

centuries later than Pliny;¹ yet in the interval a juster idea of the facts had been published by Pausanias, who knew that silk was spun by insects which the Seres tended for the purpose. Either there was sounder knowledge on the subject afloat in the mercantile world which the poets ignored, sticking to the old literary tradition of the fleecy leaves as they did to the Descend O Muse; or Pausanias must have had some special source of information. The former solution of the difficulty would be the most probable, if the error were confined to the poets, but when we find a sober historian like Ammianus adopt the tale, we seem forced upon the latter. M. Reinaud thinks that Pausanias must have come in contact with a Roman visitor of China in the days of Marcus Aurelius, respecting whom we shall have to speak further on. I may observe, however, that among the ancients, and indeed down to the time when the invention of the press had had time to take effect, the *fluctuation* of knowledge in regard to geographical truth in general, and to the far east in particular, is very noticeable; chiefly due no doubt to the absence of efficient publication and the difficulties of reference. Familiar instances of this are seen in the false notion of the Caspian entertained by Strabo, and the opposite error in regard to the Indian Sea held by Ptolemy, as compared with the correct ideas on both subjects possessed by Herodotus. We find a like degeneration in the Arabian knowledge of India in comparing Al Biruni with Edrisi; and other examples will occur in the allusions to China which we shall have to cite.

19. The Chinese annals tell us that the people whom they call the *Asi* (supposed by Julien and others to be the Parthians)² were

¹ Even in the middle ages Jacques de Vitry, writing about 1213, and believing in his Virgil, says: "Quædam etiam arbores sunt apud Seres, folia tanquam lanam ex se procreantes, ex quibus vestes subtiles contextuntur (*Dequignes in Mem. de l'Acad. des Insc.*, xlv, 541). Probably, however, this writer did not think of silk (which he must have known well enough) as the Seric vestment in question.

² The name *Asi* is however said by Remusat to have been applied by the Chinese almost promiscuously to the nations between the Jaxartes and Oxus, as far south as Samarkand; and in one of his quotations it is applied to people of Khojand, and in another to people of Bokhara. In the extracts from Menander (Note VIII at the end) the *Sogdians* appear