

CHINA

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ROMAN ORIENT:

RESEARCHES INTO

THEIR ANCIENT AND MEDIÆVAL RELATIONS

AS REPRESENTED IN

OLD CHINESE RECORDS.

BY

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LEIPSIC & MUNICH: GEORG HIRTH.
SHANGHAI & HONGKONG: KELLY & WALSH.

1885.

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teristics, and that the deficiency urged in the last sentence of Colonel Yule's remark is not one inherent in the Chinese notices themselves, but one which is artificially introduced by those who persist in applying them to the Roman Empire. As Syria and Egypt were Roman provinces we find, of course, traces of Roman life among the characteristic details placed on record by the Chinese historians; but we shall find that the oriental character prevails in all the main points, apart from the unmistakable features of the topographical configuration of the country.

I have had the satisfaction of seeing the principal results of these researches, as far as they could be judged of by the perusal of advance sheets of the book, approved of by a number of sinological friends; and I may consider myself fortunate if they meet with a similar reception on the part of the general public. I am, of course, well aware that much remains to be done and that there is a fair chance for fellow-workers to treat with success quite a number of problems which I have either not taken up at all, or not attempted to solve definitively, because the range of my studies did not seem to qualify me for the question.

Mr. Phillips writes with regard to my identification of T'iao-chih: "this is the only part I cannot quite make up my mind to accept. There

are two things that require research. Firstly, did the Rhinoceros thrive and flourish at Hira at the time mentioned? and, secondly, can the term *Hsi-hai*, western sea, be applied to the Bahr Nedjef? T'iao-chih is the pivot upon which the whole thing turns. I find that I, like yourself, have in my manuscript about Ta-ts'in made Ssū-pin and Ssū-lo Ktesiphon and Seleucia, etc."

As regards the Western Sea question, I hold that, as the periplus from east to west began or could begin in the Chaldaean Lake, it is quite possible that these waters were comprised under the name "western sea." A correspondent of the *China Review* (Vol. XIII, p. 358) quotes Herodotus (I, 184) to say that, before the reign of Semiramis, the Euphrates used to overflow the whole plain like a sea. Further, Mas'udi (transl. A. Sprenger, Vol. I, p. 246) says: "The greatest part of the water of the Euphrates had once its course through el-Hirah: the bed may still be traced, and it has the name of 'Atik (ancient). On it was fought the battle between the Moslims and Rostam (at the time of 'Omar), called the battle of el-Kâdesiyah. The Euphrates fell at that time into the Abyssinian sea [*i.e.*, the Indian Ocean, here the Persian Gulf], at a place which is now called en-Najaf [Nedjef]; for the sea came up to this place, and thither resorted the ships of China and India, destined for the kings of el-Hirah." A few pages farther on, Mas'udi relates a dialogue between the Arab conqueror Khâled

and a native of Hira. Kháled had asked that the people of the city should depute an intelligent aged man to his camp, that he might enquire of him about their affairs. The following colloquy then took place between Kháled and this aged man of Hira:

“Are you Arabs or Nabathaeans?”

“We are Nabathized Arabs, and Arabized Nabathaeans.¹”

“How many years are come over thee?”

“Three hundred and fifty.”

“And what hast thou seen?”

“I have seen the ships of the sea coming up to us in this deep country with the goods of es-Sind and India; the ground which is now under thy feet was covered with the waves of the sea. Look how far we are at present from the shore, etc.”

(*Re* the Rhinoceros: the difficulty arising from the mention in the *Hou-han-shu* of this animal as “coming from” T‘iao-chih together with lions, zebus, peacocks and ostriches is not removed by placing T‘iao-chih in any of the countries with which others have associated it, nor by giving it a position farther south on the coast of the Persian Gulf; the countries producing the rhinoceros at the present day are altogether out of the question. Dr. Bretschneider (*Notes and Queries on China*

¹ Cf. the remarks on p. 172 regarding the relationship between the Chaldaeans (T‘iao-chih) and the Nabathaeans (Li-kan, Rekem).

and *Japan*, Vol. IV, p. 60 seq.), in trying to identify T'iao-chih with ancient Persia (Susa, Persepolis), assumes that, in this case, the term *hsi-niu* should be translated by *buffalo*; buffaloes being found in great numbers all over western Asia. But the difference between this animal and the rhinoceros is far too great; and I would certainly not credit the Chinese writer, who must have known the former from his own experience and the latter from detailed descriptions of the Annamese species occurring in contemporaneous and older Chinese works, with such a confusion. If we possess no positive proof of the rhinoceros having existed in Chaldaea, I am also not aware of ancient authors stating that it did *not* exist there; for, ancient literature, as it now exists, is mainly of an accidental nature and cannot fairly be expected to contain an exhaustive picture of the geographical range of each animal. Whether the rhinoceros did or did not occupy a prominent position in the Chaldaean fauna, there is no doubt that the low, swampy soil of the inundated fields near the lower course of the Euphrates must have been as good a habitat for this pachyderm as any other part of the world. Our knowledge in this respect is very incomplete, and the faith I place in the accuracy of ancient Chinese records has been so much strengthened in the course of my studies that I consider their mention of the rhinoceros in T'iao-chih quite as reliable as if the animal

was stated by Ktesias, Pliny, or Strabo to have been seen in Chaldaea.) Is not our knowledge of the old fauna of countries much nearer our own civilisation equally doubtful? Who would have looked for rhinoceros' bones in the caves of Mount Libanon near Beirût where they have actually been seen together with the relics of the ure-ox, the bear, the capricorn, the aboriginal goat (Urziege), the gazelle and the antelope? (Fraas, *Drei Monate im Libanon*, Stuttgart, 1876, p. 66.) Brehm (*Thierleben*, 2nd ed., Vol. III, p. 520) mentions a rhinoceros seen by Chardin at Ispahan, though I am not able to say how the animal had got to that place.

I have much pleasure in acknowledging the advice and assistance I have received in passing these sheets through the press from Messrs. H. A. GILES and E. H. PARKER.

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SHANGHAI, JUNE 1885.
