

The texts

The following texts on matters Kushan come from diverse cultures, with diverse linguistic backgrounds, and they are here presented in a chronological sequence in such a way that reading them one after another is hoped to produce an image of Kushan history in its totality, as far as it is covered by reports and legends. The texts, mostly in their own script, are followed by translations which presently are regarded as reliable. In some cases, however, there is just one translation available which may convey ideas held by its author which may look questionable to others. In most cases no comment is added and the reader has to decide what he wants to adopt and what not.

Particularly the Chinese texts can produce an irritating and widely diverging range of transcriptions of one and the same term. In the quoted translations they are kept exactly as they are printed. Many translators use the transcription system of Wade and Giles, and French scholars of old seemed to prefer the EFEO system. Furthermore, some Western authors produced their own individual variants of these transcription systems. The reader is begged to combine the variants. In my own notes the Pinyin system is applied, without accents. When translators used brackets they are kept as they are printed. Occasionally, some clarifications are inserted, again in square brackets, supplied with an “ed.”.

Normally, one topic comes under one header. But there are cases where a number of passages deal with the same topic, often in similar language. In these cases the first and all following entries are initiated by a bullet, “•”.

Possible prehistory of the Yuezhi

001 – Yuzhi: Traders in jade

Context: A number of chapters in the *Guanzi* 管子 speak about the Yuzhi 禺氏, once also written *niuzhi* 牛氏, as living close to jade yielding mountains. The *Guanzi* is a compilation of diverse texts on statecraft, with parts referring to events of the 7th cent. BC. Many chapters have been reworked in Han times. Chinese commentators and modern research tend to equate the Yuzhi/Niuzhi with the Yuezhi, as forerunners of the people which later became known as the Kushans. The earlier terms are not used in later literature, apart from quotations. Since the identity cannot be proven, using the *Guanzi* for reconstructing the Kushan prehistory remains speculative. If the Yuzhi were the forefathers of the later Yuezhi, then this material would show that some of them either

once lived near Khotan/Hetian in Xinjiang, where jade is found, or that they did not disclose the origin of the jade they sold to the Chinese somewhere in Gansu or Ningxia.

• Guanzi 管子, chapter 73,4 (8a=70) Guo Xu 國蓄; cf. Thierry 2005: 447, 489 no. 2, Rickett 1998,II: 386:

玉起於禺氏，金起於汝漢，珠起於赤野，東西南北，距周七千八百里，

“Jade comes from the Yuzhi, gold from the Ru and Han rivers, and pearls from Chiye. From east to west and north to south the distance from Zhou was 7,800 *li*.”

• Guanzi 管子, chapter 77,2 (2b=84) Di Shu 地數; Rickett 1998,II: 425:

夫玉起於牛氏邊山，

“Now jade comes from the mountains bordering on the territory of the Niuzhi [牛氏].”

Note ed.: It is unclear if this is a copyist’s mistake, or a variant pronunciation or descriptive (“cattle people”).

• Guanzi 管子, chapter 78,8 (8a=89) Kui Du 揆度; Rickett 1998,II: 438:

Content: On seven taxation schemes, with increasing values of the items used as money.

陰山之礪磬，一筭也。燕之紫山白金，一筭也。發朝鮮之文皮，一筭也。汝、漢水之右衢黃金，一筭也。江陽之珠，一筭也。秦明山之曾青，一筭也。禺氏邊山之玉，一筭也。

“White nephrite from the Yin Mountains 陰山 is one of them. Silver from the Zi Mountains of Yan 燕 is another. Others include ornamental skins from the Fa 發 and Chaoxian 朝鮮 peoples, gold from the righthand (southern) confluences of the Ru 汝 and Han 漢, pearls from the Yangtze 江 and Yang rivers, malachite from Qin’s 秦 Ming Mountains 明山, and jade from the mountains bordering the territory of the Yuezhi [*sic*] 禺氏.”

• Guanzi 管子, chapter 78,12 (8a-8b=90) Kui Du 揆度; Rickett 1998,II: 439:

珠起於赤野之末光，黃金起於汝漢水之右衢。玉起於禺氏之邊山。

此度去周七千八百里，

“Pearls come from the Moguang 末光 area of Chiye 赤野, gold from the righthand (southern) confluence of the Ru and Han, and jade from the mountains bordering the territory of the Yuezhi [*sic*].

The distance to all these places from Zhou extended 7,800 *li*.”

• Guanzi 管子, chapter 80,18 (19b=100) Qing Zhong Jia 輕重甲; Rickett 1998,II: 464f.:

禺氏不朝，請以白璧為幣乎！

“The Yuzhi 禺氏 have not come to court. I suggest that you use white jade *bi* 璧 as money.”

懷而不見於抱，挾而不見於腋，而辟千金者，白璧也，然後八千里之禺氏可得而朝也。

“What may be carried unseen in the bosom or clasped unseen under the arm and is comparable in value to a thousand catties of gold is a white jade *bi*. Once you use white jade *bi* for money, the Yuzhi, who live eight thousand *li* from here, may be brought to court.”

Note: All other groups mentioned in the paragraph likewise live “8000” *li* from the court; so this number cannot be used for pinning down an exact place.

• Guanzi 管子, chapter 81,2 (2a=102) Qing Zhong Yi 輕重乙; Rickett 1998,II: 468f.:

玉出於禺氏之旁山，

“[A]nd jade from the mountains bordering on the territory of the Yuzhi 禺氏.”

002 – Years around 350 BC: The original home of the Yuzhi in Ningxia province

Context: In the novel *Mu Tianzi zhuan* 穆天子傳, “(The travels of Mu, the son of heaven”, written between 403 and 350 BC, the king meets a tribe called Yuzhi 禺知 after travelling for seven days, starting from the Yu pass, which Thierry (2005: 446) identifies with the Yanmenguan or Xijinguan Pass (39°11'30" N, 112°51'33" E), in the Yanmenshan 雁門山 mountains. Thierry calculates that the “large plain” of the Yuzhi may be anywhere between the Helanshan (39°N, 106° E) and the left side of the Yellow River, i.e. in Ningxia or Inner Mongolia.

• *Mu Tianzi zhuan* 穆天子傳 (卷一); cf. YU 2010: 23, Thierry 2005: 489:

甲午，天子西征，乃絕隴之關隘。己亥，至于焉居禺知之平。

“Au jour *jia-wu* [17^e jour], le Fils du Ciel marcha vers l’ouest, ensuite, il passa le long du flanc du précipice de la passe de Yu; au jour *ji-hai* [22^e], il arriva dans la plaine des Yanju et des Yuzhi [禺知].”

Content: In a passage of the *Yi Zhoushu* 逸周書, “Lost [chapters of the] Book of Zhou”, which Thierry (2005: 446f.) has unearthed, the Yuzhi 禺氏 are located in the north-western quarter of the Zhou territory, a region close to the one made likely through the *Mu Tianzi zhuan*.

• *Yi Zhoushu* 逸周書 59; Thierry 2005: 447:

其西般吾白虎黑文。屠州黑豹，禺氏駒駘，

“(…) à l’ouest de ces [peuples], les Fanyu avec [leur tribut,] des tigres blancs, (…), les Yuzhi avec [leur tribut,] des chevaux *toutao*.”

Note ed.: The last two signs are not translated, it seems, because of the uncertainty of their meaning. Giele (2011: 240, fn. 11), dealing with the Xiongnu in SJ 110, where these animals are mentioned as well, discusses the term and ends up with “wild horse” of a possibly “black” hue. Thierry’s translation covers more regions of the Zhou universe and shows that the tribes are connected with an animal which is regarded as typical for their terrain or lifestyle.

Note Hill: It is listed as no. 250 *Taotu* by Strassberg (2002: 180), where it also occurs as a breed of horses offered to King Tang of the Shang dynasty (second half of the 2nd mill. BC).

003 – Years 246-221 BC: Wuzhi as traders in horses

Context: Not only the very old Yizhousho connects Yuzhi 禺氏 with horses. In the SJ a man called Luo 倮 from the time of Emperor Qin (r. 246-221 BC) is linked to yet another tribe, the Wuzhi 烏氏, associated by some scholars with the later Yuezhi partly on account of his ethnic affiliation and partly because of the nature of the trade.

SJ 129 (3260), 《史記·列傳·貨殖列傳·11》; Watson 1993,II: 440:

烏氏倮牧，及眾，斥賣，求奇繒物，間獻遺戎王。戎王什倍其償，與之畜，畜至用谷量馬牛。秦始皇帝令倮比封君，以時與列臣朝請。

“Wuzhi Luo raised domestic animals, and when he had a large number, he sold them and bought rare silks and other articles which he secretly sent as gifts to the king of the Rong barbarians. The king of the Rong repaid him ten times the original cost and sent him domestic animals until Wuzhi Luo had so many herds of horses and cattle he could only estimate their number roughly by the valleyful. The First Emperor of the Qin ordered that Wuzhi Luo be granted the same honours as a feudal lord and allowed him to join the ministers in seasonal audiences at court.”

Note de la Vaissière: I strongly doubt that there was any link between Wuzhi and Yuezhi.

004 – Years as before: The Yuezhi in Gansu / Hexi corridor

Content: All younger texts starting with the SJ present the earliest home of the Yuezhi in Gansu.

• SJ 123.4a (3162), 《史記·列傳·大宛列傳·10》≈ HS 96A.10a (3891); Zürcher 1968: 360, Thierry 2005: 491 § 3, Watson 1993,II: 234:

始月氏居敦煌、祁連間，

“The Yuezhi originally lived in the area between the Qilian or Heavenly Mountains and Dunhuang.”

• HS 96B.1b (3902), 《漢書·傳·西域傳·2》; Hulsewé 1979: 145:

始張騫言

‘烏孫本與大月氏共在敦煌間(...)’

“Formerly Chang Ch’ien 張騫 had said:

‘Originally the Wu-sun (people) dwelt together with the Ta-Yüeh-chih 大月氏 in the area of Tun-huang 敦煌 (...)’”

Note ed.: The foundation of the Chinese city of Dunhuang took place in 111 BC, so that the mention here refers to the future site of the city.

• Zhang Shoujie 張守節 (fl. AD 725-735) in his commentary on the Shiji, *Shiji zhengyi* 史記正義, “Rectifying the Meaning of the Grand Scribe’s Records”, cites in chapter SJ 110 a work on geography called *Kuo Di Zhi* 括地志 from the 7th century. Translation YE:

括地志云: “涼、甘、肅、延、沙等州地, 本月氏國。”

“The *Kuo Di Zhi* says: ‘Cantons of Liang, Gan, Su, Yan, Sha and other districts are the original lands of the Yuezhi.’”

Note YE: Liang-zhou is now Wuwei of Gansu province, Gan-zhou is now Zhangye of Gansu Province, Su-zhou is now Jiuquan of Gansu Province, and Yan-zhou lies near Yan’an of Shanxi 陝西 Province. The latter, being out of the way, is regarded as a mistake for Gua-zhou 瓜州, now Anxi of Gansu Province; Sha-zhou is now Dunhuang.

• Jiu Tangshu 舊唐書, “Old book of Tang”, AD 946, scroll 198, and Xin Tangshu 新唐書, AD 1060, scroll 221, describe the state of Samarkand. Translation of XTS by Chavannes 1903: 133f.:

君姓溫, 本月氏人。(JTS 其王姓溫, 月氏人也。)

始居祁連北昭武城, (JTS 先居張掖祁連山北昭武城,)

“Le nom de famille du prince est Wen. C’étaient à l’origine des Yue-tche qui résidaient autrefois dans la ville de Tchao-ou, au nord (des monts) K’i-lien.”

Notes ed.: Chavannes (1903: 133, fn. 1) locates Tchao-ou (*Zhaowu* 昭武) of Han times with the help of an old geographical dictionary to the North-West of Ganzhou 甘州 in Gansu, probably Zhangye 張掖 in the centre of the Hexi corridor. – Recent research (Yoshida 2003) rather takes these relatively modern accounts as educated fabrications.

005 – Similar physique of Yuezhi and Wusun

• The Tang-time commentator Yan Shigu 顏師古 (AD 581-645) inserts a note into HS 96B.1a (3901); Wylie 1882: 83:

顏師古: 烏孫于西域諸戎, 其形最異, 今之胡人青眼赤須狀類彌猴者, 本其種也。

“A native commentator remarks: ‘The people of Woo–sun had the most remarkable figures of all the barbarian races. Their representatives at the present day have blue eyes and red beards; while in shape they resemble apes from which they are originally descended.’”

• Zhang Shoujie 張守節 (fl. AD 725-735) in his *Zhengyi* 正義 on *Shiji* 123 (3162) quotes from the *Nanzhou Yiwu Zhi* of Wan Zhen 萬震 (ca. AD 250), which deals with the southern countries (正義萬震南州志云:), and in this case with Bactria. Thierry 2005: 496, texte 12, LIU 2001: 278:

人民赤白色，便習弓馬。土地所出，及奇瑋珍物，被服鮮好，天竺不及也。

“The skin of people there is reddish white. People are skillful at horse archery. Local products, rarities, treasures, clothing, and upholstery are very good, and even India cannot compare with it.”

006 – Terminology shared between Wusun and Yuezhi: *yabghu*

Context: Although of a certain antiquity, the term *yabghu* is not attested among the Yuezhi before their relocation to Bactria. There it becomes prominent and denotes five governor-generals, originally acting within the monarchy.

• HS 96A.15a (3891), 《漢書·傳·西域傳·42》; Zürcher 1968: 365, Hulsewé 1979: 121:

有五翕侯:

“There are five Hsi-hou [among the Yuezhi ed.]”

• The scholastic from Tang times Yan Shigu 顏師古 inserted a commentary into HS 61.3a (2692); Hirth 1899: 49:

(顏)師古曰:

翕侯，烏孫大臣官號，其數非一，亦猶漢之將軍耳。

“(Der Scholiast) Yen Schi-ku fügt dieser Stelle hinzu:

‘Hi-hóu (yap-hau) [翕侯 ed.] war bei den Wu-sun der Titel eines Beamten von Minister-Rang; es gab deren mehrere.

Der Titel ist dem chinesischen Tsiang-kün [將軍 ed.] (Feldmarschall) vergleichbar ’ (...)”

• HS 61.3a (2692), 《漢書·傳·張騫李廣利傳·8》; Hulsewé 1979: 214f.:

子昆莫新生，傅父布就翕侯抱亡置草中，為求食，

“An infant ‘Kun-mo’ had recently been born [to the Wusun royal family ed.], and the Pu-chiu *Hsi-hou*, [翕侯 ed.] who was his guardian, took him in his arms and ran away.”

Note ed.: For *xihou* 翕侯, also the graphical variant 翕侯 can be found. On the term cf.

Sims-Williams & de la Vaissière 2007; extensive summary of research in Hill 2009: 587-590, Appendix M, 2015,II: 185-191, Appendix O. For a possible short form *hou* 侯 used by the Wusun cf. Thierry 2005: 508, fn. 158.

007 – Original and modified way of life of the Yuezhi

Content: The SJ, referring to the conditions of the 2nd/1st cent. BC, and the HS finalized in the 2nd cent. AD, read similarly, but for the HS the nomadic life is a matter of the past and the strength of the army is reduced. Trade in horses or jade is not mentioned.

• SJ 123.3b-4a (3161), 《史記·列傳·大宛列傳·10》; Zürcher 1968: 360, Thierry 2005: 506, texte 20f., Watson 1993,II: 234:

行國也，隨畜移徙，與匈奴同俗。
控弦者可一二十萬。

“They are a nation of nomads, moving from place to place with their herds, and their customs are like those of the Xiongnu.

They have some 100,000 or 200,000 archer warriors.”

• HS 96A.9b-10a (3890; 3891), 《漢書·傳·西域傳·41》; Zürcher 1968: 364-365, Hulsewé 1979: 120:

大月氏本行國也，隨畜移徙，與匈奴同俗。
控弦十餘萬，故疆輕匈奴。
本居敦煌、祁連間，

“Ta Yüeh-chih was originally a land of nomads. The people moved around in company with their stock-animals and followed the same way of life as the Hsiung-nu.

There were more than 100000 trained bowmen, and for this reason they relied on their strength and thought lightly of the Hsiung-nu.

Originally [the people] dwelt between Tun-huang and Ch'i-lien.”

• QHJ 《前漢紀·孝武皇帝紀三·8》; Thierry 2005: 492, texte 5:

大月氏本匈奴同俗。居燉煌祈連山間。

“Les Grands Yuezhi, à l’origine, avaient les mêmes coutumes que les Xiongnu; ils vivaient entre Dunhuang et les Monts Qilian.”

Note ed.: The QHJ version seems to present a crude combination of a much larger story as contained in the HSS. The role of Modu (cf. § 011, 012) is completely neglected.

008 – Years 259-210 BC: Emperor Qin ruling, the Yuezhi prosper

SJ 110.5b (2887), 《史記·列傳·匈奴列傳·5》 [≈ HS 94A.5a (3748)]; Thierry 2005: 498, texte 16, Giele 2011: 256, Watson 1993,II: 134:

當是之時，東胡疆而月氏盛。

“At this time the Eastern Barbarians were very powerful and the Yuezhi were likewise flourishing.”

The three attacks of the Xiongnu on the Yuezhi

009 – Years prior to 209 BC: The stratagem of the Xiongnu leader Touman

Content: The Xiongnu are a mighty nomad state in Mongolia. Its ruler Touman gave Modu, his son, as hostage to the Yuezhi. The locality is not defined. The plot is regulated by the age-old motif of “second wife with new child”.

SJ 110.6a (2888), 《史記·列傳·匈奴列傳·6》 [≈ HS 94A.5a-5b (3749), Thierry 2005: 503, texte 19]; Watson 1993,II: 134, Thierry 2005: 498, texte 16, Giele 2011: 256f.:

單于有太子名冒頓。

“The Shan-yü had an Heir named Mao-tun 冒頓.”

後有所愛闕氏，生少子，
而單于欲廢冒頓而立少子，
乃使冒頓質於月氏。

“Later, there was a beloved *Yen-chih* 闕氏 [sobriquet for a “lovely woman” ed.], who gave birth to a younger son, and the *Shan-yü* wanted to depose Mao-tun and install the younger son, so he sent Mao-tun as a hostage to the *Yüeh-chih* 月氏.”

Note ed.: On the pronunciation of 冒頓 as /*modu*/ cf. Thierry 2005: 437: “Modu et non pas Maodun or Modun”; also on the pronunciation /*chanyu*/ against the common /*shanyu*/ or /*shanyü*/.

010 – Years as before: First attack on the Yuezhi by the Xiongnu under Touman

Context: A mock-attack by the Xiongnu leader aims at having his son killed by the hostage-takers. The plot explains how the enmity between Xiongnu and Yuezhi arose.

SJ 110.6a (2888), 《史記·列傳·匈奴列傳·6》 [≈ HS 94A.5a-5b (3749), Thierry 2005: 503, texte 19]; Watson 1993,II: 134, Thierry 2005: 498, texte 16, Giele 2011: 257:

冒頓既質於月氏，而頭曼急擊月氏。

“After Mao-tun had become hostage of the *Yüeh-chih*, T’ou-man fiercely attacked the *Yüeh-chih*.”