

## CHAPTER VII

### HISTORICAL NOTICES OF KHOTAN

#### SECTION I.—THE EARLY RECORDS AND NAMES OF KHOTAN

IN the introductory remarks of the preceding chapter I have already referred to the reason for which it will be necessary to review the records of the early history of Khotan before I proceed to give an account of the antiquarian observations and discoveries which have resulted from my explorations in that region. I do not propose to include among the records to be discussed here the evidence furnished by archaeological finds; for however important this evidence may prove to be, its value can only be established in connexion with a critical survey of the archaeological operations which have supplied it. Apart from these data, to be verified and interpreted hereafter, our historical notices of Khotan during the pre-Muhammadan periods are derived almost exclusively from two sources; the writings of Chinese annalists and travellers, and certain Tibetan texts which appear to be based largely on legends and traditions originally chronicled in Khotan itself.

A variety of reasons combine to make the Chinese notices of far higher value for historical research. In the first place, they represent for the greatest part contemporary records embodying either official information or the observations of thoroughly trustworthy travellers; they are in almost all cases chronologically fixed, and present the great advantage of relating mainly to matter-of-fact aspects of ancient Khotan, its secular affairs and political events. Whatever political and cultural reasons may explain the fact, it appears certain that the relations of Khotan with China for over a thousand years previous to the introduction of Islām were closer and more continuous than those of any other portion of Eastern Turkestan.

Whether it was this copiousness of historical details, or the fascination of a territory which until half a century ago was to Western students one of the least known and least accessible parts of Asia, we must feel grateful to the reason which induced A. Rémusat to publish, in 1820, his *Histoire de la ville de Khotan*, containing a complete translation of all Chinese notices concerning Khotan as collected in Book LV of that vast encyclopaedia, the *Pien i tien*<sup>1</sup>. It is not for me to appraise the merits of this publication of the great French Sinologist; but it cannot be questioned that it has done more than any other work to direct attention to the exceptional historical interests attaching to Khotan<sup>2</sup>. The materials furnished in it are still the most valuable to which the non-Sinologist student of Khotan has access at present. M. Chavannes' work on the Western Turks has, of course, supplied a mass of additional and critically sifted data of considerable interest for Khotan history during the T'ang period<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless, it is probable

<sup>1</sup> Compare Rémusat, *Ville de Khotan*, pp. iv. sq.; for a specific mention of the *Pien i tien*, curiously enough left unnamed in the Introduction, ib., p. 33 note.

<sup>2</sup> The stimulating influence of Rémusat's publication is illustrated by the use made of it in the exhaustive notice

which Ritter, in 1838, devoted to Khotan and its history; see *Asien*, v. pp. 343-89.

<sup>3</sup> See Chavannes, *Turcs occid.*, pp. 125 sqq. and, for incidental notices, Index, s. v. *Khotan* and *Yu-fien*.