



## CHIONITES

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**CHIONITES** (Lat. Chionitae, probably from Pahl. *Xyōn/Hyōn* [cf. Werner, pp. 525-29; Bailey, 1930-32a, p. 945], Av. *X'īiaona* [*Hyaona*]), a tribe of probable Iranian origin that was prominent in **Bactria** and Transoxania in late antiquity. The first mention of the Chionites is by the 4th-century Greek historian **Ammianus Marcellinus** (16.9.4), the chief authority on the events of the early history of the Chionites, in connection with the Sasanian emperor Šāpūr II (309-79 c.e.), who spent the winter of 356-57 c.e. in the territory of the Chionitae and Cuseni (amended from Euseni in the manuscripts, as suggested by Markwart, *Ērānšahr*, p. 36 n. 5), or Kushans. By 358 the Chionites and the Gelani (a tribe from which the name Gilān is derived) were serving in his army (Ammianus, 17.5.1), evidence that he had succeeded in establishing military supremacy over them. As one of four main contingents (the others being the Albani [see **albania**], Gelani, and Sacae) in Šāpūr's siege of Amida (modern Diyarbakır) in 359, during the war with the Roman emperor Constantius II (317-61; Ammianus 19.2.3; cf. Göbl, II, p. 287), they were responsible for the eastern section of the wall. Their king, Grumbates, lost a son in the battle, and the subsequent funeral ceremonies and cremation were vividly described by Ammianus (19.1.7-19.2.1).

In the Avestan tradition (*Yts.* 9.30-31, 19.87) the *X'īiaona* were characterized as enemies of Vištāspa, the patron of Zoroaster, but it is not certain that they were the ones who are said to have worn pointed caps and helmets (*uruui-xao'a uruui.vərəθra*, both hapaxes) like those of the Sacae (*Sakā tigraxaudā* in the Achaemenid inscriptions), as assumed by Franz Altheim (I, pp. 52-53).



Altheim also identified them with the Sacae, though Ammianus clearly distinguished them in his report on the siege of Amida (19.2.3). The practice of cremation alone would, of course, have been sufficient to win them the hostility of Zoroastrians. In the Pahlavi tradition the Xyōn were among the enemies of Pērōz (459-84) in his struggle against the Hephthalites in the later 5th century (Bailey, 1954, p. 20; Klíma, pp. 119-20, 122-23). In *Bahman yašt* (4.58; ed. Anklesaria, pp. 34-35, 112) they are mentioned, along with the Turks, Khazars (see Bailey, 1943-46, pp. 1-2), and Tibetans, among the peoples destined to conquer Iran (cf. *Bundahišn* [TD<sub>2</sub>], pp. 216-17; tr. Anklesaria, pp. 278-79; Bailey, 1954, pp. 13-14). Three divisions were distinguished: the Xyōn with the Turks, who were mountain and desert dwellers (probably in Kūhestān beyond Samarkand); the Red and White Xyōn (*karmīr* and *spēd Xyōn* respectively; Bailey, 1930-32a, pp. 945-53) were included in the third group. In other Zoroastrian Pahlavi texts the White Xyōn are named among the enemies of Wištāsp who are doomed to final destruction because of their wickedness (*Ayādgār ī jāmāspīg*, chap. 96; cf. Bailey, 1930-32b, pp. 585-86, 591); they may have been the people referred to as the White Huns (Leukoì Oúnnoi) by Procopius in the 6th century (*Bellum Persicum* 1.3.1). The Red Xyōn, whom Harold W. Bailey identified with the Kermichíōnes or Ermēchíōnes, are also mentioned, together with the Turks, in connection with eschatological events (*Bahman yašt* 6.6; Anklesaria, pp. 47-48, 117; for other citations in Parthian and Middle Persian literature, see *Ayādgār ī Zarērān*, in *Pahlavi Texts*, ed. Jamasp-Asana, pp. 1-18; *Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, p. 643; cf. Bailey, 1954, pp. 15-16, for parallels from Indian literature: *śveta-hūṇa* or *sita-hūṇa* = White Huns, *hala-hūṇa* = dark, or Red, Huns).

The question of the ethnic origins of the Chionites is very complex, especially as the names, Avestan X'iaona/Pahlavi Xyōn and Hun/Chionite, are very close and the peoples in question inhabited approximately the same geographical region. The Chionites in fact constituted one of several waves of eastern migration into Iran in late antiquity, though exactly which has been a matter of controversy. Roman Ghirshman read a word inscribed on a group of eastern Iranian coins HIONO (pp. 9-21; cf. Hansen: OIONO) and attributed the coins to the Chionites (cf. Altheim, esp. I, pp. 34; Haussig, 1953, p. 320; idem, 1973, p. 181; Werner, pp. 543-44). He supposed further that the words he read ĒPTLA ĒIONO were evidence that the Hephthalites were the ruling elite of the Chionites and associated them with the White Huns, while insisting that they were of neither Turkish nor Mongol origin (pp. 69-134, esp. pp. 77, 115-17). Altheim accepted this definition of the Hephthalites but considered them,



along with all other Hunnic peoples, to be of Turkish origin (I, pp. 45ff.; cf. Haussig, 1953, pp. 324-25; Werner, p. 544); the language of the coins appears to be Iranian, however, though the linguistic interpretations of names and titles frequently remain in doubt (Göbl, II, pp. 6-7; Werner, pp. 538-41, 544ff.). Altheim identified the Hephthalites not only with the Chionites but also with the Xiong-nu (Hsiung-nu; see [chinese-iranian relations i. in pre-islamic times](#)), who, according to Chinese tradition, had by ca. 450 been masters of Sogdia for three generations; he therefore concluded that their conquest had occurred not long after 350 and that Šāpūr II had been fighting them there in 356-57 (I, p. 35, II, p. 258; cf. Altheim and Stiehl, pp. 685ff.). Károly Czeplédy (1954) at first considered that the Xyōn = Chionites = Xiong-nu had united with the \*Uar (an unattested name reconstructed from the Hua of the Chinese sources) = Hephthalites under the latter between ca. 350 and 450, but in a subsequent, more detailed discussion (1969) he dated this event before 350 and localized it in the Altai range. Furthermore, he identified the Juan-Juan (Zhuan-zhuan) of the Chinese sources (Mathews, no. 3164) with the \*Uar/Xyōn and the European Avars, called in late 6th-century Byzantine sources Ouarchōnītai (Menander Protector [6th century, p. 205 ll. 25-27] or Ouár, Hoúnnoi, and Khounní (Theophylactus Simocatta [1st half 7th century], pp. 258 l. 4, 259 l. 10; for a critical analysis of these hypotheses, see Mohay). H. W. Haussig assumed that the Huns who invaded Sogdiana in the mid-4th century were the same people who had conquered Lo-yang, capital of the Western Chin empire, under the leadership of Liu Cong (Ts'ung) in 311. He interpreted the name Ouarchōnītai as a combination of \*Uar/Hua = Hephthalites and Chōn = Huns; according to Theophylactus Simocatta (pp. 258 l. 4, 259 l. 10; cf. Haussig, 1953, pp. 283, 287), the Huns had been the masters of the Avars, who had settled in the same region (for Haussig's most recent statement of his views, see 1973, esp. pp. 173-181, 190-91; cf. Mohay, pp. 141-42). A correlation between the Xiong-nu and the Huns = Chōn is also attested in the Sogdian *Ancient Letters* (cf. Werner, p. 526). Hiyasuki Miyakawa and Arnulf Kollautz, drawing on the research of G. Uchida, have argued that the Northern Xiong-nu had already occupied Sogdiana in 280, having invaded from across the Oxus (cols. 100-02) but have offered no documentation to support this hypothesis.

Robert Göbl has, however, recently shown Ghirshman's readings of the coin inscriptions, on which all the preceding arguments were based, to be incorrect. He has interpreted the problematic word as Bactrian ALXONO and identified it with the Alchonids, who migrated into Iran at the end of the 4th century and invaded India in the mid-5th century (I, pp. 56-57, 70, 72, 218-19,



II, pp. 59-66, 149, 165, 237; Humbach, I, pp. 29-30, 55-57). He has also corrected the reading  $\bar{\text{E}}\text{PTLA } \bar{\text{E}}\text{IONO}$  to  $\text{XIGGILO OXONO}$ , referring to the Alchonid ruler Khingila (ca. 430-90; I, p. 72). He has thus eliminated the grounds for linking the Hephthalites with the Chionites and has shown that there is no numismatic evidence for the latter. A report by the Armenian historian Moses of Khorene (2.89) that the Armenian king Tiridates failed to attend the first Council of Nicaea in 325 because of his anxiety about an alliance of Šāpūr II with the “king of the Indians and the Eastern Khagan” seems particularly important in this connection. Göbl (II, pp. 296-98) suggested that these figures were Candragupta I (320-35), founder of the Gupta empire in India, and an unidentified leader of a tribe that had penetrated into Iran in the early 4th century, thus preceding the invasions of the Chionites and their successors. That the tribes in the area did include the Chionites seems probable from the fact that Šāpūr II met them about thirty years later; his eastern campaign of 356-58 was apparently intended to take advantage of the disintegration of the northern part of the Kushan empire (cf. Göbl, II, p. 290). It therefore seems likely that the Chionites had arrived in the mid-4th century, constituting one, though probably not the first, wave of immigration from Central Asia into Iran in late antiquity. They were followed successively by the Kidarites (ca. 371), Alchonids (ca. 400), Hephthalites (ca. 420), and so-called Napki kings (beginning ca. 460; I, pp. 24-26, II, pp. 89, 248-49, 322). Göbl argues that Procopius’s general term “White Huns” referred only to the last three of these groups (II, pp. 236-37, 245-46). It thus seems clear that the Chionites cannot be identified with any branch of the later Huns.

The subsequent history of the Chionites is unclear. Their participation in Šāpūr’s army at Amida must have been connected with a siege by the so-called “Huns” at Edessa in 360 or 361 (cf. St. Ephrem of Syria, quoted in Brockelmann, p. 391; cf. Altheim, II, p. 3, I, 38, erroneously identifying these people as Hephthalites). The 13th-century chronicler Bar Hebraeus (3.159) noted that the Qadish, who had dwelled around Mosul and guarded the Sasanian frontier in upper Mesopotamia against Rome and later Byzantium, belonged to the Xyōn; Markwart (*Ērānšahr*, pp. 77-78) considered them identical with the Qadish who inhabited the region of Herat. Theodor Nöldeke, on the other hand, thought only the names were identical (cf. Altheim, II, p. 268). These Qadish played a prominent role during the second reign of Kavād (498-531; cf. Altheim, II, pp. 11-12). Markwart (*Ērānšahr*, pp. 50-51 n. 5) had associated the Ermēchíōnes mentioned by the 9th-century historian Theophanes Confessor as belonging to the Avars (239.20-21) with the



Kermichíōnes mentioned in a passage by his namesake, Theophanes Byzantinus (Müller, *Fragmenta* IV, p. 270), where they are identified as belonging to the western Turks. Bailey (1954, p. 13), on the other hand, considered them identical with the Chionites, though Altheim accepted the identification of the Ermēchíōnes with the Avars (cf. I, pp. 26-27) and Miyakawa and Kollautz connected the Kerrnichíōnes = *karmīr Xyōn* with the Far Eastern (Mongol) element of the Huns (cols. 94-95). In a problematic passage in the chronicle of Pseudo Joshua Stylites (fl. 5-6th centuries) it is pointed out that Pērōz had to wage war on the *kywny*' (*Chronicle*, chap. 9), a term that Altheim interpreted as meaning Huns (I, p. 53); this interpretation is dubious, however, and as early as 1882 William Wright had emended it to *kšwny*' = Kushan (Altheim, II, p.7). Equally obscure are references by Pseudo Moses of Khorene to the Walchonids (*Geography* 1.34; cf. Markwart, *Ērānšahr*, p. 14.1, tr. p. 141.6), named along with the Hephthalites and the Alchonids as inhabiting the shores of the Dymos, one of the effluents of the Jaxartes (modern Amu Darya) in Sogdiana; perhaps the Ouarchōnítai are to be understood (cf. Humbach, p. 29). As late as 790 a Chionite held the office of maphrian (deputy general of the eastern patriarch) in the western Syriac (Jacobite) church (Bar Hebraeus 1.327; cf. Altheim, II, p. 273).

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