

REVEALING THE MONGOLIAN SECTIONS OF THE SILK ROAD

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Abstract: *Researching the great Eurasian trade routes, commonly known as the Silk Road, is a huge topic for scholars. Firstly, the route extended from Innermost Asia to Western Europe, and secondly, the sections of the trade routes have been changed through the periods of time. Some sections became more important, while others diminished. Many empires, states, and kingdoms ruled parts of the big trading road, but only the steppe empires were able to retain control over the bigger part of it.*

The main sections of the Silk Road are well known to researchers, but its branches, such as the northern or Mongolian sections, are only partially known, -- despite the fact that they were used by horsemen peoples from ancient times to the late Middle Ages, who transported important products from the steppes and the Altai Region to present-day China and back. Taking into account the geographical conditions of the area and using the records of the Chinese chronicles, in this paper I will try to identify the main routes of the horsemen people, mainly the Xiongnu (Hun), and I will describe how they approached the marketplaces of the Silk Road. Thanks to the One Belt One Road initiative, these old trade routes seem to have revived, and they play an important role in Mongolian-Chinese regional trade: The Mongols are transporting natural sources - coal and other minerals - to China on the ancient roads.

Keywords: *Silk Road, Xiongnu, Altai Mountains, Chinese chronicles, Mongolia, trade routes, caravans*

İpek Yolu'nun Moğol Kısımlarını Tespit

Öz: *Yaygın olarak İpek Yolu olarak bilinen büyük Avrasya ticaret yollarını araştırmak bilim adamları için çok büyük bir konudur. Öncelikle, bu güzergâh İç Asya'dan Batı Avrupa'ya kadar uzanmaktadır ve ikinci olarak ticaret yollarına ait kısımlar dönem dönem değişmiştir. Güzergâhın bazı kısımları daha önemli hâle gelirken bazı kısımların ise önemi azalmıştır. Pek çok imparatorluk, devlet ve krallık, büyük ticaret yolunun bazı kısımlarını yönetiyordu, ancak yalnızca bozkır imparatorlukları onun daha büyük kısmında kontrolü elinde tutabiliyordu.*

İpek Yolu'nun ana bölümleri araştırmacılar tarafından iyi bilinmektedir, ancak kuzey veya Moğol bölümleri gibi kolları - eski çağlardan Orta Çağ'ın sonlarına kadar önemli ürünleri bozkırlardan ve Altay Bölgesi'nden günümüze Çin'ine götürüp geri getiren atlı halklar tarafından kullanılmış olmasına rağmen - sadece kısmen bilinmektedir. Bu yazıda, bölgenin coğrafi koşullarını dikkate alarak ve Çin kroniklerinin kayıtlarını kullanarak, başta Xiongnu (Hun) olmak üzere atlı halkların ana rotalarını belirlemeye çalışacağım ve İpek Yolu'nun Pazar yerlerine nasıl ulaştıklarını anlatacağım. Tek Kuşak Tek Yol girişimi sayesinde, bu eski ticaret yolları yeniden canlanmış gibi görünüyor ve bu yollar Moğol-Çin bölgesel ticaretinde önemli bir rol oynuyorlar: Moğollar, kömür ve diğer mineraller gibi doğal kaynakları eski yollardan Çin'e taşımaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *İpek Yolu, Hun, Altay Dağları, Çin kronikleri, Moğolistan, ticaret yolları*

Research on the great Eurasian trade route, commonly known as the Silk Road, is such a vast topic that it is still an ongoing task for researchers. Trade routes have changed

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over time, some have become important while others have become less significant. The main Eastern route of the Silk Road is well known to researchers. Its stations and sections are well documented in various historical sources, and the area has gone through thorough archaeological excavations. However, its branches, such as the so-called “Mongolian” sections that went through the Altai, are only partially known, even though they were used by equestrian peoples from the ancient times to the late Middle Ages. Important products were transported here from the steppe to Siberia, present-day China, and back.

Several chronicles of the Han Dynasty (Shi ji, Han shu, Hou Han shu, etc.) report on Hun-Chinese relations. Based on early Chinese sources and taking into account the geographical conditions of the area, in this short study I will try to identify which routes the Huns may have used and how they approached the main Silk Road marketplaces. Whoever ruled the cities and gateways of the main trade routes, gained fabulous wealth. It is no wonder that there have been long, even centuries-long fights for the possession of markets and routes, in this case between the Huns and the Chinese. The special feature of the Silk Road area was that due to the terrain, the route was divided by narrow passages and passes, and traders often had to cross deserts and areas that were poor in water. The Huns also had routes that they used to join the big trade routes and to reach the big markets and fairs. The locations changed a lot during the period of nearly five hundred years in between the 3rd century BC and the 2nd century AD. From reports of Chinese sources, we gather that especially at the time of the fighting Principalities, Principality Zhao suffered a lot from the invasion of the Huns.¹ Therefore, in an attempt to stop the Huns' attacks, the Chinese principalities continued building the old border walls, the so-called “long walls,” that were initially built in the Shang era. Qin Shi Huangdi strengthened the borders and ordered walls to be erected throughout the northern border² to keep his people away from the Hu and Yue peoples.

The first Chinese emperor feared the Huns because it has predicted that the Qin Dynasty's fall would be caused by the Hu³ (Csornai, 2007: 50). The first Chinese emperor, Qin Shi Huang di (221-210 BC), the founder of the Qin Dynasty and the creator of united China, wanted to enter the markets of the Silk Road, so in 215 BC he commissioned General Meng Tian to attack the Huns in the north and the Rong and Di peoples in the west. On the one hand, the Chinese wanted to acquire new territories to accommodate the ever-growing population, and on the other hand, they wanted to get close to the Silk Road, which was ruled by foreign peoples, usually of steppe origin - Rong, Di and Yuezhi⁴ (Watson, 1961-I: 86-89). Meng Tian's campaign was successful, and a new border was established along the west bank of the Yellow River, reaching as far as what is now Gansu Province, Lintao. After the death of the first ruler of the Qin dynasty, the dynasty had a crisis, and then it ceased to exist in 207 BC. At the same time the Xiongnu or Huns got stronger. Maodun shanyu (209-176 BC) became their leader. He strengthened his state and then launched his conquest campaigns with his soldiers to the four directions of the world. The new ruler began to reclaim their old territories, first

¹ Today's Shanxi Province, the east bank of the Yellow River. Shi Ji, 88.

² The remains of the Shang era walls still exist around Yulin City, but also in other parts of the Ordos. Ningxia Province is called the Province of the Great Walls. There are several wall sections from different eras on its territory.

³ Huainanzi, 18.

⁴ Shi Ji, 15.

attacking the Donghu and then it also clashed with the Han Dynasty of China, which was formed in 206 BC and which also wanted to expand north and west. However, the two sides first came into conflict over Dai Province (now Shanxi Province), which both claimed because of its strategic importance. One of the border point was Mayi, which often occurs in the Chinese records.

In 200 BC the Chinese launched a war lead by their ruler emperor Gaozu. The Chinese suffered heavy losses due to the cold winter. The Xiongnu or Huns withstood the cold well and moved easily on their fast horses. Applying a trick: the “pretended flee”-which is also used by the later steppe warriors and proved itself to be effective- they lured the Chinese army north to a well-known terrain to Baideng near the town of Pingcheng⁵, where they defeated the Han army, surrounded the emperor, and did not release him for a week. Eventually, Maodun let Emperor Gaozu free, who sent his envoy: Liu Jing to negotiate the terms of peace with the Huns. The text of the agreement was recorded in the Han Dynasty’s Chronicle: the Han shu. The agreement regulated how much tax the Chinese had to pay each year, and that he had to give a Chinese inness to the Hun ruler to marry⁶ (Csornai, 2007: 63). This also meant that the Han Dynasty was unable to expand in the direction of the Silk Road for some time. The Xiongnu-Han relations was concentrated on the east bank of the Yellow River, present-day Shanxi, Inner Mongolia, and Hebei provinces.

After the Hun had defeated its eastern and southern neighbors in 176 BC and by defeating the Yuezhi, they gained control of the great trade route, the Silk Road, from which they gained enormous wealth. They then conveyed Chinese products to the West and Western products to China. Meanwhile, they also sold their own mineral resources (iron, gold and other metals) and animal products extracted in the territory of present Mongolia. As I mentioned before, Hun-Chinese relations were mainly concentrated on the eastern banks of the Yellow River. Hun and Chinese products also changed hands in the markets there. It’s most likely that the Huns used the same gateways in their time as the ones that are the modern border crossings today between Mongolia and China (Khangai and Gashuut Sukhait). Due to the terrain there are limited crossings in the Gurvan Saikhan Mountains (the easternmost part of Altai Mountain) and in the Gobi desert. On the south, they crossed the Da Qin Mountains to reach today’s Höhhot city, and the other route led through Pingcheng, one of China’s major northern commercial centers.

The Huns received an annual tax from the Chinese Han Dynasty for more than six decades. There was a radical change in Chinese foreign policy when Emperor Wu di (140-80 BC) came to power. His goal was to acquire sections of the Silk Road by bypassing the intermediaries, so the Chinese could sell their products themselves and have access to the mineral resources in the area. However, this required the defeat of the Huns, which at the time seemed impossible. He consulted with his advisors at the Han court several times about how to defeat the Huns. They finally decided to send envoys to the unknown western territory first to investigate and to try and make alliances with the peoples living there. The envoys’ task was to survey the products of the distant lands, especially how they could get horses, as the Huns forbade all the peoples under their rule to trade horses with the Han. A delegation of almost hundred people left around 135 BC.

⁵ Today Datong town, Shanxi province. There is a memorial column at the site of the battle.

⁶ Han shu, 43. Liu Jing zhuan.

Almost everyone was perished. They were probably captured by the Hun and did not return home from there. Only Zhang Qian returned home to the imperial court after ten years on an adventurous journey. He appeared in the Han Court in 125 BC and he gave an account of his ten-year journey, which is recorded in Chapter 123 of *Shi Ji*. For a long time, this was the most valuable information for the Chinese about the western territories. Eventually, he achieved his goal, he reached the Central Asian territory beyond the Huns, and he investigated the peoples who lived there and what the most important raw materials and commercial products were there. This report confirmed to the ruler, Wu Di, that it was worth starting a war. The report also revealed that metals (iron, copper, silver, gold, etc.) were available in large quantities in the Tarim Basin between Turfan and Dunhuang. The raw material for making bronze: tin, was obtained from Kucha, and gold was washed in the Khotan oasis (Psarras, 2004: 52). One of the most important minerals for the Chinese was jade, which was only available in limited quantities on the internal market, mainly in and around Changan (today: Xian), so it was obtained in large quantities from abroad from the Hun / Yuezhi areas. Two places are mentioned in the literature: the area of Khotan and Kunlun in Tibet.⁷ Imported goods included fruits and vegetables.⁸

The Han ruler was preparing his military to fight the Huns for a decade and a half, while at the same time he was constantly bribing and luring the Hun reigning princes who eventually betrayed their ruler and joined forces with the Chinese Han Dynasty, thus strengthening the Chinese army. It must be mentioned that even despite the betrayal of the border princes, it was not easy to defeat the Huns. They only managed to expel them from a certain area where the Chinese could build their settlements and establish their commercial centers. In 123 BC, Wu Di thought the time had come for an open battle with the Huns. The Han forces attacked the Huns from today's Gansu province, where they still got through the campaigns of Qin Shi Huangdi. In 121 BC and 119 BC, the Hans had also conducted a successful campaign to the north and northern-west. According to reports, a lot of Huns were killed and a massive loot was obtained, including the golden idol of King Xiutu.⁹

In 119 BC, General Wei Qing attacked the Huns. He started his campaign from Dingxiang¹⁰ and attacked the Hun shanyu in the northern part of the desert (Gobi Desert-OB). Many Huns were killed and then they retreated to the Tianyan Mountains¹¹ In the newly acquired areas they established the Wuwei and Jiuquan forts, and their lands were subdivided and in 111 BC, they founded Zhangye and Dunhuang settlements¹² (Csornai, 2007: 193).

As a result, they gained control over strategic trade routes west of the Yellow River. This area was named Hexi i.e. the area "west of the river" which was a narrow gorge of

⁷ The main jade quarries: Khotan Oasis - Kharakash, Black Jade River, Yurungash - White Jade River, Yumen (Jade) Gate - Jade Gate. The names show that the Chinese procured one of their main raw materials: jade from present-day Gansu Province. Jade was first transmitted to them by the Yuezhis and then by the Huns. Jade also came from the Kunlun Mountains in Tibet.

⁸ The heavenly horses came from the western frontier or Central Asia.

⁹ According to the Shamanic faith, idol played an important role in the sacrifices presented to the ancestors. (Turkic name is balbal, Mongolian name is hun chuluu and Hungarian name is bálvány.)

¹⁰ It is located in the central part of today's Shanxi Province.

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¹² Han shu, 6. Wu di ji, 19.

the Yellow River.¹³ So Emperor Wudi achieved his goal in part because the Chinese got on the Silk Road and took control of it, but the Huns could not be completely expelled from the area because Huns still lived north of the cities, in or near the desert, who from time to time broke into the Chinese areas. From Chinese sources we can get a relatively accurate picture that the Huns did not resign themselves to the loss of their territories, so there was a fierce struggle with the Han Dynasty for possession of the areas of the Silk Road until the end of the until the end of the 2nd century BC. Certain sections of the trade route, especially the northern ones (Turfan, Hami area), often changed hands, which may have been due to the fact that these places were easily reached by the Huns, sometimes visiting them peacefully for commercial purposes, but often attacking and occupying some of them.

In 9 AD, an usurper, Wang Mang, proclaimed himself emperor and founded a new dynasty called Xing (9-23 AD). The new ruler tried to reform the empire and cut spending. He took the land into state ownership and carried out financial reforms. Because the maintenance of the remote Western Territories consumed too many financial resources, Wang Mang did not send them money, so China's influence weakened. Many of the local rulers took advantage of this to become independent, and the northern Huns launched an attack. In 13 AD, a campaign was launched against the Western Territories and they regained control of parts of the cities of the Silk Road¹⁴ (Csornai, 2007: 351). Many of the Chinese settlers who lived along the border fell victim to the battles, so emigration began from that area¹⁵ (Hill, 2003). Certain passages, mainly the northern ones on the Silk Road were again inspected by the Huns.

After the death of Wang Mang in 25 AD, a descendant of the Han Dynasty, Liu Xiu Guangwudi, ascended the throne and founded the Late or Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 AD). Reclaiming the old Han territories was not an easy task for the new ruler, he first had to fight two claimants to the throne: Wei Ao and Lu Fang (originally named Liu Wenbo), the latter was a descendant of Emperor Wu and his mother was a Hun princess. Fighting for the throne carried on all the way to 42 AD when Guangwuda finally gained power and Lu Fang fled to Hun territory. Some of the leaders of the Western Territories: the lords of North Jushi, Shanshan and Yanqi (Karashahr) sent their sons to Emperor Guang Wu in 45 AD to renew the old agreement and ask for the protection of the Hans, but the ruler sent them back because he could not give them soldiers. His state wasn't strong enough yet.

It took almost 30 years for the Han Dynasty to launch an attack to reclaim the western territories. At the time, the Han army was already using well-established trade routes in the Yellow River Basin, described below.

Hun-Chinese clashes were regularly reported in the Han-era historical chronicles, outlining the route of the Chinese army's march through which we can find out where the trade and military routes were heading to the Huns. It is unfortunately rather difficult to clarify the names of contemporary places, but a well-defined geographical place – a mountain, a lake - makes it much easier to identify these places. It is also an advantage that due to the mountain ranges of the Altai Mountains and the barren, waterless areas of

¹³ This place is called Hexi, which means “to the west of the river”. It is a narrow passage dug by the Yellow River over millennia. It currently connects the modern city of Lanzhou with Dunhuang.

¹⁴ Han shu, 99. Wang Mang's story.

¹⁵ Hou Han shu, 88.

Gobi, there are limited passages in the area. It is not possible to travel anywhere, but only through the gateways of the mountains and in the case of the semi-desert landscape through oases. The modern roads used today, on which the Mongolian- Chinese trade in goods still takes place also assist our work to identify these roads. By knowing these roads, we can trace back where the ancient Huns were able to approach the main sections of the Silk Road and how they reached the local markets. Based on reports from Chinese sources and cartographic data, the following trade and military routes may be considered in the Hun-Chinese relationship.

In the first half of the 2nd century BC, the main Hun-Han contact points were in the provinces of Dai, Shangjun, Beidi, Yunzhong, Shanggu, and Yanmen, which are located in what is now Shanxi Province and Inner Mongolia. Chinese chronicles report that the Huns regularly invaded the above provinces. The reasons were not mentioned, but the Hun force mostly set out to give effect to previous agreements when trade restrictions were imposed by the Chinese. In the 130s BC, the main place of contact between the two peoples was today's Datong and its surroundings. This place had lost its significance in the late 120s BC as the main trade routes shifted west to the Hexi corridor. It is written in the Chinese chronicles that when the Hun king of the Western Territories, Hunya, surrendered to the Hans, the number of soldiers at the old garrisons — Longxi, Beidi, Shangjun — was halved¹⁶ (Csornai, 2007: 163). Following the conquests of Emperor Wu Di along the Silk Road, the Shuo Fang base was established at the tip of the Yellow River meander at today's Bayannur District Center (Inner Mongolia). Later on, to the east of this, Wu Yuan was founded, which was also a major border fortress against the northern Huns. It is also located in the Bayannur district. Later on, these were commercial stops as well as the starting points of the campaigns against the Huns, which led to the Gurvan Saikhan Mountains, the eastern mountain ranges of the Altai Mountains, which is in today's Umnugovi County. On the road, we can find Lake Gaxun, followed by Khara Khoto, the former capital of the Tangut, but for the first time Huns established a city there. After the 120s BC, the Han Dynasty established a fortress called Jiuyan there, which was an excellent logistics center in the fight against the Huns (Erdenebaatar, 2021: 132). From there, a road leads to the modern Shive Khuren Mongolian border crossing to Gurvantes, and then you can continue north through the western pass of Gurvan Saikhan to the former Hunnic centre. From there, they reached the southeastern section of today's Umnugovi County: Gashuun Sukhait - Oyu Tolgoy-Khanbogd, which is a bordering point where, Mongolians transport coal to China.

There are remains of fortifications associated with the Huns on these sections, suggesting that important commercial and military routes used to pass through them. In what is now Mongolia, archaeologists have so far found the remains of four fortified settlements that have played an important protective role. There are three Hun settlement remains on this road section of road and the archaeologists have identified necropolises, too. Near Gashuun Sukhait there are the ruins of a former city called Mangasin khuree, built in the Hun era. It was a typical steppe fortress with ramparts. About 200 kilometers to the northwest from there is Sairiyn balgas, around which Hun tombs have been excavated by archaeologists. About 100 kilometers north of the ruin is a place called Kheerin bulagin kherem, where archaeologists have also found the remains of a Hun fortified town. About 350 kilometers west of Mangasin khuree, there is Bayanbulagin

¹⁶ Shi Ji, 111. scroll, Piaoqi liezhuan, 8-11; Han shu, 55. scroll Huo Qubing zhuan, 7-10.

tuuri, which protected the easternmost extension of the Altai Mountains, the passes of the Gurvan Saikhan mountain (Erdenebaatar, 2021: 128-134). Rich archaeological finds were excavated in this settlement, which suggests that the Huns used this settlement on a permanent basis and it could even have been one of the lodgings of the shanyu. This area continued to be significant. The above trade and military roads were still in use, probably due to Shuo Fang, but new roads were also built, starting from Shuofang and heading west to the towns along the Silk Road. This is where the Hun dominated branches joined in from the north, from the Gobi.

From Shuofang it was possible to reach Turfan (Gaochang), from where a road passed through the modern city of Urumqi through the passes of the Altai Mountains to the present-day Mongolian territories in the southern part of Khovd County. The road, that is still in use today, passes through the Bulgan district of Khovd County, which is extremely rich in archaeological findings associated with the Huns, but archaeologists have also found rock drawings and tombs associated with the Huns. A high class Hun burial of 130 tombs was found at Takhiltin Khotgor in Mankhan District, Khovd County (Amartuvshin, Turbat, Odbaatar and Davaatseren, 2021: 243). The large number of graves is an evidence that the Huns did not only settle in the area but that it was also one of their centers of power. From here they could send caravans, but also armies, to the Chinese Han Dynasty.

The other important route also started from Shuofang and led to Hami. It ran parallel to the Great Silk Road. From there, a road headed north to what is now Govi-Altai County. This goes by Pu-Lei, or Lake Barkhol, which is also described in Chinese chronicles in connection with the Hun-Chinese fights. This was one of the main routes used by the Huns, as reported by the Hou Han shu, a chronicle of the late Han dynasty, in connection with the events of 91 AD. At that time, the Chinese commander Gen Kui defeated the northern Huns and the shanyu managed to flee. His younger brother, Yu Chu Qiang, became the shanyu who began negotiations with Han. The envoys went to the fort at Lake Pu Lei (Barkol) that was on the road to Hami to negotiate. If we follow the trade route that is still in use today, we will get to the southwestern part of the Govi-Altai County in Mongolia. Large-scale Mongolian-Chinese trade is currently taking place at the Burgasta crossing, which in ancient times was believed to have been one of the stops for Hun-Chinese trade. There are many unidentified remains of ancient settlements in the county next to the former trade routes and there are Hun-era rock drawings and tamgas at Tsagaan Gol. So far, 328 Hun graves have been mapped in nine regions of the county, of which 46 were high rank graves.¹⁷ Based on the excavations and fieldwork so far, it has been proven that the Altai region was an important area for the Huns. The Han Dynasty launched a series of large-scale attacks to take over the towns along the Silk Road from the 70s AD. One location took place in Govi-Altai area.

The Chinese Imperial Court entrusted the task to General Ban Zhao, who fought to take back the cities of the region between 72 and 102 AD. The Hou Han shu recorded this: "In the sixteenth year of Emperor Ming Yongbing (73 AD), the Han (Chinese) occupied Yiwu (Hami), thus establishing contact with the western regions. Following this, Jushi (Turfan / Jimasa) rejoined the Han Empire, but the Huns did not approve of this. They sent soldiers, attacked the area, and finally Jushi's leaders renewed their

¹⁷ The 46 high rank tombs were found in Taishir district. Based on a survey by the Institute of Archeology of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences. Kindly reported by G. Eregzen.

alliance with the northern savages (northern Huns)”¹⁸ (Batjargal, 2016). In addition to the Han attacks on the cities along the Silk Road, they opened another front against the Huns, at what is now called Umnugovi County in Mongolia, where the main trade routes stretched. In 73 AD, the Han Dynasty increased the size of the border army. This army was led by generals Zhai Tong and Wu Tang. The southern Huns also took part in the attack on the Chinese side. The southern shanyu entrusted the wise king of the east, Xin, to lead the army. They started from Shuo Fang and reached the Zhuo ye mountain.¹⁹ The southern Hun commander Xin got into a clash with Zhai Tong and out of revenge he misled the army so that the Northern Huns could easily get out of their way. The following was written in the Chinese chronicle: “An army of thieves (the northern Huns) came and having found out of about the events, they then crossed the desert and departed far away. The coalition army did not cross the Mount Zhuo ye mountain.” In 76 AD, the northern Huns reoccupied the southern part of the Zhuo ye mountain. The Mount Zhuo ye mountain may refer to the Gurvan Saikhan Mountains, under which, on the road west of the aforementioned Shuo Fang, troops could travel on one hand to Turfan and on the other hand to present Mongolia.

In the absence of sources, we do not know whether there have been any clashes in the area in the following years. There were no written records on all border clashes. It is known from the Hou Han shu chronicle that at the end of the next decade, in 89 AD, a coalition army led by Commander Dou Xian launched into what is now Mongolia. The best of the army was the southern Huns. Based on cartographic data, the route can be reconstructed as follows: General Dou Xian started from Shuo Fang, which may have been in the present-day Bayannur district of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Province in China. From there, they reached the southeastern section of today’s Umnugov County: Gashuun Sukhait - Oyu Tolgoy-Khanbogd, which is still an important crossing of the Mongolian-Chinese border. This route between Baotao and Bayan Nuur connects to the northern Chinese road network. Subsequently, the Chinese army defeated the Huns at Mount Jiluo. The name of the mountain is unidentified. It may have been between today’s Umnugovi and Dundgovi counties. The northern shanyu could not be captured because he managed to flee. The Chinese army burned down Longcheng, the capital of the Huns and they killed the leaders of 21 tumens. They then went up to Mount Yanran and carved a victory inscription in the rock. The inscription had previously been found on Mount Delgerkhaan, in present-day Dundgovi County, in the heart of Mongolia, but it could only be deciphered in 2017²⁰ (Batjargal, 2016). The Chinese-Southern Hun coalition force thus penetrated deep into the land of the northern Huns. A new campaign was launched in the following year, but this was following a different route. According to the Chinese source: “In the middle of She Di Yun Yuan’s time (89-105), grand commander Dong Xian appointed Gen Kuit to attack the Huns.

The southern Huns once again joined the campaign launched in 90 AD. They were led by the right-wing Luli Wang and set off with a team of 8,000 soldiers from both the right and left wings. The army went on a similar route as in the previous year. Their main goal again was to capture the shanyu. They did not seem to have penetrated deep into

¹⁸ Hou Han shu, 89.

¹⁹ Zhuo ye shan, the Edlenjin ridge in the southeastern part of Govi-Altai, Mongolia.

²⁰ Hou Han shu, 89.

what is now Mongolia. The coalition army set off from Ji lu fort.²¹ They then unloaded their baggage at the Zhuo ye mountain. They split into two and encircled the shanyu's palace at night. The shanyu was wounded, but he managed to escape with his companions. His jade seal was seized and his wife was taken prisoner. 8,000 people were slaughtered and thousands were captured. The Southerners reaped a bright victory yet again at this time²² (Batjargal, 2016). The shanyu's palace may have been in Umnugovi County, but no source has provided accurate information on this so far. The descriptions are so concise that we do not know whether the shanyu's palace was just a summer lodge or that it was one of the forementioned fortifications. In any case, it seems that in 89 and 90 AD, one of the important bases of the northern Hun shanyu was in the Gurvan Saikhan Mountains. In 90 AD, Dou Xian fought at Hami and probably he defeated the Huns there²³ (Batjargal, 2016). The campaign continued. The campaign in 91AD also took place around Turfan. The Chinese chronicle reports on this as follows: "The following year, Gen Kui defeated the Huns. The shanyu fled, no one knew where. His younger brother, the western luli wang, Yu Chu Qiang appointed himself shanyu. He sent envoys to the fort at Lake Pu Lei (Barkol) to begin negotiations with the Hans. Dou Xian received them." After losing the war, in 91 AD, negotiations began between the northern Huns and the Chinese. The Shanyu was followed on the throne by his younger brother, Yu Zhang the west luli wang, who tried to settle relations with the Chinese through diplomacy. He sent envoys to the fort at Lake Pu Lei (Barkhol) to begin negotiations with the Han envoys. An agreement was reached under which the shanyu would formally submit to the Chinese court. The report also stated that because the Hun ruler and his country was poor, he did not take gifts,²⁴ which suggests that they have indeed suffered severe losses from years of war and many natural disasters. At the same time, the source also proves that the Huns continued to live in the area, despite losing some of their sovereignty and having become dependent on the Chinese. Serious changes soon took place in the Silk Road area. After the Chinese campaign in the 90s AD, the northern Huns surrendered. Two years later General Dou Xian, who led the campaign, was executed, and no one else was appointed to replace him, so no further Chinese campaign was launched into the territory of the northern Huns. The southern Huns also began to revolt in the Ordos. They didn't wage a war to the north again. The large-scale war to conquer the Western Territories ended in 102 AD. In the 2nd century, it became increasingly difficult for the Hans to keep the area inhabited by the northern, steppe peoples. Taking advantage of this, the northern Huns launched attacks on the cities of the Tarim Basin from 134 AD, about which very little information has been recorded in the Chinese dynastic books. The northern Huns did not take part in these struggles, they again fought for the western territories. In the 140s AD, they are referred to as regular attackers²⁵ who fought to regain control of the region (Hill, 2003: 27). The Huyan clan didn't take part in these fights. At the same time, the influence of the eunuchs in the imperial court increased, demanding a say not only in state affairs but also in the selection of rulers. More and more rebellions broke out against the Hans. The final blow was the

²¹ Located to the west of Bayangol District, in the west part of today's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Province (China).

²² Hou Han shu, 89.

²³ Hou Han shu, 89.

²⁴ Hou Han shu, 89. The event took place in 106 AD.

²⁵ Hou Han shu, 88.

revolt of the “yellow turbans” that erupted in the 180s when the disgruntled crowd occupied the central Chinese provinces. The movement could only be stifled by 205 after long struggles. The Han Empire had become unmanageable by the end of the 2nd century AD. In its territory, power was taken over by provincial leaders, so-called warlords, who formed independent kingdoms.

In summary we can conclude that there are several difficulties in clarifying the formerly vibrant Hun-Chinese border relations. On the one hand, contemporary chronicles summarized the events extremely concisely, and on the other hand, many geographical names recorded in Chinese characters are unknown and await decipherment. The local terrain is of assistance, from which we can make it out which sections probably played a specific role in which periods. It will be the task of archeology to clarify these and to further explore any Hun and Chinese monuments along the roads.

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