

the Chinese themselves of the Roman Empire and its inhabitants had some striking points of analogy to those views of the Chinese which are indicated in the classical descriptions of the Seres. There can be no mistaking the fact that in this case also the great object was within the horizon of vision, yet the details ascribed to it are often far from being true characteristics, being only the accidents of its outer borders towards the east.

18. The name of Seres is probably from its earliest use in the west identified with the name of the silkworm and its produce, and this association continued until the name ceased entirely to be used as a geographical expression.¹ Yet it was long before the westerns had any correct conception of the nature of the article which they imported at so much cost. Virgil tells how the Seres combed out from the leaves of the forest the fleecy staple of their trade; and poet after poet echoes the story down to Claudian.² Pliny knows no better, nor does Ammianus, three

¹ The Chinese *See* and *Szu*, Silk, is found in the Corean language or dialect in the form *Sir*, in Mongol *Sirkek*, in Manchu *Sirghé*. Klaproth supposes this word to have given rise to the Greek *σῆρ*, the silk-worm, and *Σῆρες*, the people furnishing silk, and hence *Sericum*, silk. (*Mem. rel. à l'Asie*, iii, 265.) Looking to the Tartar forms of the word the idea suggests itself that *Sericum* may have been the first importation, and that *Sēr* and *Seres* may have been formed by inverse analogy from that word taken as an adjective. Deguignes makes or borrows a suggestion that the word *Sherikoth*, which occurs in the Hebrew of Isaiah, xix, 9 ("They that work in fine flax and they that weave net-works shall be confounded"—Deguignes by mistake quotes *Ezekiel*) means silk, and he refers to the Arabic *Saraqat*. This, according to Freytag, means a long piece of white silk, sometimes silk in general. (*Mem. de l'Acad. des Insc.*, xlv, 575.) Pardessus, in the modern *Mem. de l'Acad. des Insc.*, xv, p. 3, says *Sir* is Persian for silk, but I cannot discover the authority. *Sarah*, connected with the Arabic word just quoted, is "a stripe of white silk." (*F. Johnston's Dict.*)

² A specimen from Silius Italicus is worth quoting, as it shows a correct idea of the position of the Seres on the shores of the remotest eastern sea:

"Jam Tartessiacos quos solverat æquore Titan
In noctem diffusos equos, jungebat Eois
Littoribus, primique novo Phaethonte relecti
Seres lanigeris repetebant vellera lucis" (Opening of book vi).

In another passage an audacious hyperbole carries the ashes of Vesuvius to that distant land:

"Videre Eoi monstrum admirabile Seres
Lanigeros cinere Ausonio canescere lucos" (xvii, 600).