the Han, for the mastery of the Western Regions took place. The Hsiung-nu people originally lived in the northern part of present-day Shaanxi in China. During the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., faced with the northward expansion of the states of Ch'in and Chao, they were forced to migrate to the grasslands of Inner Mongolia, where they became a strong tribal confederation, and subsequently controlled many of the nomad peoples of Mongolia. Early in the second century B.C. the Hsiung-nu drove out the Yüeh-chih and took possession of their land. At that time there were several communities in the oases round the Tarim basin leading a sedentary life, occupied in agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry. In the Turfan basin to the west of Lop Nor and along the northern foot of the Kunlun and Altai ranges were scattered communities carrying on a semi-agricultural and semi-nomadic way of life. These groups had organized themselves around urban centres to form a series of petty kingdoms. The Han historians refer to these as the 'Walled City-States of the Western Regions'. There were some thirty-six of them, the more important being Chü-shih (Turfan), Lou-lan, Yen-ch'i (Qarashahr), Ch'iu-tzū (Kucha), Ku-mo (Aksu), Shu-lê (Kashgar), So-chü (Yarkand), Yü-t'ien (Khotan) and Chü-mi (Khema). Because of the great distances between them they were not integrated into one strong political unit, and were unable to offer any effective resistance to the Hsiung-nu.

Under Mao-tun, the Hsiung-nu consolidated their position. The land

* See Map 6.

west of the Altai mountains, with the 'Walled City-States', was ruled by the Prince of Li-jhu. The Hsiung-nu under him were nomads living on the grassy plain around Lake Pu-li (modern Lake Bar-köl). A resident with the title 'general-in-charge of slaves' was installed to keep watch on the petty Walled City-States, with the duty of levying taxes from them. The Hsiung-nu clearly considered all the peoples living in the Walled City-States as slaves, but left their original political organization undisturbed. No doubt their princes had been sent as hostages to the Hsiung-nu. Taxes to the Hsiung-nu would naturally be paid in agricultural produce such as grain and fruit. The tribal confederation of the Hsiung-nu was prepared to challenge the Han in China, which suffered from political instability following the tyrannical rule of the Ch'in and the widespread civil war. The Chinese tried to appease the Hsiung-nu through intermediaries, by paying indemnity and providing gifts for several decades. Eventually, after forty years of peace during the reigns of Wen-ti and Ching-ti, the Han had sufficient economic and military power to confront the Hsiung-nu. Emperor Wu-ti, who ascended the throne in 140 B.C., proposed joint action with the Yüeh-chih against their common enemy, the Hsiung-nu, and sent a mission under Chang Ch'ien to the Yüeh-chih, in the Ili river basin, seeking an alliance. About 117 B.C. Chang Ch'ien was again sent on a mission to the Wu-sun, and dispatched deputy envoys to the countries of Ta-yüan, K'ang-chü, Yüeh-chih and Ta-hsia. The information he collected was recorded by the great historian Szü-ma Ch'ien in the *Shih-chi*, the earliest reliable Chinese literary source for the history of Central Asia.

After Chang Ch'ien's first mission there was a long struggle for control of the Western Regions. In 121 B.C. one of the Hsiung-nu leading nobles ruling over the Gansu corridor surrendered to the Han, who set up the four prefectures of Wu-wei, Chang-i, Chiu-ch'üan and Tun-huang, the first step towards extending Han power over the Western Regions. After this the oasis kingdoms of the Tarim basin, previously dependants of the Hsiung-nu, successfully transferred their allegiance to the Han. The campaign by the Han general Li Kuang-li against Ta-yüan (part of modern Ferghana) in 101 B.C. further increased the political prestige and influence of the Han.

The clash between the Han and the Hsiung-nu now focused on Chü-shih (the modern Turfan basin), an area of great strategic importance. During the first half of the first century B.C. internal rivalries greatly weakened Hsiung-nu power. In 60 B.C., the Hsiung-nu prince Jih-chu surrendered to the Han; the Hsiung-nu post of 'general-in-charge' was abolished. The eventual victor in the internal rivalries, *shan-yü* Hu-han-yeh, surrendered to the Han in 54 B.C. After this event the thirty-six states of the Western Regions came under the direct rule of the Han. They invested Ch'eng Chi as the first *hsi-yü tu-hu* (protector-general of the Western Regions), that is, the highest civil and military official in charge of the area. From then until the end of the reign of Wang Mang (c. A.D. 23), there was an unbroken succession of protectors-general, eighteen in all, of

whom ten names have come down to us.¹ The last protector-general, Li Chung, died at Kucha and his personal seal has been discovered in Shaya County, Xinjiang.²

China and the Western Regions

The large-scale peasant uprising in the last years of Wang Mang's reign and the ensuing civil war left the Eastern Han dynasty too exhausted to regain control over the Western Regions. After a fierce war between the petty kingdoms, the state of So-chü (Yarkand) gained hegemony over the area for a few years. The Southern Hsiung-nu remained subject to the Han, and stayed within the northern prefectures; but the Western Hsiung-nu invaded the Western Regions, and the Walled City-States of the Western Regions fell once more into their hands.

In the first years of the Eastern Han period, three fierce battles were fought for the control of the Western Regions. Pan Ch'ao was the best-known Han general. His military career of thirty-one years (A.D. 73–102) was crowned with success, and he was popular with the people of the oasis states. He successfully averted the invasion of the army sent by a Kushan king who attempted to interfere in the affairs of the Walled City-States, and sent his envoy, Kan Ying, on a mission to Tiao-chih (the Persian Gulf). Kan Ying was, however, prevented from completing his journey by the Parthians.

In A.D. 126 Pan Ch'ao's son, Pan Yung, again defeated the Northern Hsiung-nu and consolidated Han rule in the Western Regions. Instead of the protector-general the Han court now appointed a *hsi-yü chang-shih* (secretary-general), a post that was retained until the end of the reign of Ling-ti (c. A.D. 188). At least eight of these officials are recorded in documentary sources.

The protracted civil war in China towards the end of the Eastern Han severed links with the Western Regions, but the Northern Hsiung-nu also declined. One part migrated to the west, another part was dispersed over Gansu, Shaanxi and Inner Mongolia and, like the Southern Hsiung-nu, began to merge with the local inhabitants of China. Meanwhile, a new nomadic confederation, the Hsien-pi, took over the Mongolian plateau and the lands west of the Altai mountains. During the first half of the third century A.D., China proper was divided into three independent states, the Wei, Shu and Wu. Both the Wei and the Shu re-established relations with the Western Regions, the Wei reviving the post of secretary-general. A substantial number of wooden tablets with Chinese inscriptions belonging to the Wei and Ch'in periods have been found in the

1. Huang Wenbi, 1981, pp. 310–14.

2. Huang Wenbi, 1958, p. 113. The seal inscription is '*Li Chong shi yin xin*'. Huang inexplicably rendered '*xin*' as two separate characters and hence failed in its decipherment. See Ma, 1975, p. 29.

ruins of Lou-lan north-west of Lop Nor.³ They are official documents and archives from the office of the secretary-general, governor of the Western Regions.

The economy of the oasis states

The economic base of these oasis states was farming and horticulture, with irrigation and animal husbandry. Numerous dwelling sites have been discovered recently in the Tarim basin dating from the Han, the most famous being at Niya in the north of Minfeng County. The remains of houses are spread along both banks of the now dry Niya river, covering an area of 10 km (south to north) by 25 km (east to west). The houses had floors made from a mixture of wheat-straw, cow-dung and mud; their walls were made of wattle woven with tamarisk twigs daubed with mud, and fitted with fireplaces. Around the settlement were extensive orchards. This site and the economic life it reflects are representative of the oasis states in this area (Fig. 1).⁴ In places where the land was poor or sandy, as in Shan-shan, and it was impossible to rely upon agriculture, people reared animals and obtained cereals from the agricultural oases by barter.

The most outstanding handicraft product of the Western Regions under Han rule was probably textiles. Because herding was widespread, skins and woollen garments were used for protection. Many pieces of woollen cloth, brightly coloured and beautifully figured, have been found in ruins of the Han period. Fragments of woollen cloth with remarkably beautiful designs of men, animals, vines, tortoiseshell and petal patterns (Fig. 2) were found in a husband-and-wife tomb of the Eastern Han period in Minfeng County. Tapestries from

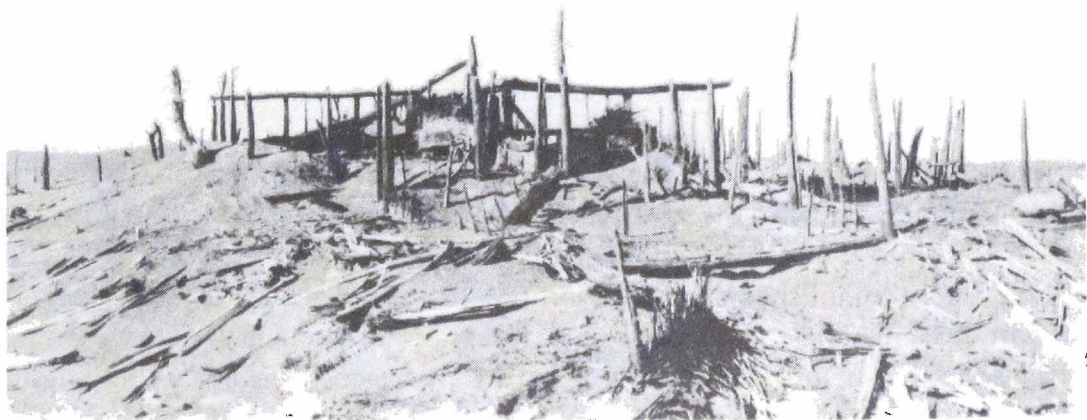


FIG. 1. Ruins of a village. Niya.

3. Luo and Wang, 1914; Huang Lie, 1981, pp. 58–63.

4. Shi, 1962.

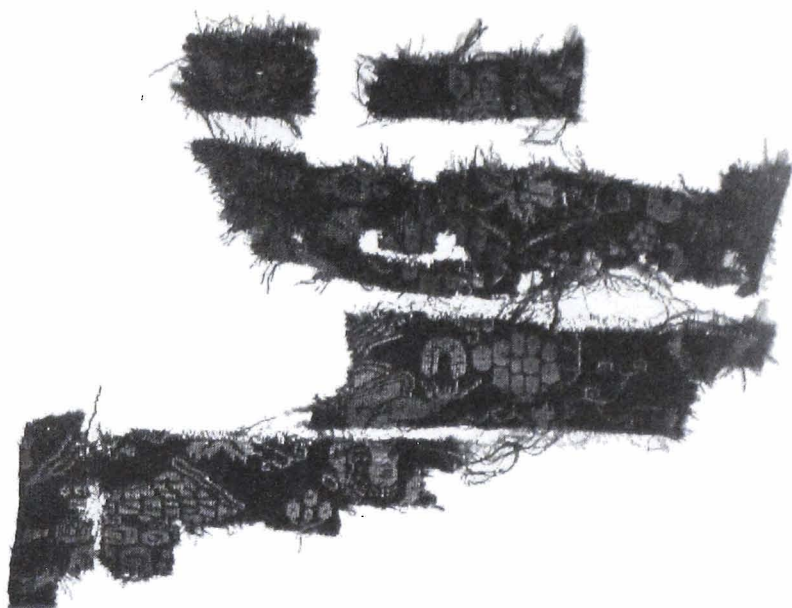


FIG. 2. Woollen cloth with figures of men, animals and grapes.

the Western Regions used for bed coverings, carpets and hangings were held in high esteem by the Han people.⁵ Clothing was also made from linen, cotton and silk. Flax was extensively cultivated in the Western Regions and had quite a long history. Cotton perhaps first entered the area from India. Two pieces of dyed cotton cloth of this period have been found at Niya (Fig. 3). Using a white ground, the cloth is dyed with wax and indigo to form beautiful designs comparable in quality to modern products using the same technique in China today. One beautifully designed piece of dyed cotton has a head (perhaps of Buddha) surrounded with a halo and the figure of a dragon. In terms of decorative style it has strong Indian characteristics, but the dragon is certainly Chinese in conception. It is not clear whether this material was imported or a local product, but it does show that the inhabitants of the Western Regions were using high-quality batik-dyed cotton clothes during the Eastern Han period. There is no doubt about the Chinese origin of silks. The Emperor Wu-ti and Chang Ch'ien had opened up the Silk Route, and the Han court regularly presented gifts of all sorts of silk. Many pieces of Han silk have been found in Xinjiang in the Wusun tombs at Zhaosu and in the Han sites at Lop Nor. Among the best-preserved pieces of silk are those from the tomb of a husband and wife at Minfeng. There is hardly any item of clothing in the tomb that is not of finely woven silk, with quality embroidery. One robe is decorated with Chinese characters wishing 'Good luck for 10,000 generations', while a 'crowing-cock' pillow suggests the idea of rising early in the morning. Other beautifully woven Chinese cha-

5. Ma, 1983*b*.

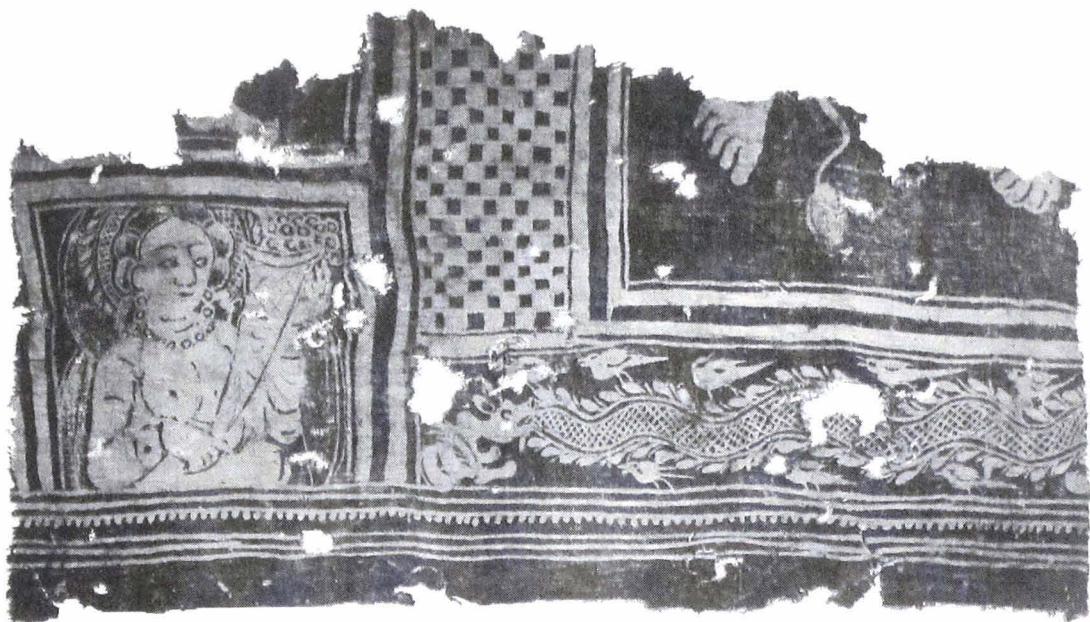


FIG. 3. Wax-resist dyed cotton cloth.

racters wish 'Long life and good fortune to you and your descendants'. They were obviously in daily use in China proper, but the narrow sleeves of the brocade robe suggest a local fashion that was possibly tailored locally (Fig. 4).⁶

The Western Regions had already developed mining and metal casting techniques prior to the Han dynasty. The *Han-shu* description of the Shou-ch'iang states that 'there is iron ore in the hills; and they produce their own arms – bows, arrows, long knives, swords and armour'. The natives of Shan-shan were also skilled at making arms and in the states west of Ch'ieh-mo 'the arms made were like those of the Han'. So-chü (Yarkand) 'has mountains containing iron ores' and in Ch'iu-tzū (Kucha) workmen were 'skilled at casting and had reserves of lead'. It is clear that iron-casting and steel-making were fairly widespread among the Walled City-States of the Western Regions, and were used in making both tools and weapons.

Mining sites of the Han period have been discovered at A'a Shan, Minfeng and Aqikê Shan. From A'a Shan the finds include crucibles, iron slag, ore and pottery like the bellows air pipe found in Shaanxi (Fig. 5). At Niya and elsewhere ore, sintered iron, slag, stone chisels, whetstones and fragments of iron shovels have been found; and houses there contained iron adzes and sickles with wooden handles. A copper-mining site has been located at Ka-ke-ma-ke. 'Wu-shu' coins of the Han period have been found at all these mining sites, sug-

6. Ma, 1975, pp. 29–30.



FIG. 4. Brocade robe.

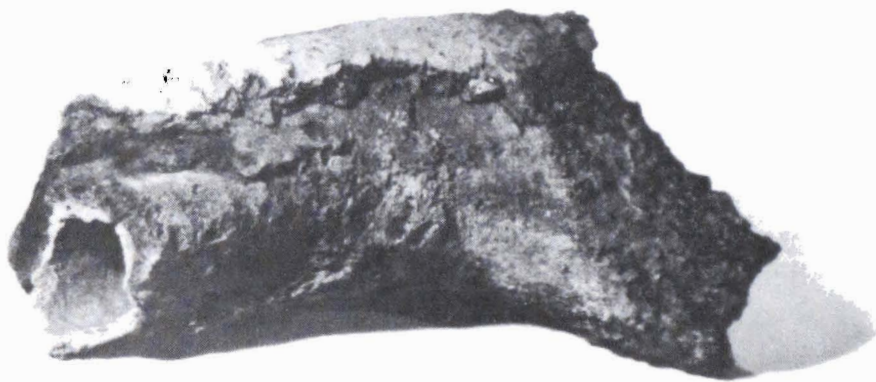


FIG. 5. Pottery bellows air-pipe.

gesting that they were established after the beginning of Han rule in the Western Regions.⁷ From the Wu-sun tomb site in Zhaosu County dating from Han times comes an iron ploughshare, and tool marks found on a wooden outer coffin show that iron tools were in use.⁸ In the same context was found a strikingly beautiful gold ring set with precious stones, but it is not yet possible to determine whether it was imported or made locally.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30.

8. Ma and Wang, 1978, pp. 11–12.

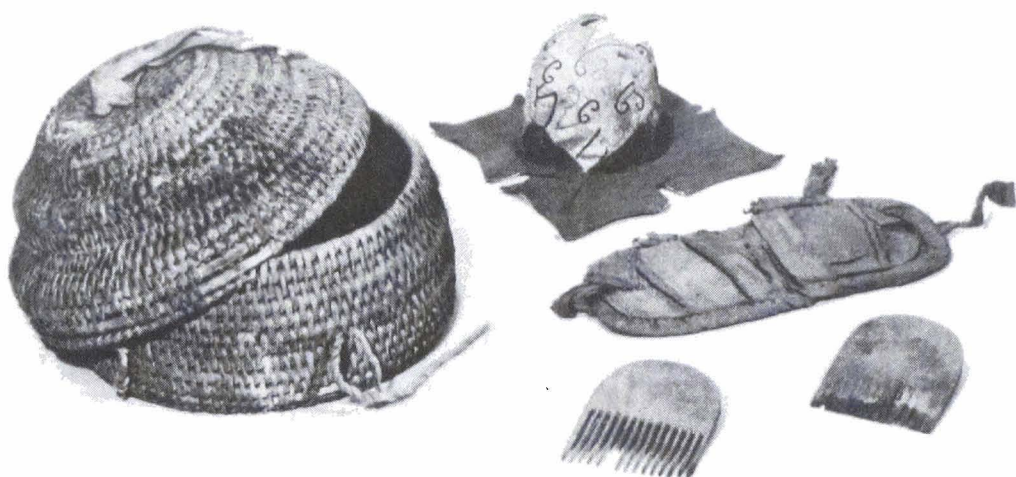


FIG. 6. Toilet box and toiletries.

The exchange of commodities between the Western Regions and the heartland of China expanded considerably during the Han period. At a number of Han sites in Xinjiang lacquerware, woven rattanware and bronze mirrors have been discovered, all imported from China proper (Fig. 6). It is especially worthy of mention that linen-made paper was discovered among Western Han remains at Lop Nor and paper of a similar kind has been found in Eastern Han tombs in Minfeng County.⁹ Paper is one of the most striking inventions of China, dating back to the Western Han period. Paper appeared in the Western Regions soon after it was first invented in China, showing the speed at which commodities were exchanged between the two regions. China imported from the Western Regions fine breeds of horses, grapes, alfalfa and, of course, jade, the famous product of Khotan. The name Yü-men Kuan (Jade Gate Pass) may have been given by the Chinese merchants who imported jade from the Western Regions. Some post-Han sources mention Chinese imports of *hu* paper (flax), *hu* gourds, *hu* peaches and *hu* stallions. The term '*hu*' means 'Western barbarian' and points to the area from which they came. Fine woollen and cotton textiles from the Western Regions also flowed into China in large quantities.

There is hardly one Han site in Xinjiang that has failed to yield a great number of Han coins, including varieties of all periods, clear evidence that under Han rule the coinage of China proper also circulated in the Western Regions (Fig. 7). The Walled City-States did not issue their own coins. The only exception was Khotan, which minted a small quantity of Sino-Kharoṣṭhī bilingual copper coins. They are round but, unlike Chinese cash, have no hole in the

9. Huang Wenbi, 1948, p. 168, Plates 23-5.

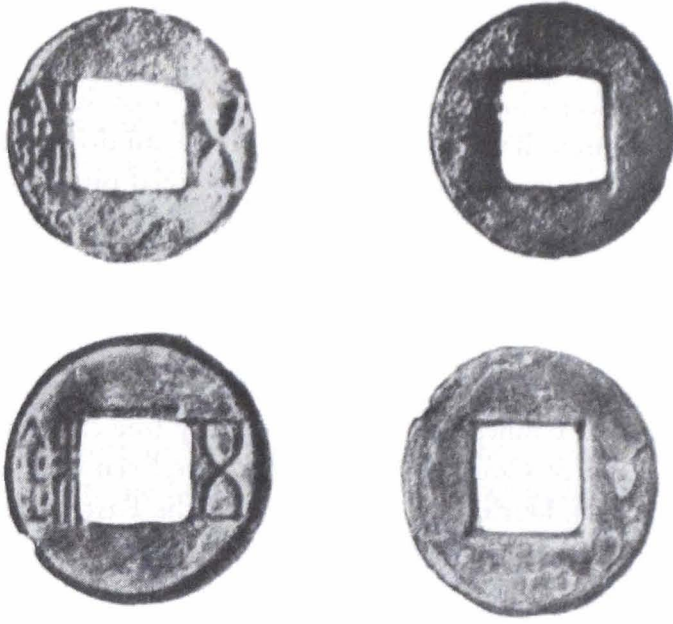


FIG. 7. Han 'Wu Shu' coins.

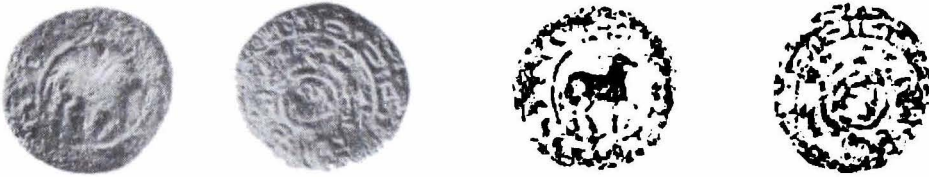


FIG. 8. Sino-Kharoṣṭhī bilingual coins.

centre or trimmed line round the rim. The obverse has a legend in Chinese seal script indicating the value of the coin. On the reverse is a horse or camel surrounded by a Prakrit legend in Kharoṣṭhī script, giving the name and titles of the king. The coins were struck in two denominations, the larger with the legend 'bronze cash weight 24 *shu*', the smaller with '6 *shu* cash'. Most of these coins were found at the oasis of Khotan and were early recognized as issues of the ancient state of Khotan. They were struck between A.D. 152 and 180, that is, in the last few decades of the Eastern Han period (Fig. 8), apparently not for economic reasons so much as for prestige. Consequently the quantity issued was small and circulation was limited. The use of Kharoṣṭhī script shows the influence of Kushan culture, but the honorific titles of the King of Khotan on the coins are on an equal footing with those of the Kushan kings, making it clear that at that time Khotan was not under Kushan rule. The fact that the legend indicating the value of the coin and the unit of value is in Chinese shows the strength of Chinese influence.

Language, culture and religion

These Central Asian kingdoms had no script of their own; it seems that Chinese was well known, though the large number of Kharoṣṭhī documents found suggests that Chinese may have been used only for official purposes. In a number of Western Region states there were 'directors of interpreters', officials in charge of the translators, who had full knowledge of spoken, and probably also of written, Chinese because they were obliged to translate Chinese government documents. Some of the wooden tablets inscribed in Chinese discovered at Niya in Minfeng County are letters of the local nobility. The inscriptions on the tablets were in classical Chinese characters with very fine calligraphy, reflecting an excellent command of Chinese, which must have been their chief means of communication (Fig. 9). During the last decades of the Eastern Han period, as a result of Kushan influence, Kharoṣṭhī script seems to have dominated the Western Regions; the Sino-Kharoṣṭhī bilingual coins struck by the King of Khotan are perhaps the earliest instance of this.¹⁰ Later, Kharoṣṭhī script reached the state of Shan-shan,¹¹ becoming the official script there for a period in the third and fourth centuries A.D.¹²



FIG. 9. Wooden tablets with Chinese text.

10. Ma, 1983a; Xia Nai, 1962.

11. Luo and Wang, 1914; Huang Lie, 1981, Tables 28–31.

12. Ma, 1980b.

Besides using the Chinese script, some rulers of the oasis kingdoms also copied the Han court in other ways. Chiang-pin, King of Kucha during the late Western Han, took instructions of the Han court as his model in building his palace, setting his guards of honour and adopting the ringing of bells and beating of drums for court ceremonies. Yen, King of So-chü, also consulted and employed the ceremonial rules of the Han court.¹³

Our knowledge of burial customs is limited, except for Zhaosu County, where a number of Wu-sun graves have been excavated recently. The Wu-sun tombs with domed tumuli are found in groups, arranged in a row from north to south. Most contain wooden outer coffins, with inner walls decorated with felt hangings. Most are multi-chambered, with traces of wooden coffins, but sometimes the corpses were only wrapped in felt. The burials are in the extended supine position, with the head pointing west. Most tomb furniture is poor and simple, there being pottery vessels and iron objects such as small awls. In some large tombs more luxurious grave furniture has been found, including such beautiful objects as the gold ring discussed above.¹⁴ Near the Wu-sun area, a joint husband-and-wife burial has been found among the graves of the Eastern Han period at Niya, with their box-like wooden coffin standing on four feet, placed in a rectangular shaft with mid-coated tamarisk wattle; to judge from the covering and clothing of the deceased, these would seem to be the graves of the local higher nobility.¹⁵ Earlier it was suggested that the boat-shaped wooden-coffin burials found in the Lop Nor area were the graves of the Lou-lan people during the Han dynasty, but similar remains have now been found on the lower reaches of the Kongque river, dated by Carbon-14 to around 1000 B.C., so the so-called 'Lou-lan graves' can no longer be ascribed to the Han period.

Many scholars believe that Buddhism was brought into China at the end of the Western or the beginning of the Eastern Han period, hence the Western Regions must have received Buddhism even earlier. The supposition is that if Buddhism spread north-eastwards from India, it must naturally have been accepted first by the peoples of the Western Regions before reaching central China. The *Biography* of Pan Ch'ao, in the *Hou Han-shu*, however, mentions that when he arrived in Khotan in A.D. 73, the local people believed in Shamanism and a shaman tried to kill his horse to practise sacrifices and incantations. This could not have been Buddhism, and must have been a local religion practised among the oasis states. A greater part of the chapter on the Western Regions in the *Hou Han-shu* was copied from Pan Yung's original written record of the Western Regions, which was completed by the end of the reign of Emperor An-ti, that is, around A.D. 124. Pan Yung spent the whole of his youth

13. For King Chiang-pin of Ch'iu-tzū, see *Han-shu* 96; for King Yen of So-chü, see *Hou Han-shu*, chapter on the Western Regions.

14. Archaeological Research Institute, 1979.

15. *Wenwu*, 1960.

in the Western Regions and was familiar with the local customs. He was also interested in the question of Buddhism. But it was only when he spoke about the state of T'ien-chu (India) that he commented that the country 'practises the Buddhist Way and does not take life, which has now become the order of the day'. From his records we can find hardly any trace of Buddhism in the Western Regions under Han rule. Moreover, from an art-historical point of view none of the Buddhist caves with murals in Xinjiang can be dated before the beginning of the Eastern Han. It may therefore be suggested that Buddhism reached the Tarim basin around the middle of the second century A.D. There is no doubt that Buddhism reached China proper a little earlier. This may be explained in two ways. The first hypothesis is that the people who first brought Buddhism to China were Buddhists from the Kushan Empire. Although they took the road through the Western Regions, the object of their mission was the Han court. The introduction of Buddhism was therefore not by a gradual expansion across the Western Regions as some scholars envisaged. The alternative is that the spread of Buddhism into China during the Eastern Han came another way, perhaps by the sea route.

Chinese administration

The *Han-shu* chapter on the Western Regions gives a fairly clear description of the sphere of jurisdiction of the Han protector-general. Wherever a state did not come under his control, it was always indicated that this particular state 'was not subject to the protector-general'. The official residence of the protector-general was located at Wu-li (east of Lun-t'ai County, Xinjiang).

Among the inhabitants ruled by the protector-general was, first, the so-called 'Tocharian' group.¹⁶ It is difficult to suggest a definite name for their language, which is, however, named after the ethnic group using it. Spoken by the Chü-shih, Yen-ch'i, Ch'iu-tzū and Lou-lan (Shan-shan) peoples, it was Indo-European, though its relation with other languages of the family remains unclear. We can distinguish three dialects: (a) the Kuchean dialect, spoken by the Chü-shih and Ch'iu-tzū peoples (Tocharian B); (b) the Yen-ch'i dialect, spoken by the Yen-ch'i people (Tocharian A); and (c) the Lou-lan dialect, spoken by the Lou-lan people.¹⁷ This Tocharian group as a whole settled along the

16. The dispute about the term 'Tocharian language' is well known internationally so it is unnecessary to discuss it further here. In recent years most Chinese scholars have discarded this term and used the 'Yen-ch'i-Ch'iu-tzū language' in its place. Nevertheless, this language should also include the dialects of Chü-shih and Lou-lan (Shan-shan) area. Accordingly, the term 'Yen-ch'i-Ch'iu-tzū language' is not really appropriate. Therefore, for our present purpose we shall preserve the old usage and call it 'Tocharian'.

17. The Kharoṣṭhī documents found in the Kingdom of Shan-shan in Xinjiang are written in Gāndhārī Prakrit, but some words borrowed from the local language reflect the Lou-lan dialect, which should come under the so-called 'Tocharian' category. See Burrow, 1937.

northern fringes of the Tarim basin and to its east in the Turfan basin as well as the vicinity of Lop Nor. The second was the Ch'iang language group, of tribes settled along the northern foot of the Altyn, Kunlun and Karakorum ranges, the major tribe being the Yüeh-ch'iang. The Hsi-yeh, Pu-li, Yin-ai and Mo-lu-ti peoples, who lived on the south-east of the Pamir plateau, also belonged to the Ch'iang group, but they may also have been intermingled with the Sakas.¹⁸ The language of the Ch'iang doubtless belonged to the Sino-Tibetan language family. They had close relations with the Ku-yang people in the Kui-lan mountain area and present-day Qinghai Province. The third was the Saka language group, spread over a broad area from south of Lake Balkhash to the south of the Pamir plateau, including such places as Shu-lê, Yü-t'ien, etc., in the western part of the Tarim basin. Except for the Wu-sun, who were mainly nomadic herdsmen, most of the population had formed themselves into the Walled City-States by the second century B.C., with agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry as the basis of their economy. Most of the city-states were very small. According to the population figures in the *Han-shu*, the largest was Ch'iu-tzū (Kucha) with a population of 81,317 and the smallest, Shan-huan, with only 194. It is clear that the kings of these oasis states were only rulers of a town or large village. For a time under the Eastern Han the thirty-six Walled City-States were divided further and became fifty-five. The *Hou Han-shu* records the population of some of these states at a later date, but in far less detail. Comparing the *Hou Han-shu* and the *Han-shu* we can see that the population in the Eastern Han period was about twice as much as in the Western Han period, but the total was still very small.

Under the rule of the protector-general and secretary-general of the Western Regions, all the kings of these states, large and small, were subject to the central government of the Han, as previously they had been subject to the central government of the Hsiung-nu. They had to send 'attendant sons' to the Han court. Their royal status, and the status of certain of their officials, was dependent on Han approval. According to the *Han-shu*, the number of kings, aristocrats and ministers of the Walled City-States who had received seals of authority from the Han court exceeded 376 (Fig. 10). In certain states, the Han also set up new official posts and sometimes even appointed Han people as officials.¹⁹

However, Han rule in the Western Regions differed from that of the

18. The *Han-shu* 96 alleged that the Hsi-yeh, Pu-li, Yin-ai and Mo-lu-ti were of the same nationality, 'differing from the Hu but similar to the Ch'iang and Ti'. 'Hu' here seems to belong to the east Iranian group. However, the archaeological remains we find in this area revealed that their culture had strong elements of the Sai (Saka) culture. (See Chapter 9 of the present volume.) The *Han-shu* notes that they were 'similar' to the Ch'iang or Ti, which shows that they were not of pure Ch'iang descent.

19. For example, 'marquis to attack the Hu' and similar posts are obviously Han-conferred official titles. See *Han-shu* 96.



FIG. 10. Official seal of the 'Han Kuei I Ch'iang Chang'.

Hsiung-nu. It only required the subject states to provide part of the military force needed to withstand the Hsiung-nu in time of war, and to accept responsibility for protecting communication lines along the Silk Route during time of peace.

Military and agricultural colonies

It was not enough to rely exclusively on the military strength of these small states for defence against Hsiung-nu incursions, therefore the Han government stationed some armed forces in the Western Regions. To avoid problems in supplying remote areas, and transporting provisions across the Gobi Desert, the *t'un-t'ien* (military agricultural colony) policy was adopted: the garrison troops were required to cultivate land on the spot. As early as the reign of Emperor Wu-ti, *t'un-t'ien* colonies were set up at Lun-t'ai and Ch'ü-li with an initial complement of several hundred farming conscripts led by envoy-commanders. During the reigns of Emperors Chao-ti and Hsüan-ti there were also *t'un-t'ien* colonies at I-hsun City (east of modern Ruoqiang County), Chü-shih (west of modern Turfan County), Chih-ku (near the Issîk-köl in Kyrgyzstan) and on the north-west bank of Lop Nor. The scale of the individual colonies increased and the number of garrison conscripts of Lun-t'ai alone rose to 1,500. During Eastern Han rule there was a *t'un-t'ien* colony at I-wu (in the area of present-day Hami) and a 'commander-in-charge of cereals' was posted there.²⁰ Liu-jong in the east of the Turfan basin was the long-term central location for the garrison troops and farming colonies. These troops were under the command of an officer of higher rank called the Wu-chi commandant.²¹ The site of his headquarters was called Kao-ch'ang-pi, this being the origin for the use of the name Kao-ch'ang (Qocho) for the Turfan basin as a whole. During the latter days of the Eastern Han, the Wu-chi commandant had become the highest commanding

20. Ma and Wang, 1978, pp. 11–12.

21. Hou, 1980.

officer of the Western Regions garrisons, comparable to the secretary-general, who held authority over the inhabitants of the Western Regions; duties were divided between the two.

Vestiges of the *t'un-t'ien* colonies of the Han period are still to be seen in Lun-t'ai, Shaya and Ruoqiang Counties, and the region close to Lop Nor, where traces of ancient irrigation channels and field ridges can be recognized on the red clay banks of the Qizil river. From the Tu-yin site on the north bank of Lop Nor large numbers of wooden tablets (Fig. 11) have been found, dating from the second half of the first century B.C., mostly official documents of the *t'un-t'ien* troops, reflecting their organization and original encampments, agricultural products, tools used, methods of cultivation, granaries and their daily life generally.²² From these tablets we learn that these *t'un-t'ien* soldiers came from all over China's inner prefectures, bringing their families with them and living there for long periods of time, engaging on the one hand in agricultural labour, and on the other hand in fulfilling the task of military defence. East of Lop Nor and in the Turfan basin were important military granaries for storing provisions. These *t'un-t'ien* districts gradually developed into fixed Chinese settlements in the Western Regions.²³

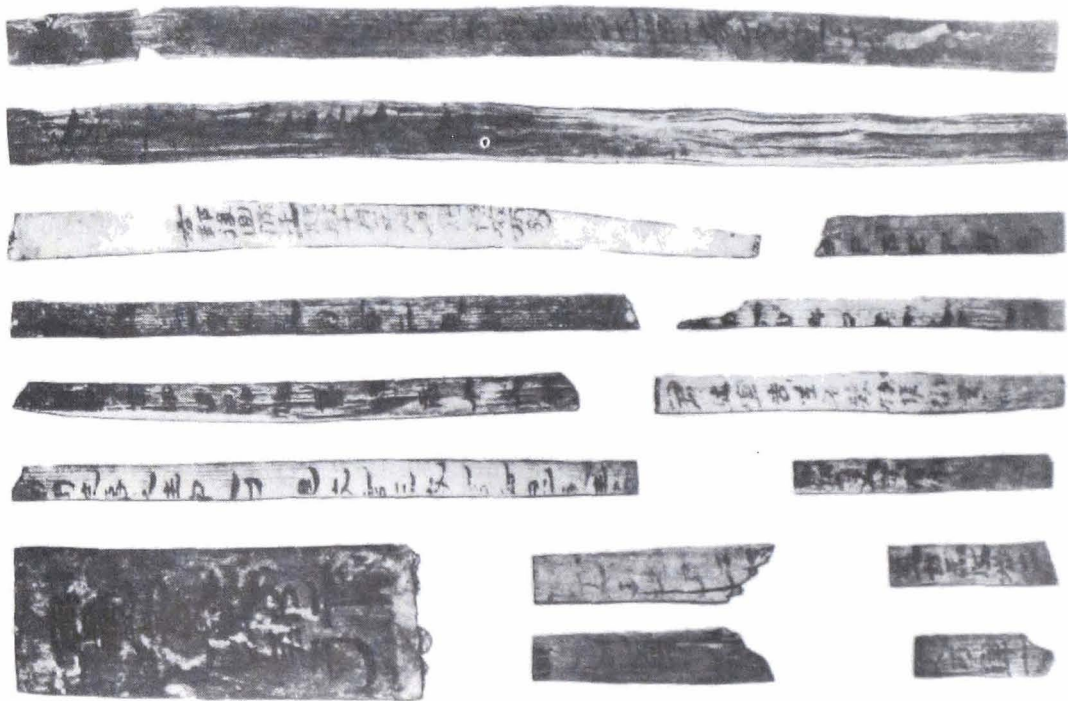


FIG. 11. Wooden tablets relating to a Han *t'un-t'ien* colony.

22. For the Lou-lan sites, see Huang Wenbi, *n.d.b.*, pp. 181–4. For the latest investigations of the Lou-lan sites, see Hou, 1981. For the Tu-yin site, see Huang Wenbi, 1948, pp. 105–9. As to the remains of the ancient city of Kao-ch'ang (Qocho), reports and materials are abundant and so well documented that there is no need to cite them here.

23. Ma, 1975, pp. 27–30.

Closely related to the *t'un-t'ien* agricultural colonies was the work of irrigation. The Western Regions comprise a wide expanse of arid land with extremely low rainfall, where agriculture depends wholly on irrigation channels fed yearly by the melting snow. The construction of artificial irrigation systems is absolutely essential. Long before the Han dynasty, the local inhabitants must have constructed some irrigation channels, but the Han introduced the *t'un-t'ien* policy; there was a remarkable increase in irrigation construction due to the adoption of advanced technology from China proper. In Shaya County there are remains of an ancient Han irrigation channel more than 100 km long. Close to this channel Han coins and vestiges of cultivation were found. A Han irrigation system has also been discovered at Miran, following the course of the ancient Miran river, where main floodgates, bifurcation gates, trunk and branch canals were constructed. Han tombs and other objects have also been found near by.²⁴ Nowadays in the Turfan basin the most famous and remarkable type of irrigation system is the so-called *kahrez*, consisting of an underground channel descending the hill slope, which conducts meltwater on to the farmland. On the surface, walls are sunk at intervals, so that the underground channel passes through them. Some scholars think that the *kahrez* system was introduced from Iran during the Ch'in dynasty; on the other hand, a *Han-shu* chapter on irrigation records that during the Han dynasty there were already 'irrigation channels with wells' in Shaanxi, of a type found in the *kahrez* system. Perhaps we may therefore presume that the *kahrez* system of an 'irrigation channel with wells' was introduced there by the *t'un-t'ien* agricultural colonies during the Western Han period.²⁵

Another important measure implemented by the garrison troops in the Western Regions during the Han dynasty was the construction of a system of fortifications and beacon towers – a warning system in case of a Hsiung-nu attack. Each fort consisted of a small square encampment of rammed earth, surrounded by walls, within which stood a small building. In one corner was a rammed-earth watch-tower more than 10 m high. On top was a lever device holding a basket of firewood. The sentry on top of the watch-tower could observe enemy movements and send a warning signal – smoke by day and open fire by night. This signalling system could transmit messages in a very short time and get news to Chang-an, the capital, within the same day. Each *sui* (beacon fire) or *t'ing* (watch-tower) had its own name and number. The beacon network of the Western Regions began from Yü-men (the Jade Gate), west of Tun-huang, and passed through the desert and along the northern bank of the Lop Nor directly to Kucha and Pai-cheng. Along this route remains of ancient beacons can be found. The example at Qizil, west of Kucha County, is relatively well preserved (Fig. 12).²⁶ Carved on a cliff at the foot of the Kelatagh,

24. Ma, 1975, pp. 29–30.

25. Huang Wenbi, n.d.b, p. 89.

26. Ma, 1975, p. 37.

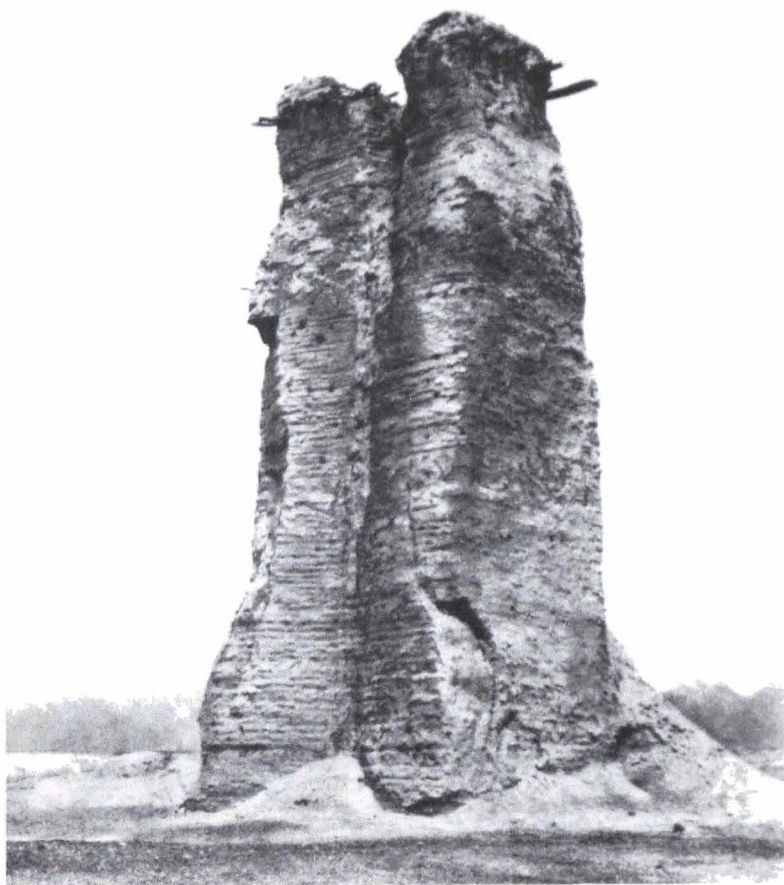


FIG. 12. Remains of a Han beacon tower.

north-east of Pai-cheng County, an inscription dating from the fourth year of Yung-shou during the reign of Emperor Huan-ti of the Eastern Han (A.D. 158) records that Lieutenant-General Liu P'ing K'uo, on assuming office at Kucha, led six Chinese men to construct a series of watch-towers (Fig. 13).²⁷ At strategically important centres, there were also fortified barracks, such as the ruins of Lou-lan and Tu-yin on the north-western bank of the Lop Nor at the site of the ancient city of Kao-ch'ang in the Turfan basin and the site of Pochengzi at Banjiegou in Jimsar, all strategic centres where Han troops were garrisoned. The eaves-end tiles with cloud pattern, excavated at Qitai, are typically Han in style (Fig. 14).

The Silk Route

The object of the Han in posting garrison troops, establishing farming colonies, and building fortifications and signal beacons was not simply to avert incursions

27. Ma, 1980a.



FIG. 13. Rock inscription of Liu P'ing K'uo.

by the Hsiung-nu; they also had an important role in safeguarding traffic on the Silk Route (see Map 5). This road played a key role in the history of civilization, facilitating economic and cultural exchanges between East and West. Geographical factors had to be overcome, especially the obstacles presented by the Taklamakan Desert. As is well known, there were two routes circumventing this impassable sea of sand. The southern route ran west from Tun-huang, along the southern bank of the Lop Nor to Tashkurgan. Ascending the Pamir plateau, it went through the Wakhan valley to Balkh (ancient Bactra). A branch to the west of Tashkurgan passed through Gandhāra. As the Taklamakan Desert has been spreading south, this section of ancient road, with the Walled City-States along it, has been submerged in sand. Only in modern times have archaeologists discovered the ruins of Niya and Endere and their important remains. The northern route,²⁸ also starting from Tun-huang, ran north-west through

28. The new northern route was opened up at the beginning of the Christian era according to the suggestion made by Hsü P'u, the Wu-chi colonel (see *Han-shu* 96).



FIG. 14. Eaves-end tile with cloud design.

Sanlongsha to Lou-lan on the north bank of the Lop Nor, passing Qarashahr and Aksu before turning south-west to Kashgar. From the Ferghana basin it made a detour around K'ang-chü, a region covering the Tashkent oasis and a part of the territory between the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya rivers (see Chapter 19) and turning south to join the southern route in Bactria. There were branches from K'ang-chü to Parthia and to the land between the Aral and Caspian Seas. Another road went north-west to Wu-sun, yet another going north from Lou-lan through Chü-shih close to Turfan, an extremely important strategic position. There was also a main line of communication connecting the northern and southern routes; and at the end of the Western Han period a new northern route was opened up giving direct access to Wu-sun.

Throughout the two Han dynasties, effective measures were taken to maintain and defend these important routes, using posthouses, sentry guards and interpreters to maintain communications between China and the West. When Emperor Wu-ti first sent Chang Ch'ien to the Yüeh-chih, the objective was a military one, but subsequently political and economic factors came to play the key role.

Before the Han established the post of protector-general of the Western Regions, there had been exchanges of diplomatic envoys who also served as merchants. Increasingly, traffic along the Silk Route flourished. Chinese silk products reached Parthia via the Walled City-States of the Western Regions and were sent on to Rome. Chinese silk soon became the most expensive luxury

item in the Roman Empire and commanded high prices. But Han merchants were unable to overcome the monopoly of the Parthian middlemen and little Roman currency flowed into China. Virtually no Roman coins before the Byzantine period (c. A.D. 400) have been found in Xinjiang or China proper.²⁹

29. Finally we should allude to the question of the relations between the Western Regions and the Kushan kingdom during the Han period. Many works by European scholars on Central Asian history have given incorrect accounts of this episode, believing that, at the end of the Eastern Han period, Kanishka, King of the Kushans, had once conquered part of the Tarim basin, at least as far as Shu-lê and Khotan; some scholars have even gone as far as to include Turfan and the Lop Nor region in the Kushan Empire. This erroneous conclusion resulted merely from the incorrect interpretation of the Chinese historical records. In fact, the *Hou Han-shu* faithfully records events of the Western Regions from the later period of the Eastern Han epoch and also mentions contemporary Sino-Kushan relations.

THE NOMADS OF NORTHERN CENTRAL ASIA AFTER THE INVASION OF ALEXANDER*

Y. A. Zadneprovskiy

Transoxania

A small part of Transoxania came under the rule of Alexander the Great after his eastern campaign, but in Transoxania and in the steppes the nomads who belonged to various tribes of Sakas and Massagetae played the dominant political role. Several important changes had occurred on the steppes of Eurasia. In the west the Scythians were succeeded by the Sarmatians, while in the east a strong nomadic power had emerged – the Hsiung-nu (Huns). This important epoch in the history of the nomads of Eurasia is aptly named the Hunno-Sarmatian period.

These events affected the historical fortunes of the nomads of Central Asia. The third and second centuries B.C. were a long transitional phase for these nomads, marked by major migrations and by the consequent emergence of new groupings of tribes on the historical scene. The movement of the nomads was a constant threat to the security of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom. The middle of the third century B.C. saw the rise to power of a group of tribes consisting of the Parni (Aparni) and the Dahae, descendants of the Massagetae of the Aral Sea region. They invaded Parthia, the older Achaemenid satrapy, from the north and took advantage of the weakness of the Seleucids to establish, in 250 B.C., an independent Parthian state under the Arsacid dynasty (see Chapter 5). This powerful nomad state, which lasted from the middle of the third century B.C. to the beginning of the third century A.D., became a dangerous rival of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom, the Seleucid state, the Romans and the Kushan Empire. The Arsacids often recruited mercenaries from other nomadic groups, which resulted in a constant replenishment and growth of the nomadic population of the country. Nomad burial grounds investigated at a number of

* See Map 9.

sites in the valleys of the Kopet Dag and Greater Balkhan mountains as well as in the lower hills¹ provide solid evidence of the permanent presence of nomads in northern Parthia, and of the major role they played in the life of that state. They also show that the nomads had maintained their distinctive way of life and culture.

Classical sources knew about the conquest of Bactria by nomadic tribes (see Chapters 4 and 5), referring to them as peoples who came from beyond the Jaxartes (now the Syr Darya). Strabo (XI.8.2) mentions four tribes: the Asii, the Pasiani, the Tochari and the Sacaraucae. Writing of the event which followed, Pompeius Trogus notes briefly that the Asiani, kings of the Tochari, laid waste the Sacaraucae (Justin. *Prologus*, XI.I).

Chinese chronicles merely recount the conquest of Bactria by the Yüeh-chih from Central Asia, whereas other ancient sources mention several invading tribes from beyond the Jaxartes. The juxtaposition of these two contradictory accounts gives rise to the notion of a two-pronged invasion from the north and west. But all attempts to identify the actual invaders have been disputed. Only one thing is beyond doubt concerning this major event in world history. The defeat of the rulers of Bactria was the work of the local nomadic tribes of Transoxania as well as of tribes from northern Central Asia.

The principal sources for the history of these nomads are the *Shih-chi* (Historical Records), by the Han-dynasty court historiographer Szü-ma Ch'ien, the *Han-shu* (Annals of the Former Han), the *Hou Han-shu* (Annals of the Later Han) and the *Pei-shih* (Annals of the Wei Dynasty).² Valuable but very brief references are to be found in the works of ancient historians and geographers, such as Strabo, Ptolemy, Pomponius Mela, etc. The interpretation of these sources continues to be difficult, but the growing volume of archaeological evidence helps to clarify some issues.

The Wu-sun

The Chinese sources tell us of four major groups of nomads: the Wu-sun, the K'ang-chü, the Yen-ts'ai and the Yüeh-chih. The most detailed information available concerns the Wu-sun. The second century B.C. saw the formation of the Wu-sun, a tribal confederation in the north-eastern part of Turkestan (the T'ien Shan mountains) and Semirechye. According to the Chinese sources, the Wu-sun originally lived in Central Asia, together with the tribes of Yüeh-chih and Hsiung-nu. We have the semi-legendary account that when the Wu-sun were defeated by the Yüeh-chih, their leader was killed and some of the Wu-

1. Mandel'shtam, 1971; Marushchenko, 1959.

2. Bichurin, 1950; Kyuner, 1961; Chavannes, 1905, p. 519, 1907, p. 149; Hulsewé, 1979.

sun, with the new-born son of this leader, obtained the protection of the Hsiung-nu. Later, the Wu-sun, now allied to the Hsiung-nu, invaded T'ien Shan around 160 B.C. and settled down in their newly conquered territories, which became their second homeland. In course of time, when the Wu-sun had become sufficiently powerful, they ceased to obey the Hsiung-nu. In 125 B.C. the Wu-sun were visited by Chang Ch'ien, the famous Chinese traveller and diplomat, who had been sent to establish a coalition against the Hsiung-nu. Chang Ch'ien recommended a plan to deal with the Hsiung-nu. The Chinese were to make peace with the Wu-sun, sealing the compact by marriage. The plan was approved and Chang Ch'ien was sent as ambassador to the Wu-sun in 115 B.C., with the proposal that the Wu-sun should return to their original homeland and attack the Hsiung-nu jointly with the Han. The Wu-sun ruler was offered an alliance and the hand of a Han princess in marriage, but the Wu-sun, wary of the Hsiung-nu, refrained from giving a final answer. After the Han state had achieved considerable military victories in East Turkestan, the Wu-sun finally concluded the marriage alliance with the Han princess; but the Hsiung-nu also sent a princess to marry the lord of the Wu-sun, and she was declared his senior consort, while the Han princess was only his junior wife. The Han bride complained in verse of her destiny, mourning her enforced union with a Wu-sun king whose abode was made out of felt, who ate meat and whose drink was sour milk. In spite of this treatment the next ruler of the Wu-sun was given another Han princess in marriage. After their defeat by the Yüeh-chih and subsequent revenge, the Wu-sun had settled into their new homeland and had become so strong that the Han state felt obliged to win their friendship in an alliance, based on a royal marriage.

In the T'ien Shan region the Wu-sun were the first tribal group about which substantial evidence is available. The Chinese sources refer to the Wu-sun or nomad state. The Wu-sun were bounded by the Hsiung-nu to the east, by the settled peoples of East Turkestan to the south, by Ta-yüan (Ferghana) to the south-west and by K'ang-chü to the west. Their federation included locally conquered Saka tribesmen, as well as some Yüeh-chih. The question of the ethnic origin of the Wu-sun themselves remains debatable, and contradictory hypotheses have been advanced. The one thing that is clear is that the majority of the population consisted of linguistically Iranian Saka tribes.

The administrative and political centre of the Wu-sun state was the walled city of Ch'ih-ku, 'the City of the Red Valley', situated in the basin of the Issik-köl. Lying on one of the branches of the Silk Route, it was also an important trade centre, but its exact location has not yet been established. The principal activity of the Wu-sun was cattle-raising. They freely wandered with their livestock seeking pasture and water, but the geographical conditions in Semirechye and T'ien Shan did not allow constant wandering, and the economy of the Wu-sun remained semi-nomadic, with the population moving from one climatic zone to another with each change of season. They combined cattle-breeding

with agriculture, as is evident from archaeological finds of the Wu-sun period from settlements in the Chu valley, the Issik-köl basin and in eastern Semirechye. These contained the remains of *pisé* dwellings, some with mud floors and other built on stone foundations. Numerous querns and agricultural implements as well as bones of domesticated animals have been found, suggesting a semi-nomadic pastoral economy.

The social structure of the Wu-sun followed the Hsiung-nu pattern. Their ruler was the Great K'un-mo, whose power was hereditary. There was a fairly developed administrative apparatus, consisting of sixteen officials. The ruler was assisted by a council of elders, a body which to some degree limited his power. The Great K'un-mo and his two sons, the rulers of the left and right domains, each commanded a personal force of 10,000 horsemen. There was also a regular army and each freeman was considered as a warrior. The administrators and members of the ruling nobility maintained themselves on the tribute paid to them by conquered tribes, war booty and profits from trading activities. Trophies acquired in wars, which were a frequent occurrence, were at times of quite considerable value. They included large herds of cattle, abundant goods and many prisoners. Most of this booty was shared by the ruling élite and by the privileged warriors of the king's guard, who amassed enormous riches.

The inequitable ownership of livestock and pasture inevitably resulted in the concentration of power in the hands of the wealthiest and largest family within the tribe. This in turn led to social inequality, which is evident from both archaeological finds and written records. The richest of the Wu-sun owned as many as 4,000 or 5,000 horses, and there is evidence pointing to the privileged use of certain pastures. These factors created dissatisfaction, disputes and popular unrest, especially in the lower strata of Wu-sun society. The accumulation of wealth by the dominant stratum led to social stratification and to relations typical of early class societies, in which the patriarchal-clan order played a major role. A manifestation of this was the widespread application of the custom of the levirate, by which a widow was obliged to remain within the late husband's family, becoming wife to one of his relatives.

Wu-sun society included slaves, most of them prisoners of war. One report says that 10,000 persons were captured in one campaign against the Hsiung-nu. Most slaves laboured as household servants though some worked as craftsmen, but the principal producer was the freeman. The socio-economic structure was similar to that of the Hsiung-nu as an organized community of nomads.

The Wu-sun played the part of a third force between the Hsiung-nu and the Han state. They were attacked around 80 B.C. by the Hsiung-nu and were badly worsted. Their ruler, the reigning K'un-mo, Wu-ku-chi-mi, turned to the Han emperor for assistance and their joint force defeated the Hsiung-nu in 72 B.C., taking numerous prisoners and capturing thousands of horses, cattle, camels and asses. This rich booty greatly strengthened the Wu-sun and gave

them great influence over the political life of the settled oases of East Turkestan. The son of Wu-ku-chi-mi became the ruler of Yarkand, while his daughter was given in marriage to the lord of Kucha. The first century B.C. was a period of success and prosperity for them.

Little is known of the Wu-sun during the early centuries of the Christian era. Under pressure from the Ju-jan, a new group of nomadic tribes from Central Asia, the Wu-sun were obliged to abandon Semirechye and seek refuge in the T'ien Shan mountains. The last reference to the Wu-sun in the historical sources is in A.D. 436, when a Chinese diplomatic mission was dispatched to their country and the Wu-sun reciprocated. It is probable that by the middle of the fifth century A.D., the Wu-sun, with other neighbouring peoples, had succumbed to the Hephthalites.

The archaeological sites of the Wu-sun period (Fig. 1) which have been explored in the regions of Semirechye and T'ien Shan are very varied and reflect the ethnic heterogeneity of the population. Most cemeteries are burial grounds with the dead interred in pit-graves³ of the Chil'pek group. They belong to the local Saka population, which formed part of the Wu-sun federation⁴ and preserved the traditions, funeral rites and material culture of the earlier Sakas. A second group consists of kurgans with burials in lined and 'catacomb' chamber graves. Sites of this Aygirdzhal group are widely found from the first century A.D. and are not basically a local type.⁵ For a long time, between the second century B.C. and the fifth century A.D., these graves co-existed with burials of the Chil'pek group, often within the same area, inside the same burial ground. The lined graves and shaft chamber tombs were probably those of the immigrant population, and there is reason to associate lined graves with the Yüeh-chih.

It is clear that the tribesmen who migrated into Turkestan and their descendants spent some 600 years living side by side with the indigenous population, mingling with them to form some kind of unity. Typical of the time are burials in simple grave-pits, which were sometimes covered with logs. The deceased were supplied with a large quantity of utensils, probably containing milk and pieces of mutton. They were buried with their personal adornments and articles of everyday use. Some graves contained gold ornaments, but those of ordinary members of the community were usually poor, with a uniform assortment of grave goods.⁶ The graves of the Aygirdzhal group often contain weapons.

Of particular interest is the Kargali burial of a female shaman discovered in a gorge at an altitude of 2,300 m, near Alma-Ata, which contained many items of jewellery, clothing and head-dress – a total of nearly 300 gold objects

3. Akishev and Kushaev, 1963; Bernshtam, 1949, 1952; Voevodskiy and Gryaznov, 1938.

4. Zadneprovskiy, 1971, 1975*b*.

5. Akishev and Kushaev, 1963; Zadneprovskiy, 1971, 1975*b*; Kibirov, 1959.

6. Akishev and Kushaev, 1963; Bernshtam, 1952; Vaynberg, 1981.



FIG. 1. Nomad culture of the Wu-sun period.

with turquoise inlay. A unique find was a diadem depicting animals, birds and human beings, embellished with settings of carnelian, almandine and turquoise, testifying to the high degree of artistic skill of the ancient jewellers.⁷ A rich burial of Wu-sun times at Tenlik in eastern Semirechye contained the grave of a high-ranking warrior whose clothing had been decorated with about 100 skilfully wrought golden bosses. The wide distribution of such rich burials suggests that Wu-sun society was stratified on the basis of property ownership.

7. Bernshtam, 1940.

The K'ang-chü

The nomadic federation of the K'ang-chü was the second great power after the Yüeh-chih in Transoxania. According to the Chinese sources, K'ang-chü lay north-west of Ta-yüan and west of the Wu-sun, bordering upon the Yüeh-chih to the south. The territory of the K'ang-chü, therefore, covered the region of the Tashkent oasis and part of the territory between the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers, with its heartland along the middle Syr Darya. It seems to have emerged as a powerful state in the second century B.C. As the historians of Alexander do not refer to the existence of any political confederation on the Jaxartes (Syr Darya) except Chorasmia, the K'ang-chü must have appeared a little later. They united a number of regions which had sedentary, agricultural and nomadic populations.

The K'ang-chü were inevitably affected by the events of the mid-second century B.C., when the Central Asian tribes invaded Graeco-Bactria. The migration of the nomadic peoples (the Asii, Tochari, etc.) to the south altered the balance of power in the valley of the Syr Darya. Taking advantage of these circumstances, as the *Hou Han-shu* suggests, the K'ang-chü subjugated Yen-ts'ai in the region of the Aral Sea, and the still more remote land of the Yen in the southern Urals. Yen-ts'ai is identified with the large confederation of Sarmatian tribes led by the Aorsi.⁸ Thus, K'ang-chü established direct contact with the Sarmatian world to the north-west. The expansion of K'ang-chü in this direction in the first and second centuries A.D. was occasioned by the rise of the powerful Yüeh-chih confederacy (subsequently the Kushan Empire) to the south and by the presence in the east of the formidable Wu-sun state allied with the Hsiung-nu and the Han Empire. The Chinese sources inform us that K'ang-chü was tributary to the Yüeh-chih in the south and to the Hsiung-nu in the east. The north-west advance of K'ang-chü and its conquest of Yen-ts'ai apparently obliged some tribes of the Aorsi, and later of the Alans, to move west; it may, therefore, be concluded that K'ang-chü played a major historical role in the initial stages of the Great Migration of Peoples, which was such an important event in world history. In this way, K'ang-chü gained control over the northern sector of the international trade route known as the Northern Route.

In endeavouring to maintain its influence over the southern portion of this route, K'ang-chü pursued an active policy in the east and south-east, allying itself in 101 B.C. with the Ta-yüan, and helping them to preserve their independence against the Han. During the course of its continued struggles against the Wu-sun, K'ang-chü sought assistance from Chih-chih, ruler of the northern Hsiung-nu, in the middle of the first century B.C. Initially Chih-chih's army penetrated deep into the country of the Wu-sun and besieged their capital in

8. Matsulevich, 1947.

42 B.C. But the Han state intervened and defeated and killed Chih-chih at Talas in 36 B.C. The K'ang-chü ruler was obliged to send his son as a hostage to the court of the Han emperor as a token of his submission. All these events in the campaign against Chih-chih are related in colourful terms in *The Life History of Ch'eng-t'ang*.⁹

Undaunted, K'ang-chü continued to pursue an independent policy. It maintained its independence up to the end of the third century A.D. and continued to send embassies to the Chinese court. Convincing evidence of its independent status may be seen in the coinage it issued in the second and third centuries. During this period the K'ang-chü rulers at Chach (the Tashkent oasis) began to issue their own currency,¹⁰ similar to some of the early coin issues of ancient Chorasnia. Soon afterwards the fortunes of K'ang-chü declined and it was absorbed into the Hephthalite state – a fate which it shared with the other states of Transoxania.

The *Han-shu* describes the typically nomadic way of life of the K'ang-chü élite and particularly of its sovereign, who spent his winters in the capital, the city of Pi-t'ien, and his summers at his steppe headquarters, situated seven days' journey away on horseback. The ruling nucleus of K'ang-chü consisted of nomadic tribes whose customs resembled the Yüeh-chih. Excavations at archaeological sites (Fig. 2) associated with the K'ang-chü nomads reveal their role in the state. In the burials at Berk-kara and Tamdî, the dead were placed in pit-graves, sometimes covered over with logs, under kurgan mounds. The graves contain hand-made pots, iron swords, arrow-heads and some simple jewellery, and belong to K'ang-chü tribes of the early period, their traditional culture exhibiting traits characteristic of the Saka tribes as a whole.

From the beginning of the Christian era, burials in 'catacomb graves' (in shaft- and chamber-tombs) became widespread, as we see in the burial grounds of the Kaunchi and Dzhun cultures covering the period from the first to the fourth century and accepted in scholarly literature as the remains of the K'ang-chü tribes.

A considerable level of sophistication distinguished the culture of the settled agriculturalists of K'ang-chü, as we see from brief references in written sources and in archaeological finds such as the burial sites of the Kaunchi and Dzhun cultures of the Tashkent oasis and the middle Syr Darya, of which some seem to belong to the sedentary farming population.

9. Taskin, 1973.

10. Buryakov, 1982.

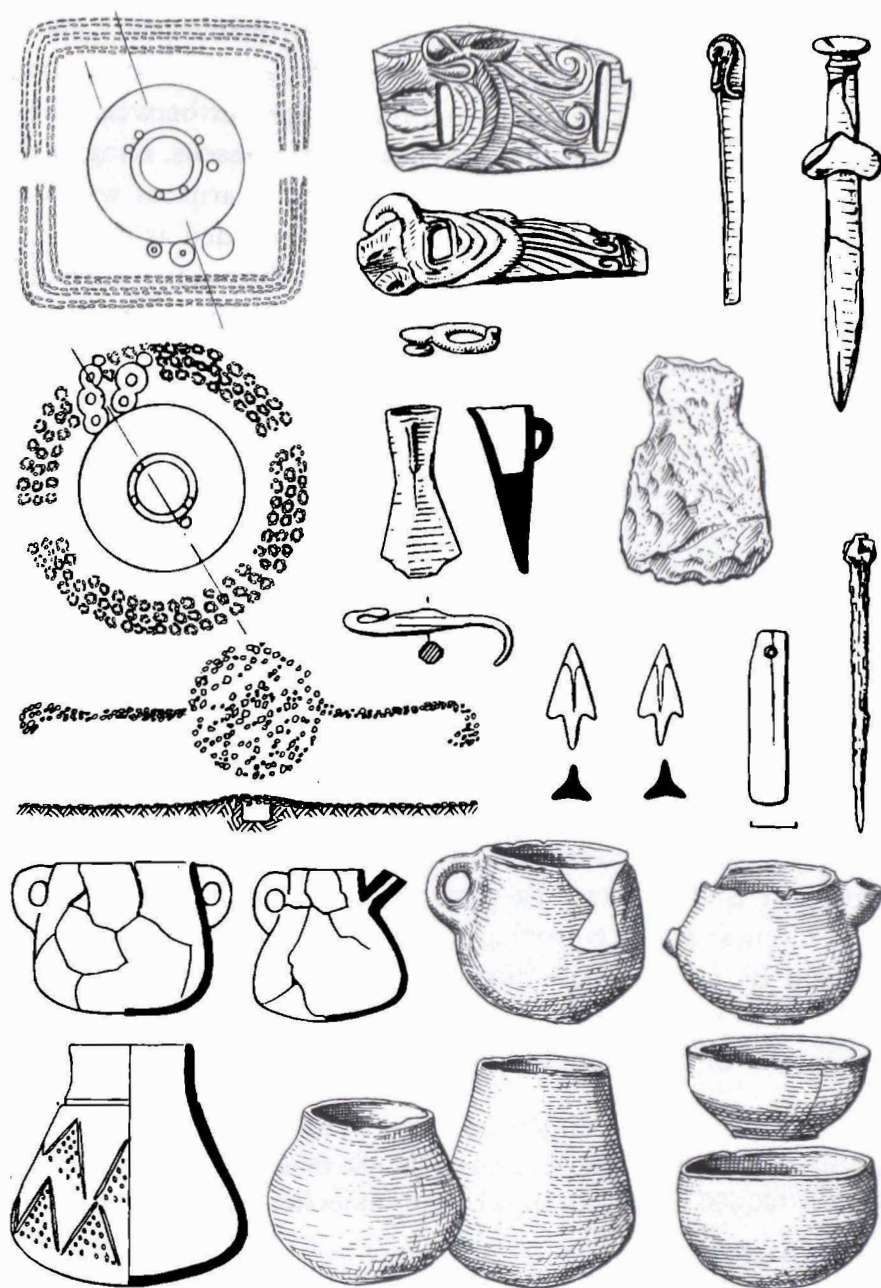


FIG. 2. Nomad culture of south Kazakhstan (third to first century B.C.).

The Yen-ts'ai, Aorsi and Siraci

The third major nomadic state, that of the Yen-ts'ai, was situated in north-western Central Asia in the steppe around the Aral Sea and the northern shores of the Caspian, where it was in contact with the world of the Sarmatians. The nomadic population of this region belonged to the Sarmatian group of tribes

which replaced the Scythians around the turn of the third century B.C.¹¹ During the second century B.C. a new major grouping of Sarmatian tribes, of which the chief were the Siraci and Aorsi, appeared on the steppes between the Caspian and the Tanais (the River Don), as Strabo describes. Abeacus, King of the Siraci, could mobilize 20,000 horsemen (at the time when Pharnaces was lord of the Bosphorus), while Spadinus, King of the Aorsi, commanded as many as 200,000 and the Upper Aorsi had even more. That explains their camel caravan trade in Indian and Babylonian goods which they procured by barter from the Armenians and the Medes (Strabo XI.5.8).

It is evident from this text that the Aorsi and their kinsmen, the Upper Aorsi, were tribes of Sarmatian origin and were masters of the lands lying along the coast of the Caspian Sea. The precise eastern boundaries of the Aorsi are unknown, but their influence probably extended to the Aral Sea. They were a great military power and for almost three centuries, until the arrival of the Alans, they played a major role in events of the northern Pontic region. King Eunonus of this tribe was an ally of Mithradates VIII (A.D. 40–44) in his struggle against Rome, and offered him asylum after his defeat.

Strabo refers to the established international trade links of the Aorsi with the states of the Caucasus. They also controlled trade routes leading from the Bosphorus and other Black Sea states to Transoxania and China. According to Chinese sources, one of the branches of the Silk Route – the Northern Route – passed through East Turkestan, Ta-yüan and K'ang-chü, ending in the country of Yen-ts'ai. Chinese artefacts from archaeological excavations provide concrete evidence of the use of this route during the first few centuries A.D.

Scholars generally identify the Aorsi mentioned by classical writers with the Yen-ts'ai state of the Chinese sources.

The *Shih-chi* states that Yen-ts'ai lies almost 2,000 li north-west of K'ang-chü, and it is a nomadic country whose customs are like those of K'ang-chü. Its army numbers over 100,000. It lies on a large lake that does not have high banks – the Northern Sea.¹²

This independent nomadic state played a role of some significance in the history of Transoxania and the neighbouring localities along the international trade route. It is not, therefore, surprising that the Han Empire should have sent embassies there and fostered trade relations. Eventually, in the first century B.C., Yen-ts'ai lost its independence and became a dependency of K'ang-chü. According to the *Hou Han-shu*: 'The domain of Yen-ts'ai was renamed A-lan-ya, over which K'ang-chü held sway.'¹³ Another country to lose its inde-

11. Harmatta, 1950.

12. Bichurin, 1950; Kyuner, 1961.

13. Bichurin, 1950; Kyuner, 1961; Hulsewé, 1979.

pendence was Yen, which paid tribute in furs. Many scholars seek to identify A-lan-ya (or A-lan-liao) with the Aorsi and Alans of the ancient sources. It should be noted that the appearance of the name A-lan-ya in the *Hou Han-shu* coincides with the emergence of the Alan tribes on the political stage.

The Alans

At the beginning of the first century A.D. the Alans secured a dominant position among the Sarmatians living between the Caspian Sea and the River Don. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, they were descended from the Massagetae. The people of the Alani in the first to third centuries A.D. represented a powerful force with which the Roman Empire was obliged to reckon. They frequently threatened Rome's more remote possessions along the Danube and in Asia Minor, and were successful in penetrating the Caucasus. They also waged successful warfare against Parthia. Historical and archaeological evidence enables us to link Yen-ts'ai (the Aorsi), A-lan-ya (the Alans) and K'ang-chü with the Iranian tribes with whom, as the Chinese chronicles state, they had ties. They had similar dress and identical customs. This cultural affinity can also be traced in burial sites that have been excavated along the lower Volga, in the southern Urals, in the Tashkent oasis and along the middle Syr Darya.

In the Aral region a considerable number of heterogeneous burial sites of the nomads have been discovered. Distinctive circular-plan mausoleums with cruciform interior layouts along the lower reaches of the Syr Darya were places of multiple interconnected burials. The sites in question, Chirik-Rabat, Babish-Molla and Balanda, date from the fourth to second century B.C. and were built by the Apasiacae tribes.¹⁴ The Dzhetî-Asar burials in the basin of the Kuvan Darya, a tributary of the Syr Darya, unusual kurgans with round and rectangular ground-level chambers built of raw brick, are attributed to Strabo's Tocharoi.¹⁵ Lined kurgans were used for burials by nomads on the left bank of the Amu Darya from the fourth century B.C. The number of such burials increased during the last centuries B.C. and the first two centuries A.D.¹⁶ At a certain stage, a change occurred and the dead were buried with the head pointing south, as in the contemporary Sarmatian burials in the southern Urals. These sites have been tentatively attributed to the Yüeh-chih group of tribes. Similar lined kurgans of the fourth to second centuries B.C. have survived in the south-east part of the Ustyurt plateau in the Aral region, where sites similar to the Late Sarmatian complexes have been discovered.

14. Tolstov, 1962.

15. Ibid.

16. Vaynberg, 1981; Lokhvits and Khazanov, 1979.

The complicated palaeo-ethnographic character of nomadic settlement in the Aral Sea region during the period under consideration is thus reflected in the archaeological finds, which show the successive replacement of one group of nomads by another. What needs to be stressed again, however, is the tentative character of all the ethnic (tribal) identifications.

The Hsiung-nu (Hunni, Huns)

An important role in the political history of Central Asia was played by the Hsiung-nu (Hunni or Huns) at the turn of the first century B.C. They were first involved with the affairs of the Wu-sun and the K'ang-chü, but there is hardly any reliable evidence of their presence in the lands where the Wu-sun and K'ang-chü lived. Of particular interest are reports about the small country of Wu-shan-mu,¹⁷ which lay between the lands of these two tribes. Wu-shan-mu had close ties with the Hsiung-nu. Hu-lu-ku, ruler of the Hsiung-nu (96-85 B.C.), arranged a marriage with the family of the ruler of the Wu-shan-mu, establishing blood ties between the two states. In 60 B.C. Ch'i-hou-shan, son of the ruler of the Hsiung-nu, having failed to inherit the throne, fled to the court of his father-in-law in Wu-shan-mu, who played a decisive role in the election of Ch'i-hou-shan to the position of ruler of the Southern Hsiung-nu in 58 B.C., at the time of the division of the Hsiung-nu into two mutually hostile kingdoms. Wu-shan-mu, a minor power, could have played such a role only with the support of a Hsiung-nu military force. As we have seen, the Hsiung-nu first emerged into historical prominence at the beginning of the first century B.C. It was in the year 60 B.C., in connection with the election of Hu-han-yeh as their ruler, that the armed detachment of Chih-chih, leader of the Northern Hsiung-nu (enemies of the Southern Hsiung-nu), appeared in K'ang-chü. Chih-chih entered into an alliance with the K'ang-chü against Wu-sun, the lord of K'ang-chü, giving his daughter in marriage to Chih-chih while he himself married Chih-chih's daughter. Their joint forces then attacked the Wu-sun, reaching the Wu-sun capital in 42 B.C. After so much success, Chih-chih began to demand tribute from Ta-yüan and other kingdoms. But later, when the allies had quarrelled, Chih-chih was attacked and killed by a Chinese force.¹⁸ The Northern Hsiung-nu continued to move south, and their numbers increased considerably following their defeat by Hsien-pi. It is with this mass migration that the emergence of the new Kingdom of Yüeh-pan in the Lake Balkhash region is associated.

17. Bichurin, 1950.

18. Taskin, 1973.

The Yüeh-pan

The Chinese chronicle *Pei-shih* informs us that the territory of the Yüeh-pan was formerly a possession of the Hsiung-nu, crushingly defeated by the Chinese. The Northern Hsiung-nu retreated west to K'ang-chü, while part of the local population (some 200,000) remained to form the Kingdom of Yüeh-pan.¹⁹

In the course of the first century B.C./first century A.D. the Hsiung-nu gradually became masters of the steppe regions north of the Syr Darya. Unlike the Southern Hsiung-nu, who became subjects of the Han emperors, the Northern Hsiung-nu remained independent and grew so powerful that eventually, under Prince Hu-yen (A.D. 123–35), they could establish a vast domain of their own.

Later history

The long occupation of parts of the Central Asian region by numerous Northern Hsiung-nu tribes has left archaeological evidence behind. The finds at Dzhetî-Asar on the Syr Darya include clay pots whose shape closely resembles that of the typical bronze cauldrons of the Hsiung-nu,²⁰ suggesting, with other remains, the influence of Hsiung-nu culture on the population of Dzhetî-Asar. It could equally be suggested that these tribes formed part of the peoples known as the White Huns, or Hephthalites.²¹ 'Catacomb' (shaft-and-chamber) tombs dated between the first and fourth centuries A.D. have been excavated at the burial ground of Kenkol (Fig. 3) in the Talas valley.²² The dead were placed in wooden coffins and their grave goods included weapons and a bow of distinctive Hsiung-nu type with bone arrow-heads and wooden vessels. All these material objects were typical of the Hsiung-nu²³ while the earthen pots and articles of everyday use were the work of local tribes. The actual form of the grave structure was different from the common Hsiung-nu types and the people buried at Kenkol were of two distinct racial types. The majority turned out to be of the Pamir-Ferghana Europoid type. Others were Europoids, albeit with a significant Mongoloid admixture.²⁴ The ethnic (tribal) identification of Kenkol is a matter of controversy. Some scholars attribute it to the Hsiung-nu and others to local tribes.²⁵ Since Kenkol is situated in the Talas valley, in the eastern

19. Bichurin, 1950.

20. Levina, 1966.

21. Tolstov, 1962.

22. Bernshtam, 1951; Kozhombardiev, 1963; Sorokin, 1956a.

23. Bernshtam, 1951; Mandel'shtam, 1975a.

24. Ginzburg and Trofimova, 1972.

25. Bernshtam, 1951; Kozhombardiev, 1963; Harmatta, 1952.

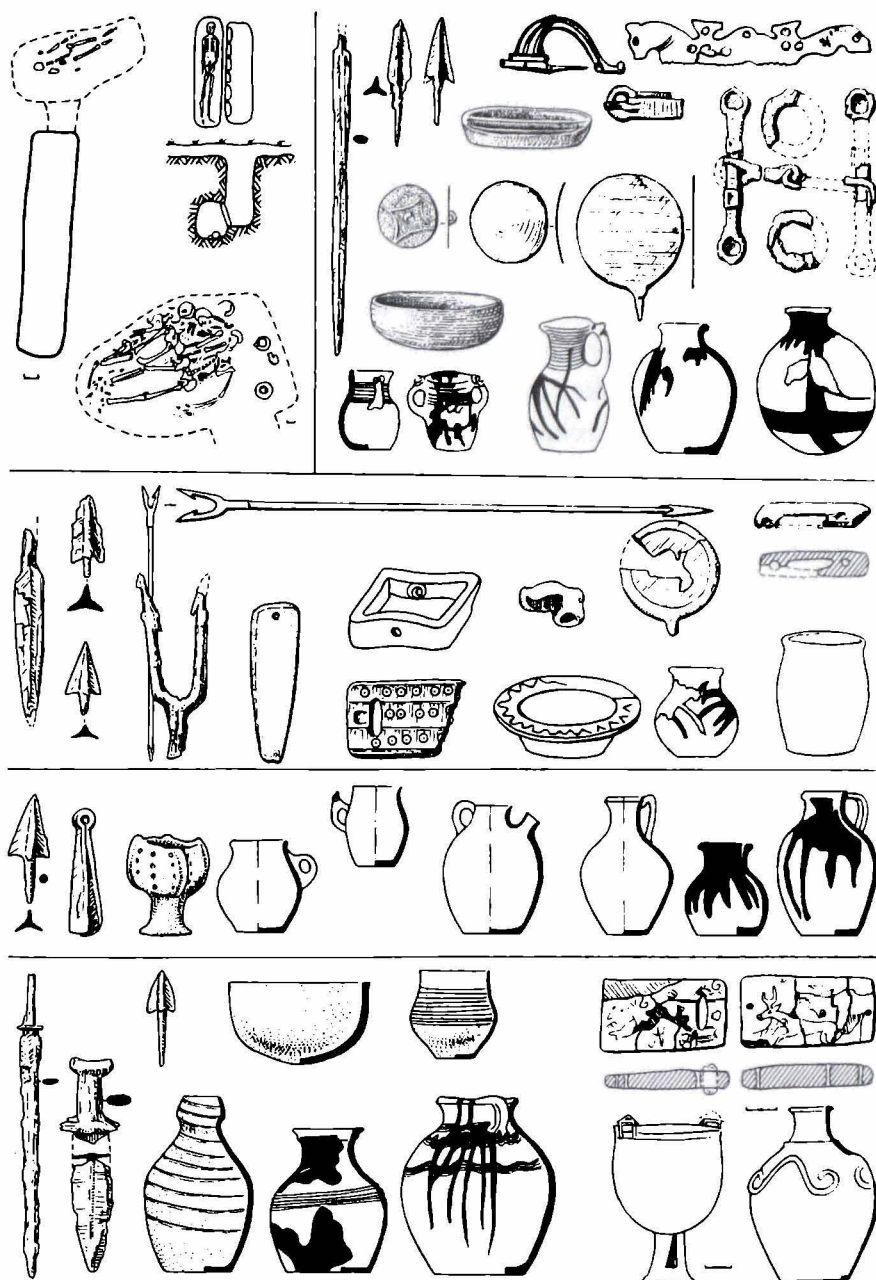


FIG. 4. Nomad culture of south Kazakhstan and the Tashkent oasis
(first to fourth century A.D.).

in conclusion, that the nomad tribes of the Yüeh-chih, who constituted the most powerful force in Transoxania in the second and first centuries B.C., played a specific and decisive role in the emergence of one of the most formidable powers of the ancient world, the Kushan Empire. The burial grounds excavated in northern Bactria – Tulkhar, Aruktau, Kokkum and Babashi²⁷ –

27. Mandel'shtam, 1975b.

seem to have belonged to the Yüeh-chih, and similar nomad burial sites explored in T'ien Shan,²⁸ Semirechye,²⁹ Sogdiana³⁰ and Ferghana³¹ can reasonably be used as evidence for the southward migration of the Yüeh-chih tribes towards Bactria and India.³²

These historical and archaeological data shed interesting light on the role of the Transoxanian nomads in the history of both Central Asia itself and the world at large. It was as a direct result of their enterprise and warlike activities that the new strong states of Parthia and the Kushans, the major powers of K'ang-chü, Wu-sun and later the Hephthalite Empire emerged. The nomads of Central Asia also played a key role in the Great Migration of Peoples. They contributed much to the interchange of cultural achievements between the civilizations of the ancient world and equally exercised considerable influence on the development of the sedentary cultures of the East, especially in matters of warfare and the arts. The Central Asian nomads of antiquity did indeed leave their indelible mark on history.

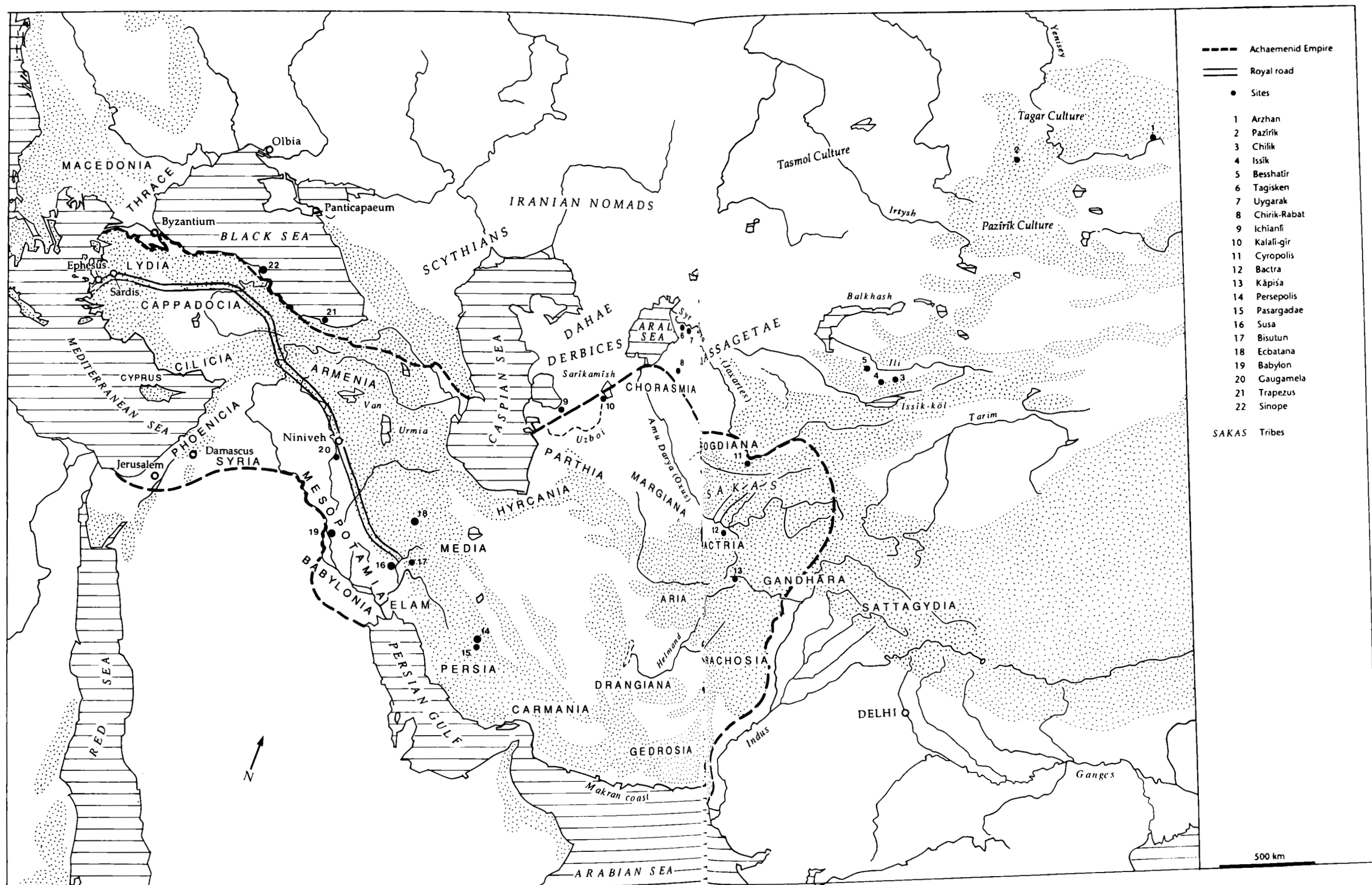
28. Bernshtam, 1952; Kibirov, 1959.

29. Akishev and Kushaev, 1963; Bernshtam, 1951.

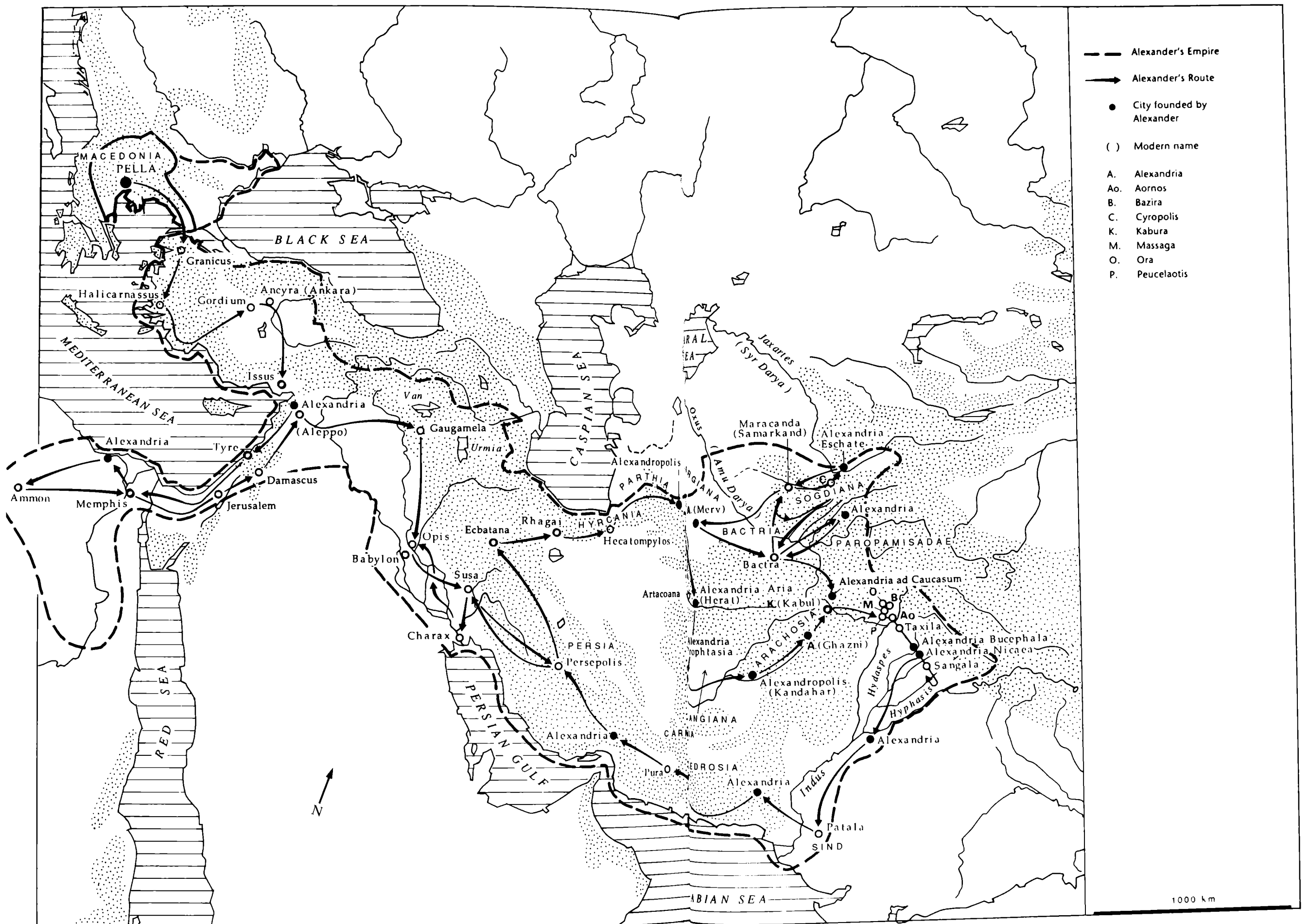
30. Obel'chenko, 1961.

31. Baruzdin, 1962; Kozhombardiev, 1977; Lokhvits and Khazanov, 1979.

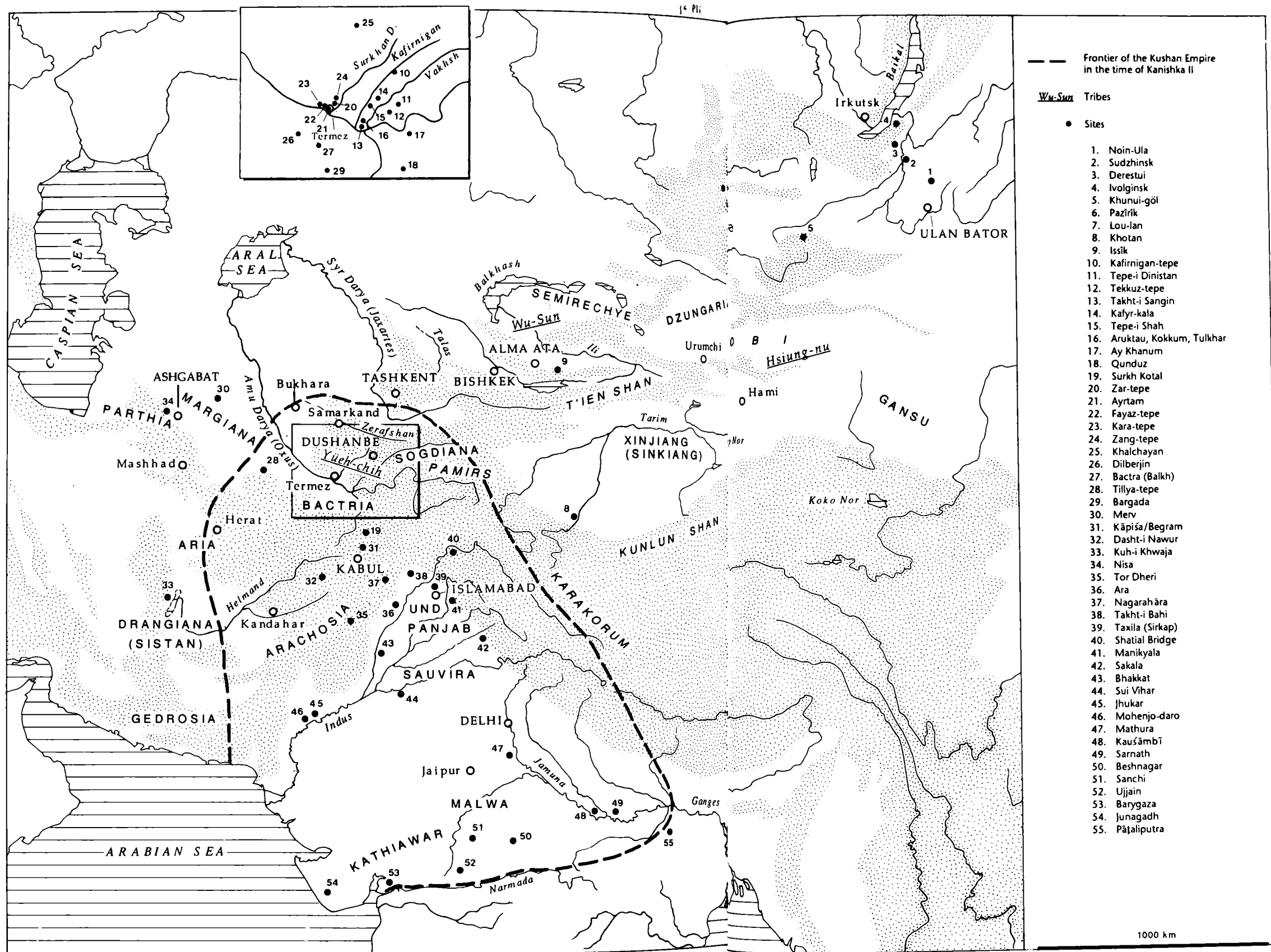
32. Zadneprovskiy, 1975a.



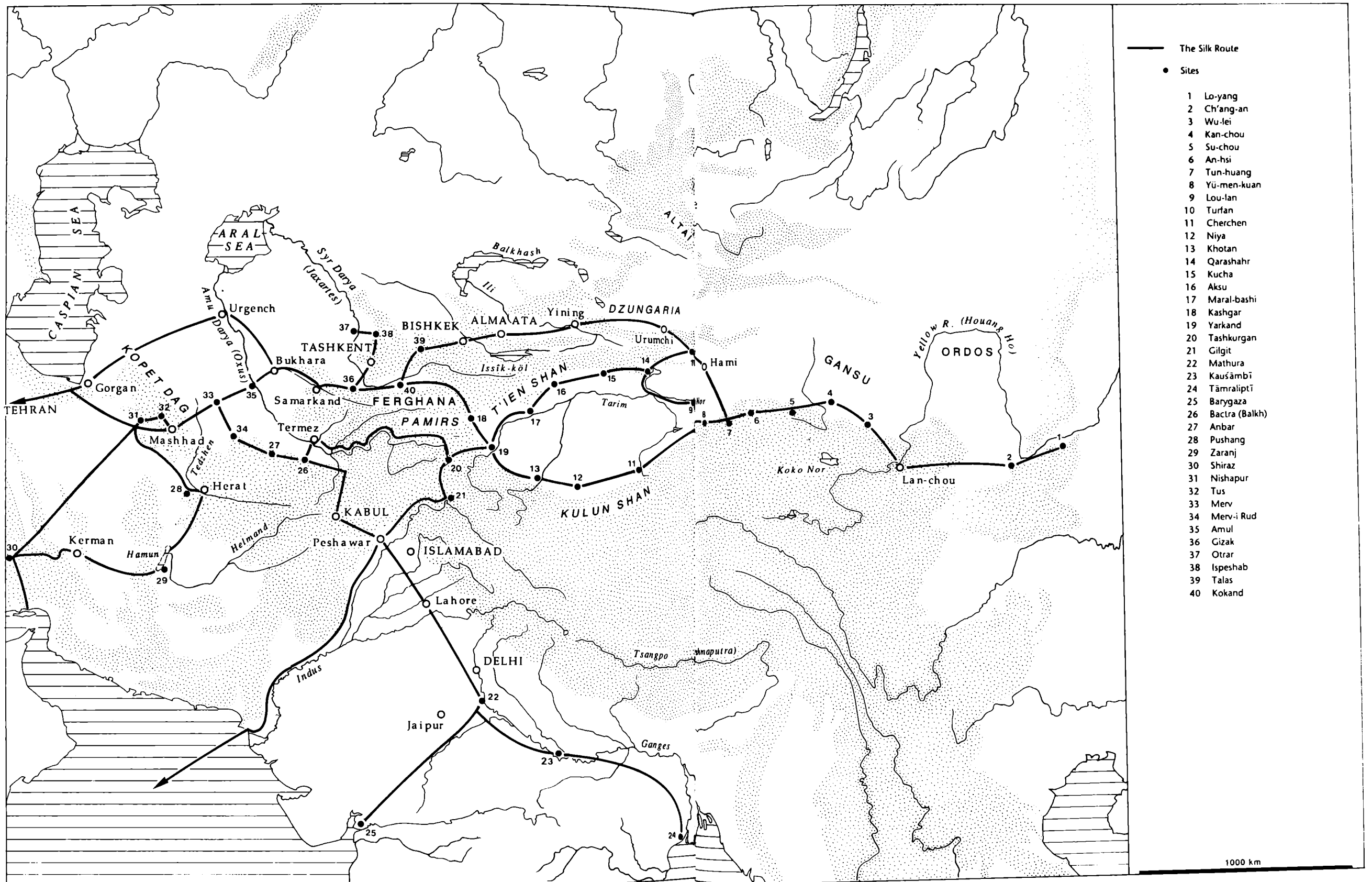
MAP 1. The Achaemenid Empire and the Iranian nomadic tribes of Central Asia.



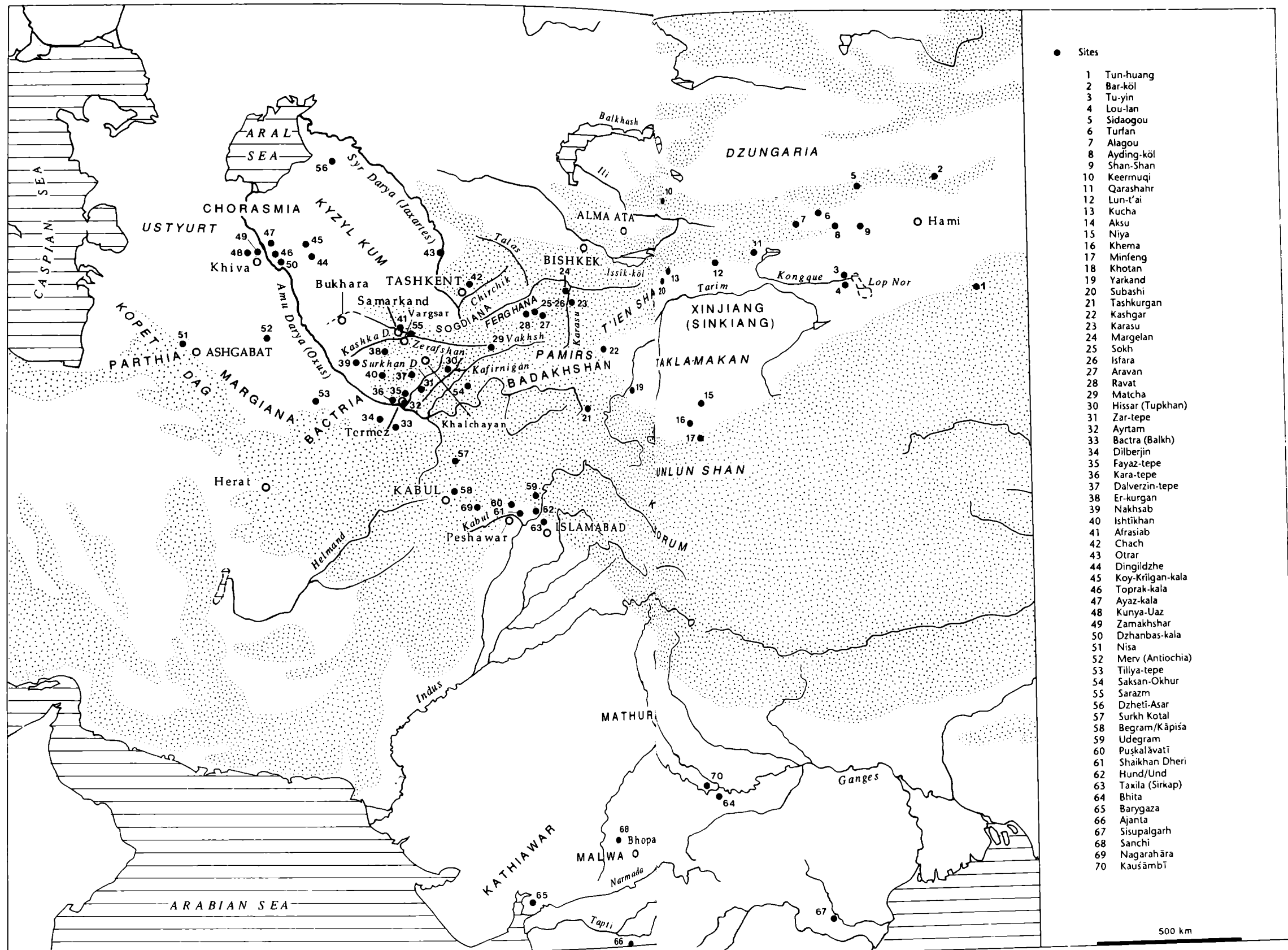
MAP 2. The campaigns of Alexander the Great in Central Asia.



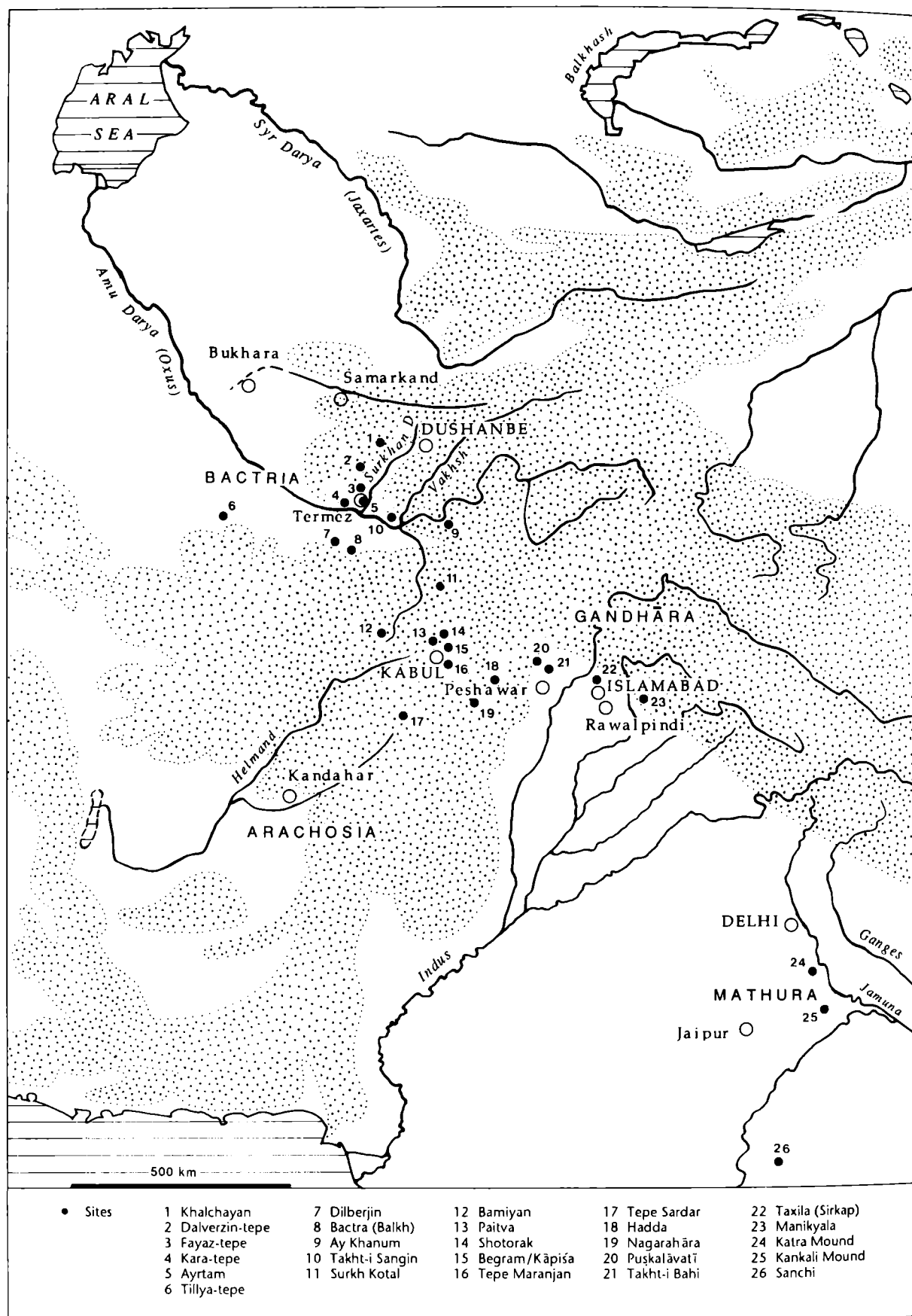
MAP 4. The Hsiung-nu, the Yüeh-chih and the Kushan kingdom.



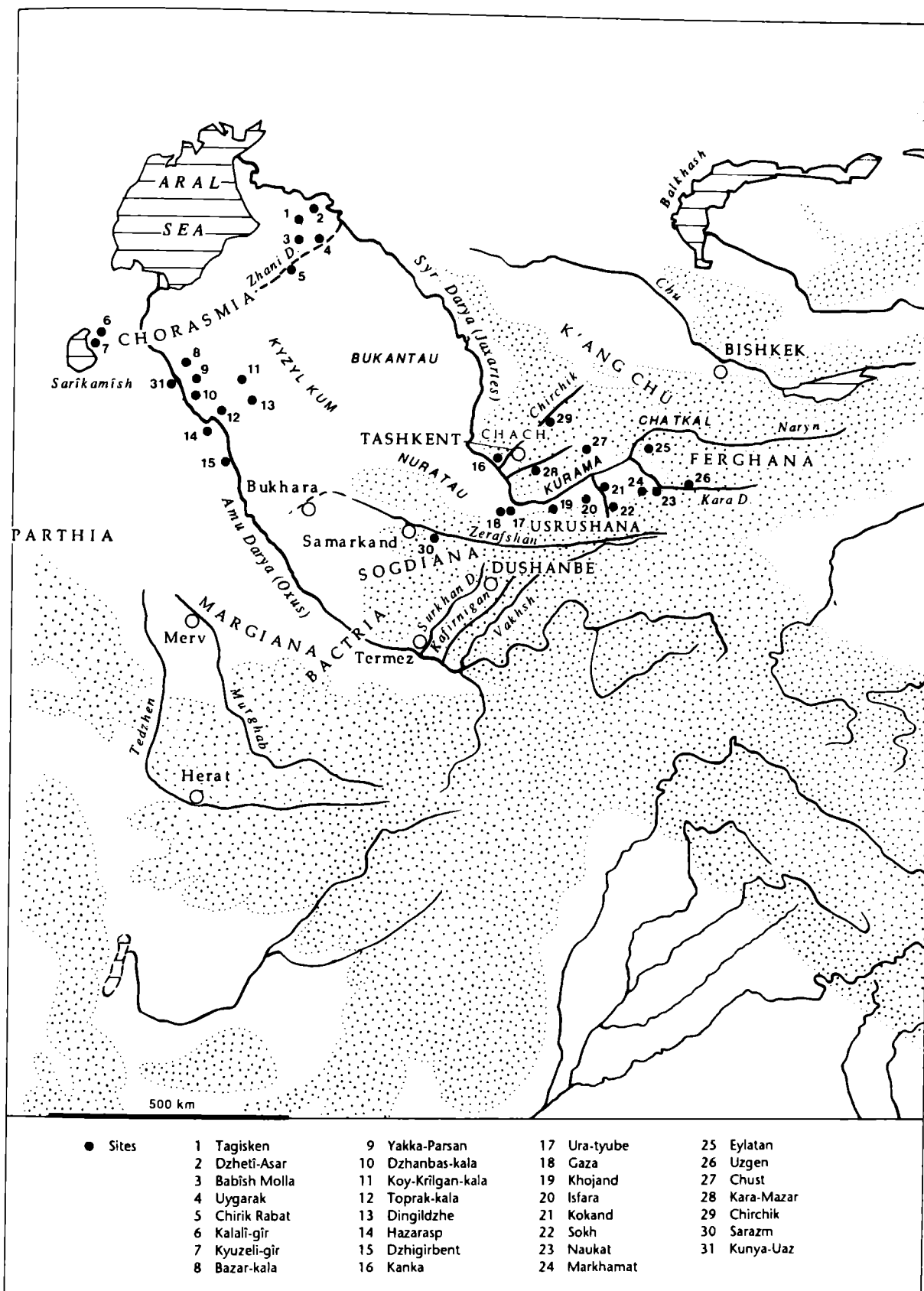
MAP 5. The Silk Route.



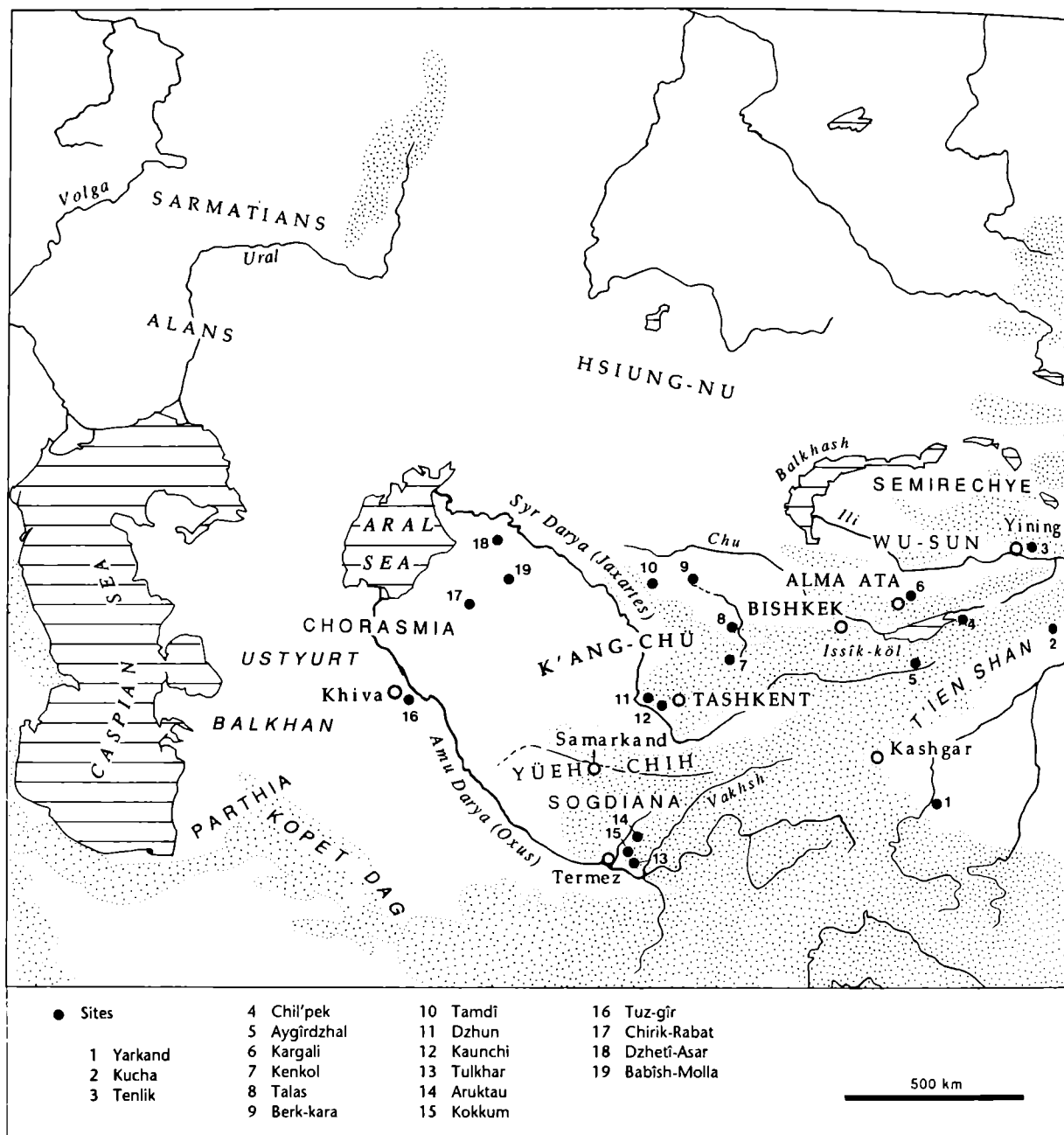
MAP 6. The nomadic and urban cultures in Central Asia.



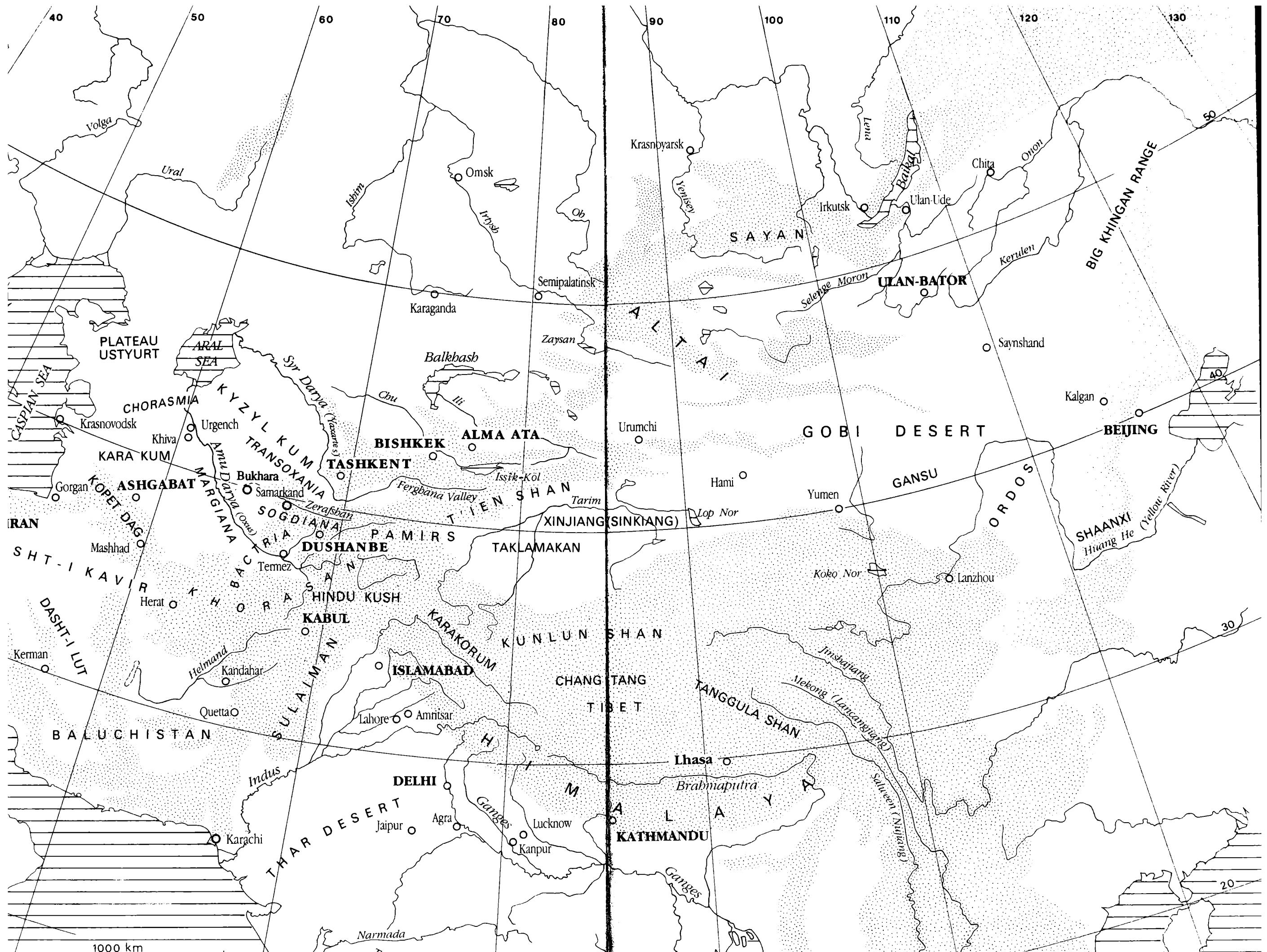
MAP 7. Sites of Kushan art.



MAP 8. States in north-western Central Asia.



MAP 9. The nomads of northern Central Asia after the invasion of Alexander.



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ABBREVIATIONS OF PERIODICALS

- AA = *Arts asiatiques*, Paris
AAH = *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, Budapest
Acta Ant. Hung. = *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, Budapest
AM = *Asia Major*, London
AO = *Arkheologicheskie otkritiya*, Moscow
AOH = *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, Budapest
AP = *Ancient Pakistan*, Peshawar
ART = *Arkheologicheskie raboti v Tadzhikistane*, Dushanbe
AS = *Afghan Studies*, Kabul
ASIAR = *Archaeological Survey of India Annual Report*, New Delhi
BCH = *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*, Paris
BEFEO = *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, Paris
BSOAS = *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, London
CAH = *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Cambridge
CHM = *Cahiers d'histoire mondiale/Journal of World History*, Neuchâtel
CII = *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Calcutta
CRAI = *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles lettres*, Paris
EI = *Epigraphia Indica*, New Delhi
EV = *Epigrafika Vostoka*, Moscow/Leningrad
EW = *East and West*, Rome
IANTSSR = *Izvestiya Akademii nauk TSSR*, Ashkhabad
IIA = *Institut po izucheniyu arkheologii*
IIJ = *Indo-Iranian Journal*, The Hague
IMKU = *Istoriya material'noy kul'turi Uzbekistana*, Tashkent
IOON Tadz. SSR = *Izvestiya Otdeleniya obshchestvennikh nauk Akademii nauk Tadzhikskoy SSR*, Dushanbe
IsMeo.R.M. = *Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente. Reports and Memoirs*, Rome
JA = *Journal asiatique*, Paris
JAOS = *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, New Haven, Conn.

- JBBRAS* = *Journal of the Bengal Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*
JCA = *Journal of Central Asia*, Islamabad
JNSI = *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, Varanasi
JRAS = *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, London
KhAEE = *Khorezmskiye arkheologo-êtnograficheskiye êkspeditsii*, Moscow
KSIA = *Kratkie soobshcheniya Instituta arkheologii*, Kiev
KSIIMK = *Kratkie soobshcheniya Instituta Istorii material'noy kul'turi*, Moscow
MAIKTSA = *Mezhdunarodnaya assotsiatsiya po izucheniyu Kul'tur Tsentral'noy Azii*
MDAFA = *Mémoires de la Délégation archéologique française en Afghanistan*, Paris
MDAFI = *Mémoires de la Délégation archéologique française en Iran*, Paris
ME = *Materiali po êtnografii*, Moscow/Leningrad
MIA = *Materiali i issledovaniya po arkheologii*, Moscow/Leningrad
MIFAOC = *Mémoires de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire*, Cairo
MKhe = *Materiali Khorezmskoy êkspeditsii*, Moscow
MU = *Materiali Uzbekistana*, Tashkent
MYuTAKE = *Materiali Yuzhno-Turkmenistanskoy arkheologicheskoy kompleksnoy, ekspeditsii*, Leningrad
NC = *Numismatic Chronicle*, London
ONU = *Obshchestvennâ nauka v Uzbekistane*, Tashkent
OS = *Orientalia Suecana*, Uppsala
PIIE = *Polevie issledovaniya Instituta êtnografii*, Moscow
RA = *Revue archéologique*, Paris
RN = *Revue numismatique*, Paris
SA = *Sovetskaya arkheologiya*, Moscow
SAI = *Svod arkheologicheskikh istochnikov*, Moscow/Leningrad
SE = *Sovetskaya êtnografiya*, Moscow/Leningrad
SNV = *Strani i narodi Vostoka*, Moscow
TANTadzSSR = *Trudi Akademii nauk Tadzhikskoy SSR*, Dushanbe
TIANTadzSSR = *Trudi Instituta istorii Akademii nauk Tadzhikskoy SSR*, Dushanbe
TMKIATSAKe = *Trudi mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii po istorii arkheologii i kul'turi Tsentral'noy Azii v Kushanskuyu êpoku*, Moscow
TNIYaLI = *Tuvinskiy nauchno-issledovatel'skiy institut yazika, literatury i istorii*, Kyzyl
TP = *T'oung-Pao*, Leiden
TrGE = *Trudi Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha*, Leningrad
TrGIM = *Trudi Gosudarstvennogo Istoricheskogo muzeya*, Moscow
TrSAGU = *Trudi Sredneaziatskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta*, Tashkent
Trudi IIA AN Uzb. SSR = *Trudi Instituta istorii, arkheologii Akademii nauk Uzbekskoy SSR*, Tashkent
Trudi IIAE AN Turkmen. SSR = *Trudi Instituta istorii i arkheologii i êtnografii Akademii nauk Turkmeniskoy SSR*, Ashkhabad
Trudi KhAEE = *Trudi Khorezmskoy arkheologo-etnograficheskoy ekspeditsii*, Moscow
Trudi YuTAKE = *Trudi Yuzhno-Turkmenistanskoy arkheologicheskoy kompleksnoy ekspeditsii*, Leningrad
USA = *Uspekhi Sredneaziatskoy Arkheologii*, Leningrad
VDI = *Vestnik Drevney Istorii*, Moscow
VKF AN UzSSR = *Vestnik Karakalpakskogo filiala Akademii nauk Uzbekskoy SSR*

ZDMG = *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Wiesbaden
ZDO = *Zemli drevnego orosheniya*, Moscow

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