

THE NOMADS OF NORTHERN CENTRAL ASIA AFTER THE INVANSION OF ALEXANDER*

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Transoxania

A small part of Transoxania came under the rule of Alexander the Great after his eastern campaign, but in Transoxania and in the steppes the nomads who belonged to various tribes of Sakas and Massagetae played the dominant political role. Several important changes had occurred on the steppes of Eurasia. In the west the Scythians were succeeded by the Sarmatians, while in the east a strong nomadic power had emerged – the Hsiung-nu (Huns). This important epoch in the history of the nomads of Eurasia is aptly named & the Hunno-Sarmatian period.

* See Map 9.

These events affected the historical fortunes of the nomads of Central Asia. The third and second centuries B.C. were a long transitional phase for these nomads, marked by major migrations and by the consequent emergence of new groupings of tribes on the historical scene. The movement of the nomads was a constant threat to the security of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom. The middle of the third century B.C. saw the rise to power of a group of tribes consisting of the Parni (Aparni) and the Dahae, descendants of the Massagetae of the Aral Sea region. They invaded Parthia, the older Achaemenid satrapy, from the north and took advantage of the weakness of the Seleucids to establish, in 250 B.C., an independent Parthian state under the Arsacid dynasty (see Chapter 5). This powerful nomad state, which lasted from the middle of the third century B.C. to the beginning of the third century A.D., became a dangerous rival of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom, the Seleucid state, the Romans and the Kushan Empire. The Arsacids often recruited mercenaries from other nomadic groups, which resulted in a constant replenishment and growth of the nomadic population of the country. Nomad burial grounds investigated at a number of which resulted in a constant replenishment and growth of the nomadic population of the country. Nomad burial grounds investigated at a number of sites in the valleys of the Kopet Dag and Greater Balkhan mountains as well as in the lower hills¹ provide solid evidence of the permanent presence of nomads in northern Parthia, and of the major role they played in the life of that state. They also show that the nomads had maintained their distinctive way of life and culture.

Classical sources knew about the conquest of Bactria by nomadic tribes (see Chapters 4 and 5), referring to them as peoples who came from beyond the Jaxartes (now the Syr Darya). Strabo (XI.8.2) mentions four tribes: the Asii, the Pasiiani, the Tochari and the Sacaraucae. Writing of the event which followed, Pompeius Trogus notes briefly that the Asiani, kings of the Tochari, laid waste the Sacaraucae (Justin. *Prologus* XI.I).

Chinese chronicles merely recount the conquest of Bactria by the Yüehchih from Central Asia, whereas other ancient sources mention several invading tribes from beyond the Jaxartes. The juxtaposition of these two contradictory accounts gives rise to the notion of a two-pronged invasion from the north and west. But all attempts to identify the actual invaders have been disputed. Only one thing is beyond doubt concerning this major event in world history. The defeat of the rulers of Bactria was the work of the local nomadic tribes of Transoxania as well as of tribes from northern Central Asia.

The principal sources for the history of these nomads are the *Shih-chi* (Historical Records), by the Han-dynasty court historiographer Szü-ma Ch'ien, the *Han-shu* (Annals of the Former Han), the *Hou Han-shu* (Annals of the Later Han) and the *Pei-shih* (Annals

¹ Mandel'shtam, 1971; Marushchenko, 1959.

of the Wei Dynasty).² Valuable but very brief references are to be found in the works of ancient historians and geographers, such as Strabo, Ptolemy, Pomponius Mela, etc. The interpretation of these sources continues to be difficult, but the growing volume of archaeological evidence helps to clarify some issues.

The Wu-sun

The Chinese sources tell us of four major groups of nomads: the Wu-sun, the K'ang-chü, the Yen-ts'ai and the Yüeh-chih. The most detailed information available concerns the Wu-sun. The second century B.C. saw the formation of the Wu-sun, a tribal confederation in the north-eastern part of Turkestan (the T'ien Shan mountains) and Semirechye. According to the Chinese sources, the Wu-sun originally lived in Central Asia, together with the tribes of Yüeh-chih and Hsiung-nu. We have the semi-legendary account that when the Wu-sun were defeated by the Yüeh-chih, their leader was killed and some of the Wu-sun, with the new-born son of this leader, obtained the protection of the Hsiung-nu. Later, the Wu-sun, now allied to the Hsiung-nu, invaded T'ien Shan around 160 B.C. and settled down in their newly conquered territories, which became their second homeland. In course of time, when the Wu-sun had become sufficiently powerful, they ceased to obey the Hsiung-nu. In 125 B.C. the Wu-sun were visited by Chang Ch'ien, the famous Chinese traveller and diplomat, who had been sent to establish a coalition against the Hsiung-nu. Chang Ch'ien recommended a plan to deal with the Hsiung-nu. The Chinese were to make peace with the Wu-sun, sealing the compact by marriage. The plan was approved and Chang Ch'ien was sent as ambassador to the Wu-sun in 115 B.C., with the proposal that the Wu-sun should return to their original homeland and attack the Hsiung-nu jointly with the Han. The Wu-sun ruler was offered an alliance and the hand of a Han princess in marriage, but the Wu-sun, wary of the Hsiung-nu, refrained from giving a final answer. After the Han state had achieved considerable military victories in East Turkestan, the Wu-sun finally concluded the marriage alliance with the Han princess; but the Hsiung-nu also sent a princess to marry the lord of the Wu-sun, and she was declared his senior consort, while the Han princess was only his junior wife. The Han bride complained in verse of her destiny, mourning her enforced union with a Wu-sun king whose abode was made out of felt, who ate meat and whose drink was sour milk. In spite of this treatment the next ruler of the Wu-sun was given another Han princess in marriage. After their defeat by the Yüeh-chih and subsequent revenge, the Wu-sun had settled into their new homeland and had become so strong that the Han state felt obliged to win their friendship in an alliance, based on a royal marriage.

² Bichurin, 1950; Kyuner, 1961; Chavannes, 1905, p. 519, 1907, p. 149; Hulsewé, 1979.

In the T'ien Shan region the Wu-sun were the first tribal group about which substantial evidence is available. The Chinese sources refer to the Wu-sun or nomad state. The Wu-sun were bounded by the Hsiung-nu to the east, by the settled peoples of East Turkestan to the south, by Ta-yüan (Ferghana) to the south-west and by K'ang-chü to the west. Their federation included locally conquered Saka tribesmen, as well as some Yüeh-chih. The question of the ethnic origin of the Wu-sun themselves remains debatable, and contradictory hypotheses have been advanced. The one thing that is clear is that the majority of the population consisted of linguistically Iranian Saka tribes.

The administrative and political centre of the Wu-sun state was the walled city of Ch'ih-ku, 'the City of the Red Valley', situated in the basin of the Issik-köl. Lying on one of the branches of the Silk Route, it was also an important trade centre, but its exact location has not yet been established. The principal activity of the Wu-sun was cattle-raising. They freely wandered with their livestock seeking pasture and water, but the geographical conditions in Semirechye and T'ien Shan did not allow constant wandering, and the economy of the Wu-sun remained semi-nomadic, with the population moving from one climatic zone to another with each change of season. They combined cattle-breeding with agriculture, as is evident from archaeological finds of the Wu-sun period from settlements in the Chu valley, the Issik-köl basin and in eastern Semirechye. These contained the remains of *pisé* dwellings, some with mud floors and other built on stone foundations. Numerous querns and agricultural implements as well as bones of domesticated animals have been found, suggesting a semi-nomadic pastoral economy.

The social structure of the Wu-sun followed the Hsiung-nu pattern. Their ruler was the Great K'un-mo, whose power was hereditary. There was a fairly developed administrative apparatus, consisting of sixteen officials. The ruler was assisted by a council of elders, a body which to some degree limited his power. The Great K'un-mo and his two sons, the rulers of the left and right domains, each commanded a personal force of 10,000 horsemen. There was also a regular army and each freeman was considered as a warrior. The administrators and members of the ruling nobility maintained themselves on the tribute paid to them by conquered tribes, war booty and profits from trading activities. Trophies acquired in wars, which were a frequent occurrence, were at times of quite considerable value. They included large herds of cattle, abundant goods and many prisoners. Most of this booty was shared by the ruling élite and by the privileged warriors of the king's guard, who amassed enormous riches.

The inequitable ownership of livestock and pasture inevitably resulted in the concentration of power in the hands of the wealthiest and largest family within the tribe. This in turn led to social inequality, which is evident from both archaeological finds and written

records. The richest of the Wu-sun owned as many as 4,000 or 5,000 horses, and there is evidence pointing to the privileged use of certain pastures. These factors created dissatisfaction, disputes and popular unrest, especially in the lower strata of Wu-sun society. The accumulation of wealth by the dominant stratum led to social stratification and to relations typical of early class societies, in which the patriarchal-clan order played a major role. A manifestation of this was the widespread application of the custom of the levirate, by which a widow was obliged to remain within the late husband's family, becoming wife to one of his relatives.

Wu-sun society included slaves, most of them prisoners of war. One report says that 10,000 persons were captured in one campaign against the Hsiung-nu. Most slaves laboured as household servants though some worked as craftsmen, but the principal producer was the freeman. The socio-economic structure was similar to that of the Hsiung-nu as an organized community of nomads.

The Wu-sun played the part of a third force between the Hsiung-nu and the Han state. They were attacked around 80 B.C. by the Hsiung-nu and were badly worsted. Their ruler, the reigning K'un-mo, Wu-ku-chi-mi, turned to the Han emperor for assistance and their joint force defeated the Hsiung-nu in 72 B.C., taking numerous prisoners and capturing thousands of horses, cattle, camels and asses. This rich booty greatly strengthened the Wu-sun and gave them great influence over the political life of the settled oases of East Turkestan. The son of Wu-ku-chi-mi became the ruler of Yarkand, while his daughter was given in marriage to the lord of Kucha. The first century B.C. was a period of success and prosperity for them.

Little is known of the Wu-sun during the early centuries of the Christian era. Under pressure from the Ju-jan, a new group of nomadic tribes from Central Asia, the Wu-sun were obliged to abandon Semirechye and seek refuge in the T'ien Shan mountains. The last reference to the Wu-sun in the historical sources is in A.D. 436, when a Chinese diplomatic mission was dispatched to their country and the Wu-sun reciprocated. It is probable that by the middle of the fifth century A.D., the Wu-sun, with other neighbouring peoples, had succumbed to the Hephthalites.

The archaeological sites of the Wu-sun period (Fig. 1) which have been explored in the regions of Semirechye and T'ien Shan are very varied and reflect the ethnic heterogeneity of the population. Most cemeteries are burial grounds with the dead interred in pit-graves³ of the Chil'pek group. They belong to the local Saka population, which formed part of the Wu-sun federation⁴ and preserved the traditions, funeral rites and material culture of

³ Akishev and Kushaev, 1963; Bernshtam, 1949, 1952; Voevodskiy and Gryaznov, 1938.

⁴ Zadneprovskiy, 1971, 1975b.



FIG.1. Nomad culture of the Wu-sun period.

the earlier Sakas. A second group consists of kurgans with burials in lined and ‘catacomb’ chamber graves. Sites of this Aygîrdzhal group are widely found from the first century A.D. and are not basically a local type.⁵ For a long time, between the second century B.C. and the fifth century A.D., these graves co-existed with burials of the Chil’pek group, often within the same area, inside the same burial ground. The lined graves and shaft chamber tombs were probably those of the immigrant population, and there is reason to associate lined graves with the Yüeh-chih.

It is clear that the tribesmen who migrated into Turkestan and their descendants spent some 600 years living side by side with the indigenous population, mingling with them to

⁵ Akishev and Kushaev, 1963; Zadneprovskiy, 1971, 1975b; Kibirov, 1959.

form some kind of unity. Typical of the time are burials in simple grave-pits, which were sometimes covered with logs. The deceased were supplied with a large quantity of utensils, probably containing milk and pieces of mutton. They were buried with their personal adornments and articles of everyday use. Some graves contained gold ornaments, but those of ordinary members of the community were usually poor, with a uniform assortment of grave goods.⁶ The graves of the Aygîrdzhal group often contain weapons.

Of particular interest is the Kargali burial of a female shaman discovered in a gorge at an altitude of 2,300 m, near Alma-Ata, which contained many items of jewellery, clothing and head-dress – a total of nearly 300 gold objects with turquoise inlay. A unique find was a diadem depicting animals, birds and human beings, embellished with settings of carnelian, almandine and turquoise, testifying to the high degree of artistic skill of the ancient jewellers.⁷ A rich burial of Wu-sun times at Tenlik in eastern Semirechye contained the grave of a high-ranking warrior whose clothing had been decorated with about 100 skilfully wrought golden bosses. The wide distribution of such rich burials suggests that Wu-sun society was stratified on the basis of property ownership.

The K'ang-chü

The nomadic federation of the K'ang-chü was the second great power after the Yüeh-chih in Transoxania. According to the Chinese sources, K'ang-chü lay north-west of Ta-yüan and west of the Wu-sun, bordering upon the Yüeh-chih to the south. The territory of the K'ang-chü, therefore, covered the region of the Tashkent oasis and part of the territory between the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers, with its heartland along the middle Syr Darya. It seems to have emerged as a powerful state in the second century B.C. As the historians of Alexander do not refer to the existence of any political confederation on the Jaxartes (Syr Darya) except Chorasmia, the K'ang-chü must have appeared a little later. They united a number of regions which had sedentary, agricultural and nomadic populations.

The K'ang-chü were inevitably affected by the events of the mid-second century B.C., when the Central Asian tribes invaded Graeco-Bactria. The migration of the nomadic peoples (the Asii, Tochari, etc.) to the south altered the balance of power in the valley of the Syr Darya. Taking advantage of these circumstances, as the *Hou Han-shu* suggests, the K'ang-chü subjugated Yen-ts'ai in the region of the Aral Sea, and the still more remote land of the Yen in the southern Urals. Yen-ts'ai is identified with the large confederation

⁶ Akishev and Kushaev, 1963; Bernshtam, 1952; Vaynberg, 1981.

⁷ Bernshtam, 1940.

of Sarmatian tribes led by the Aorsi.⁸ Thus, K'ang-chü established direct contact with the Sarmatian world to the north-west. The expansion of K'ang-chü in this direction in the first and second centuries A.D. was occasioned by the rise of the powerful Yüeh-chih confederacy (subsequently the Kushan Empire) to the south and by the presence in the east of the formidable Wu-sun state allied with the Hsiung-nu and the Han Empire. The Chinese sources inform us that K'ang-chü was tributary to the Yüeh-chih in the south and to the Hsiung-nu in the east. The north-west advance of K'ang-chü and its conquest of Yen-ts'ai apparently obliged some tribes of the Aorsi, and later of the Alans, to move west; it may, therefore, be concluded that K'ang-chü played a major historical role in the initial stages of the Great Migration of Peoples, which was such an important event in world history. In this way, K'ang-chü gained control over the northern sector of the international trade route known as the Northern Route.

In endeavouring to maintain its influence over the southern portion of this route, K'ang-chü pursued an active policy in the east and south-east, allying itself in 101 B.C. with the Ta-yüan, and helping them to preserve their independence against the Han. During the course of its continued struggles against the Wu-sun, K'ang-chü sought assistance from Chih-chih, ruler of the northern Hsiung-nu, in the middle of the first century B.C. Initially Chih-chih's army penetrated deep into the country of the Wu-sun and besieged their capital in 42 B.C. But the Han state intervened and defeated and killed Chih-chih at Talas in 36 B.C. The K'ang-chü ruler was obliged to send his son as a hostage to the court of the Han emperor as a token of his submission. All these events in the campaign against Chih-chih are related in colourful terms in *The Life History of Ch'eng-t'ang*.⁹

Undaunted, K'ang-chü continued to pursue an independent policy. It maintained its independence up to the end of the third century A.D. and continued to send embassies to the Chinese court. Convincing evidence of its independent status may be seen in the coinage it issued in the second and third centuries. During this period the K'ang-chü rulers at Chach (the Tashkent oasis) began to issue their own currency,¹⁰ similar to some of the early coin issues of ancient Chorasmia. Soon afterwards the fortunes of K'ang-chü declined and it was absorbed into the Hephthalite state – a fate which it shared with the other states of Transoxania.

The *Han-shu* describes the typically nomadic way of life of the K'ang-chü élite and particularly of its sovereign, who spent his winters in the capital, the city of Pi-t'ien, and his summers at his steppe headquarters, situated seven days' journey away on horseback.

⁸ Matsulevich, 1947.

⁹ Taskin, 1973.

¹⁰ Buryakov, 1982.



FIG. 2. Nomad culture of South Kazakhstan (third to first century B.C.).

The ruling nucleus of K'ang-chü consisted of nomadic tribes whose customs resembled the Yüeh-chih. Excavations at archaeological sites (Fig. 2) associated with the K'ang-chü nomads reveal their role in the state. In the burials at Berk-kara and Tamdî, the dead were placed in pit-graves, sometimes covered over with logs, under kurgan mounds. The graves contain hand-made pots, iron swords, arrow-heads and some simple jewellery, and belong to K'ang-chü tribes of the early period, their traditional culture exhibiting traits characteristic of the Saka tribes as a whole.

From the beginning of the Christian era, burials in 'catacomb graves' (in shaft- and chamber-tombs) became widespread, as we see in the burial grounds of the Kaunchi and Dzhun cultures covering the period from the first to the fourth century and accepted in scholarly literature as the remains of the K'ang-chü tribes.

A considerable level of sophistication distinguished the culture of the settled agriculturists of K'ang-chü, as we see from brief references in written sources and in archaeological finds such as the burial sites of the Kaunchi and Dzhun cultures of the Tashkent oasis and the middle Syr Darya, of which some seem to belong to the sedentary farming population.

The Yen-ts'ai, Aorsi and Siraci

The third major nomadic state, that of the Yen-ts'ai, was situated in northwestern Central Asia in the steppe around the Aral Sea and the northern shores of the Caspian, where it was in contact with the world of the Sarmatians. The nomadic population of this region belonged to the Sarmatian group of tribes which replaced the Scythians around the turn of the third century B.C.¹¹ During the second century B.C. a new major grouping of Sarmatian tribes, of which the chief were the Siraci and Aorsi, appeared on the steppes between the Caspian and the Tanais (the River Don), as Strabo describes. Abeacus, King of the Siraci, could mobilize 20,000 horsemen (at the time when Pharnaces was lord of the Bosphorus), while Spadinus, King of the Aorsi, commanded as many as 200,000 and the Upper Aorsi had even more. That explains their camel caravan trade in Indian and Babylonian goods which they procured by barter from the Armenians and the Medes (Strabo XI.5.8).

It is evident from this text that the Aorsi and their kinsmen, the Upper Aorsi, were tribes of Sarmatian origin and were masters of the lands lying along the coast of the Caspian Sea. The precise eastern boundaries of the Aorsi are unknown, but their influence probably extended to the Aral Sea. They were a great military power and for almost three centuries, until the arrival of the Alans, they played a major role in events of the northern Pontic region. King Eunonus of this tribe was an ally of Mithradates VIII (A.D. 40–44) in his struggle against Rome, and offered him asylum after his defeat.

Strabo refers to the established international trade links of the Aorsi with the states of the Caucasus. They also controlled trade routes leading from the Bosphorus and other Black Sea states to Transoxania and China. According to Chinese sources, one of the branches of the Silk Route – the Northern Route – passed through East Turkestan, Ta-yüan and K'ang-chü, ending in the country of Yen-ts'ai. Chinese artefacts from archaeological excavations provide concrete evidence of the use of this route during the first few centuries A.D.

Scholars generally identify the Aorsi mentioned by classical writers with the Yen-ts'ai state of the Chinese sources.

¹¹ Harmatta, 1950.

The *Shih-chi* states that Yen-ts'ai lies almost 2, 000 li north-west of K'ang-chü, and it is a nomadic country whose customs are like those of K'ang-chü. Its army numbers over 100,000. It lies on a large lake that does not have high banks – the Northern Sea.¹²

This independent nomadic state played a role of some significance in the history of Transoxania and the neighbouring localities along the international trade route. It is not, therefore, surprising that the Han Empire should have sent embassies there and fostered trade relations. Eventually, in the first century B.C., Yen-ts'ai lost its independence and became a dependency of K'ang-chü. According to the *Hou Han-shu*: 'The domain of Yen-ts'ai was renamed A-lan-ya, over which K'ang-chü held sway.'¹³ Another country to lose its independence was Yen, which paid tribute in furs. Many scholars seek to identify A-lan-ya (or A-lan-liao) with the Aorsi and Alans of the ancient sources. It should be noted that the appearance of the name A-lan-ya in the *Hou Han-shu* coincides with the emergence of the Alan tribes on the political stage.

The Alans

At the beginning of the first century A.D. the Alans secured a dominant position among the Sarmatians living between the Caspian Sea and the River Don. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, they were descended from the Massagetae. The people of the Alani in the first to third centuries A.D. represented a powerful force with which the Roman Empire was obliged to reckon. They frequently threatened Rome's more remote possessions along the Danube and in Asia Minor, and were successful in penetrating the Caucasus. They also waged successful warfare against Parthia. Historical and archaeological evidence enables us to link Yen-ts'ai (the Aorsi), A-lan-ya (the Alans) and K'ang-chü with the Iranian tribes with whom, as the Chinese chronicles state, they had ties. They had similar dress and identical customs. This cultural affinity can also be traced in burial sites that have been excavated along the lower Volga, in the southern Urals, in the Tashkent oasis and along the middle Syr Darya.

In the Aral region a considerable number of heterogeneous burial sites of the nomads have been discovered. Distinctive circular-plan mausoleums with cruciform interior layouts along the lower reaches of the Syr Darya were places of multiple interconnected burials. The sites in question, Chirik-Rabat, Babîsh-Molla and Balanda, date from the fourth to second century B.C. and were built by the Apasiacae tribes.¹⁴ The Dzhetî-Asar burials in the basin of the Kuvan Darya, a tributary of the Syr Darya, unusual kurgans with round and

¹² Bichurin, 1950; Kyuner, 1961.

¹³ Bichurin, 1950; Kyuner, 1961; Hulswé, 1979.

¹⁴ Tolstov, 1962.

rectangular ground-level chambers built of raw brick, are attributed to Strabo's Tocharoi.¹⁵ Lined kurgans were used for burials by nomads on the left bank of the Amu Darya from the fourth century B.C. The number of such burials increased during the last centuries B.C. and the first two centuries A.D.¹⁶ At a certain stage, a change occurred and the dead were buried with the head pointing south, as in the contemporary Sarmatian burials in the southern Urals. These sites have been tentatively attributed to the Yüeh-chih group of tribes. Similar lined kurgans of the fourth to second centuries B.C. have survived in the south-east part of the Ustyurt plateau in the Aral region, where sites similar to the Late Sarmatian complexes have been discovered.

The complicated palaeo-ethnographic character of nomadic settlement in the Aral Sea region during the period under consideration is thus reflected in the archaeological finds, which show the successive replacement of one group of nomads by another. What needs to be stressed again, however, is the tentative character of all the ethnic (tribal) identifications.

The Hsiung-nu (Hunni, Huns)

An important role in the political history of Central Asia was played by the Hsiung-nu (Hunni or Huns) at the turn of the first century B.C. They were first involved with the affairs of the Wu-sun and the K'ang-chü, but there is hardly any reliable evidence of their presence in the lands where the Wu-sun and K'ang-chü lived. Of particular interest are reports about the small country of Wu-shan-mu,¹⁷ which lay between the lands of these two tribes. Wu-shan-mu had close ties with the Hsiung-nu. Hu-lu-ku, ruler of the Hsiung-nu (96–85 B.C.), arranged a marriage with the family of the ruler of the Wu-shan-mu, establishing blood ties between the two states. In 60 B.C. Ch'i-hou-shan, son of the ruler of the Hsiung-nu, having failed to inherit the throne, fled to the court of his father-in-law in Wu-shan-mu, who played a decisive role in the election of Ch'i-hou-shan to the position of ruler of the Southern Hsiung-nu in 58 B.C., at the time of the division of the Hsiung-nu into two mutually hostile kingdoms. Wu-shan-mu, a minor power, could have played such a role only with the support of a Hsiung-nu military force. As we have seen, the Hsiung-nu first emerged into historical prominence at the beginning of the first century B.C. It was in the year 60 B.C., in connection with the election of Hu-han-yeh as their ruler, that the armed detachment of Chih-chih, leader of the Northern Hsiung-nu (enemies of the Southern Hsiung-nu), appeared in K'ang-chü. Chih-chih entered into an alliance with the

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Vaynberg, 1981; Lokhvits and Khazanov, 1979.

¹⁷ Bichurin, 1950.

K'ang-chü against Wu-sun, the lord of K'ang-chü, giving his daughter in marriage to Chih-chih while he himself married Chih-chih's daughter. Their joint forces then attacked the Wu-sun, reaching the Wu-sun capital in 42 B.C. After so much success, Chih-chih began to demand tribute from Ta-yüan and other kingdoms. But later, when the allies had quarrelled, Chih-chih was attacked and killed by a Chinese force.¹⁸ The Northern Hsiung-nu continued to move south, and their numbers increased considerably following their defeat by Hsien-pi. It is with this mass migration that the emergence of the new Kingdom of Yüeh-pan in the Lake Balkhash region is associated.

The Yüeh-pan

The Chinese chronicle *Pei-shih* informs us that the territory of the Yüeh-pan was formerly a possession of the Hsiung-nu, crushingly defeated by the Chinese. The Northern Hsiung-nu retreated west to K'ang-chü, while part of the local population (some 200,000) remained to form the Kingdom of Yüeh-pan.¹⁹

In the course of the first century B.C./first century A.D. the Hsiung-nu gradually became masters of the steppe regions north of the Syr Darya. Unlike the Southern Hsiung-nu, who became subjects of the Han emperors, the Northern Hsiung-nu remained independent and grew so powerful that eventually, under Prince Hu-yen (A.D. 123–35), they could establish a vast domain of their own.

Later history

The long occupation of parts of the Central Asian region by numerous Northern Hsiung-nu tribes has left archaeological evidence behind. The finds at Dzhetî-Asar on the Syr Darya include clay pots whose shape closely resembles that of the typical bronze cauldrons of the Hsiung-nu,²⁰ suggesting, with other remains, the influence of Hsiung-nu culture on the population of Dzhetî-Asar. It could equally be suggested that these tribes formed part of the peoples known as the White Huns, or Hephthalites.²¹ 'Catacomb' (shaft-and-chamber) tombs dated between the first and fourth centuries A.D. have been excavated at the burial ground of Kenkol (Fig. 3) in the Talas valley.²² The dead were placed in wooden coffins and their grave goods included weapons and a bow of distinctive Hsiung-nu type with bone arrow-heads and wooden vessels. All these material objects were typical of the

¹⁸ Taskin, 1973.

¹⁹ Bichurin, 1950.

²⁰ Levina, 1966.

²¹ Tolstov, 1962.

²² Bernshtam, 1951; Kozhombardiev, 1963; Sorokin, 1956a.

Hsiung-nu²³ while the earthen pots and articles of everyday use were the work of local tribes. The actual form of the grave structure was different from the common Hsiung-nu types and the people buried at Kenkol were of two distinct racial types. The majority turned out to be of the Pamir-Ferghana Europoid type. Others were Europoids, albeit with a significant Mongoloid admixture.²⁴ The ethnic (tribal) identification of Kenkol is a matter of controversy. Some scholars attribute it to the Hsiung-nu and others to local tribes.²⁵ Since Kenkol is situated in the Talas valley, in the eastern part of what was once K'ang-chü,



FIG. 3. The Kenkol culture.

²³ Bernshtam, 1951; Mandel'shtam, 1975a.

²⁴ Ginzburg and Trofimova, 1972.

²⁵ Bernshtam, 1951; Kozhumberdiev, 1963; Harmatta, 1952.



FIG. 4. Nomad culture of south kazakhstan and the Tashkent oasis (first to fourth century A.D.).

there are reasons for taking it to be a K'ang-chü site which reflects Hsiung-nu influence on the local K'ang-chü populace.

A similar pattern emerges with the kurgans (Fig. 4) in the area of Char-dara along the middle Syr Darya. One of the local graves contained a bronze cauldron and earthenware pots similar to those of the Hsiung-nu.²⁶ Here too, however, the majority of the people were of K'ang-chü stock. It may be noted, in conclusion, that the nomad tribes of the Yüeh-chih, who constituted the most powerful force in Transoxania in the second and first centuries B.C., played a specific and decisive role in the emergence of one of the most formidable powers of the ancient world, the Kushan Empire. The burial grounds excavated in northern

²⁶ Maksimova et al., 1968.

Bactria – Tulkhar, Aruktau, Kokkum and Babashi²⁷ – seem to have belonged to the Yüeh-chih, and similar nomad burial sites explored in T'ien Shan,²⁸ Semirechye,²⁹ Sogdiana³⁰ and Ferghana³¹ can reasonably be used as evidence for the southward migration of the Yüeh-chih tribes towards Bactria and India.³²

These historical and archaeological data shed interesting light on the role of the Transoxanian nomads in the history of both Central Asia itself and the world at large. It was as a direct result of their enterprise and warlike activities that the new strong states of Parthia and the Kushans, the major powers of K'ang-chü, Wu-sun and later the Hephthalite Empire emerged. The nomads of Central Asia also played a key role in the Great Migration of Peoples. They contributed much to the interchange of cultural achievements between the civilizations of the ancient world and equally exercised considerable influence on the development of the sedentary cultures of the East, especially in matters of warfare and the arts. The Central Asian nomads of antiquity did indeed leave their indelible mark on history.

²⁷ Mandel'shtam, 1975*b*.

²⁸ Bernshtam, 1952; Kibirov, 1959.

²⁹ Akishev and Kushaev, 1963; Bernshtam, 1951.

³⁰ Obel'chenko, 1961.

³¹ Baruzdin, 1962; Kozhombardiev, 1977; Lokhvits and Khazanov, 1979.

³² Zadneprovskiy, 1975*a*.