



AN-HSI

AN-HSI (Middle Chinese *an-sik*), name by which the Parthian empire was known to the Chinese, a transcription of Aršak-, the name of the Parthian ruling house. (Chinese *-n* corresponds regularly to foreign *-r* in transcriptions of the Han period.) The first reference to An-hsi is in the report of the envoy Chang Ch'ien, who visited the Great Yüeh-chih around 126 B.C. in their encampment north of the Oxus shortly after their conquest of Sogdiana and Bactria (*Shih-chi* 123). He learned that An-hsi was a large country several thousand *li* to the west with many cities and a settled population engaged in agriculture. While on a later expedition to the Wu-sun, a nomadic people in the T'ien-shan, Chang Ch'ien sent envoys to a number of western countries, including Parthia. The Chinese envoy was well received, and a return embassy which arrived in China around 106 B.C. was received with much pomp. Though trading relations between China and Parthia along the Silk Road were active thereafter, official contacts between the two countries remained few. Envoys from An-hsi to the eastern Han court are recorded under the years A.D. 87 and 101; lions, ostriches, and *bubal* antelopes are mentioned as exotic articles of tribute. The Parthian king's name on the second occasion is recorded as Man-ch'u (Middle Chinese *man-k'ut*), probably a corruption of p'u-ch'ü (Middle Chinese *bo-k'ut*, earlier **ba-*), standing for Bakur, i.e., Pacorus II. In A.D. 97 a Chinese envoy, Kan Ying, tried to reach Ta-ch'in (the Roman empire) via Parthia. He reached the head of the Persian Gulf but was persuaded by local seamen that it was too dangerous to proceed further. In A.D. 147 the famous An Shih-kao, said to be a Parthian prince who had renounced the throne to become a Buddhist monk, arrived in the Chinese



capital and became the first Buddhist missionary and translator in China who is known by name. The surname An was later adopted by other missionaries from that region. After the rise of the Sasanians and the disappearance of the Parthian empire, the name An-hsi, generally abbreviated to An, became associated with Bokhara. During the T'ang period (618-905) the surname An was used both by Sogdians recently arrived from Bokhara and by descendants of earlier migrants from the west who had entered China with the nomad invaders of Northern Dynasties or had been incorporated into the Northern Turks and subsequently found themselves in Chinese territory. One of the latter was the famous general and rebel An Lu-shan.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. F. P. Hulsewé, *China in Central Asia, the early stage: 125 B.C.-A.D. 23, an Annotated Translation of the History of the Former Han Dynasty*, Leiden, 1979, pp. 115-18. (I disagree with Hulsewé's opinion that the parallel account in the *Shih-chi*, which dates the earliest embassy to An-hsi somewhat earlier than the *Han shu*, is secondary and unreliable.)

E. Chavannes, "Les pays d'Occident d'après le Heou Han chou," *T'oung Pao* 8, 1907, pp. 177-78.