

traders and adventurers out on the great routes westwards, and these now became "Silk Roads", as the main item exported by the Chinese was silk.

It is really only through the historians of the Roman Empire that we have any theoretical knowledge of China's silk trade. When the Romans had conquered Syria in B. C. 64 they learnt about a far away eastern people producing silk. This people they called Seres from the product by which it was known, but they were ignorant as to the situation of their country. The name Seres seems, however, to have been applied collectively to all those peoples of the East which were engaged in the silk trade as intermediaries, such as the Tokharians, the Wu-sun and the Sakians. Later on it came to denote the real silk producers, i. e. the Chinese.

It was more the Roman demand for silk than the Chinese demand for Western products that kept the trade going, and we may be sure of one thing: the Chinese got huge profits out of the silk trade, to say nothing of the peoples further west who served as intermediaries.

To the rich and luxury-loving Romans Chinese silk became a necessity. But they were not satisfied with the Chinese textiles in the form in which these arrived in Syria. The bizarre scrolls and fantastic beasts which made up the Chinese designs of the polychrome stuffs did not appeal to the Roman's strict sense of classical art. The textiles were therefore rewoven, but as the Chinese silk thread is thinner and longer than any existing fibre it was the most appreciated of all textile materials.

Fortunate discoveries in the Crimea and at Palmyra have brought to light specimens of real authentic Chinese silk of the Han period, which most likely reached these places along the Silk Roads across the whole width of Asia (Toll, Pfister). Besides silk, the Chinese exported certain art objects of bronze (cf. note on p. 165).

"In the Vicus Tuscus in Rome there was during the early centuries of our era a market for Chinese silk. The traffic of this silk was the most far-reaching large-scale commerce of antiquity. Since the silk might be produced in the littoral of the Yellow Sea and since Roman fashionable society existed for its demand in Spain, Gaul and Britain, the trade drew the threads of its exquisite material as a bond of economic unity across the whole of the Old World from the Pacific to the Atlantic." (Hudson, p. 68).

Glass was one of the few articles exported by the Romans to China. In most instances they had to pay for the Chinese silk in gold. In China glass ranked among the precious materials beside jade and crystal. Until some ten years ago the earliest Chinese-made glass was supposed to be of the middle of the fifth century A. D. Now we are aware that the manufacture at least of glass beads was known in China already several centuries before our era. (Kümmel 1928, Seligman 1938.)

The powerful imperialism of Emperor Wu was the necessary foundation for the establishment of the overland silk commerce. But once established, it seems to have been able to survive severe stress from political disintegration — probably, as sug-