

Beyond the White Dragon Mounds

The polities of the Tarim Basin in the first three centuries CE, their rise and importance for trade on the Silk Road



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Preface

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1.0 Introduction

The length of this desert is so great that 'tis said it would take a year and more to ride from one end to the other. And here, where its breadth is least, it takes a month to cross it. 'Tis all composed of hills and valleys of sand, and not a thing to eat is to be found on it.¹

With these words does Marco Polo (c. 1254-1324 CE), the most renowned Silk Road traveller in the west, describes the horrors of the Lop Desert as he faced what the Chinese knew as the “White Dragon Mounds”. Though Marco is not the most trustworthy of sources, in this at least he was very close to the truth, for there are few places in Asia more hostile to life than the Lop Desert, just a small part of the greater Taklamakan which fills much of the Tarim Basin, literally at the heart of the Asian continent. In his narrative it is little more than an empty quarter, an area you hope to get through alive and little more. Xuanzang(c. 602-664 CE), the most renowned Silk Road traveller from the east and immortalized in the classical Ming era novel *Journey to the West*, travelled the opposite way to Marco Polo in the 7th century and describes a rather different world. The first place he writes about on his travels is the country of Yanqi [Karashar], a little north of the Lop desert, which he describes in the following manner, “The chief town of the realm is in circuit 6 or 7 li. On all sides it is girt with hills. The roads are precipitous and easy to defend. Numerous streams unite, and are led into channels to irrigate the fields.”² Where Marco emphasised the emptiness, Xuanzang describes the vivid life of the oases cities which nestled around the great deserts at the centre of the Tarim Basin. Three hundred years prior to Xuanzang’s travels and a thousand years prior to the travels of Marco Polo a third Silk Road traveller, a man named Hu Zhizhu from the kingdom of the Yuezhi [Kushan], left a pass-note written on a little wooden slip in the town of Cadota deep within the Tarim Basin, at a town perhaps not so dissimilar to those Xuanzang visited.³

Cadota, known in Chinese as Jingjue, is today a collection of ruins surrounded and partly covered by the sand of the Taklamakan known as the Niya archaeological site. The river that once passed it no longer reaches here, running into the desert and disappearing some way to the south, and all that is left of old Cadota are numerous wooden posts and half

¹ Marco Polo, *Book of the Marvels of the World* I.XXXIX.

² Xuanzang: 18

³ Stein 1975: Appendix A, p.540, N.xv.53 & Wang 2004: 58, table 16, reference 673

crumbled walls that once formed the framework of a city. Hu Zhizhu appears to have been far from home when he left his pass-slip, for the Kushan Empire, called the Yuezhi by the Chinese, was located in modern day Afghanistan, Pakistan and Northern India. Just who Hu Zhizhu was we will probably never know but he must have followed a route that many others, like Marco Polo and Xuanzang, also followed, the Silk Road.

The term “Silk Road” is perhaps one of the most evocative terms for any communication network in human history, instantly recognized by most and vividly associated with mighty mountains, endless deserts and hardy camels laden with exotic goods. The term isn’t very old per se and was coined by the German geographer Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen (1833-1905) in his work, *China*, from 1877 which contains a detailed discussion of Chinese history where the term *Sererstraße* as well as *Seidenstraße* appears.⁴ The Silk Road, or Silk Routes, will be central to this dissertation. It is defined in this work as the vast network of routes, trails, roads and rivers that have crisscrossed the landscapes of Central Asia since ancient times. On it commodities such as silk, people such as Marco and Xuanzang, knowledge such as the secrets of papermaking, culture and religion, especially Buddhism but also Christianity and Islam, were all carried between the various societies and civilizations of Eurasia.

Silk, perhaps the most mystical and magical of all garments, was invented in China many centuries prior to Hu’s travels as sericulture in China can be traced back to Neolithic times and the earliest dated silk fragment is more than four and a half thousand years old.⁵ Already the Roman author Pliny the Elder knew and despised it⁶ while Lucan describes how Cleopatra’s white breasts would be visible through the Sidonian cloth that was woven by the Seres⁷ and then reworked and lightened by the Egyptians.⁸ The Chinese on the other end of the Silk Road were equally interested in the products of the land they called Da Qin [Great China] and information from the *Weilue*, a text from the third century, tells of such wondrous things as pearls, red coral, fire washed cloth (Asbestos cloth) and 60 other products that could be had.⁹

The trade in these materials has given rise to cities and empires alike and not only commodities but armies, culture and religion have travelled along the Silk Road. And square

⁴ Richthofen 1877: 495-501

⁵ Boulnois 1966: 17

⁶ Pliny, N.H, Book VI. Chapter XX.

⁷ Seres, Silk People, is the ancient name for the Chinese used by Roman and Greek authors.

⁸ Lucan, *Pharsalia*, X.169-171

⁹ Yu Huan, Sec.12

in the middle of these most important of routes to early human communication lies the Tarim Basin with its deserts and oases. This dissertation will focus upon the Tarim Basin, the Silk Road and how communities like Niya came into being during the last centuries BCE and first CE.

1.1 The literature and the research front on the Tarim Basin

Before presenting the research questions it is necessary to introduce the literature and research which exists on the subject. Presented first is the early work on the Silk Road and the Tarim Basin, followed by literature looking at the Tarim polities, more specific research, and finally the debate on the early Silk Road. The geographer Von Richthofen discussed the history of the Silk Road and Central Asia in the first volume of his monumental work *China, Ergebnisse eigener Reisen und darauf gegründeter Studien* and in discussing the early trade routes between China and India he not only drew on sources from the western antiquity such as Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* or Strabo's *Geographica* but also on the Chinese historical tradition such as those of *Hanshu* of Ban Gu and Fan Ye's *Hou Hanshu*, all works which would be extensively used by later Silk Road scholars.¹⁰ His student the Swedish explorer and geographer Sven Hedin (1865-1952) travelled to the Tarim Basin on four expeditions and together with other explorers and archaeologists like Sir Aurel Stein, the Japanese Buddhist abbot and count Ōtani Kōzui (1876-1948), the German Albert von Le Coq (1860-1930) and the French Paul Pelliot (1878-1945) laying much of the groundwork, both archaeologically and topographically, for later scholars studying the early history of the Silk Road. The French sinologists Edouard Chavannes (1865-1918) must also be mentioned as he wrote many of the first translations of Chinese historical texts, such the *Shiji* and parts of the *Hanshu*.

Later scholars have written much of relevance for studying the early Tarim Basin polities but very little research has focused on the Tarim Basin region as a whole. Those who do mainly focus upon the period of Buddhist domination, from the early centuries CE to the introduction of Islam around the start of the second millennium CE, often described as the golden age of the Silk Road. Recent scholars have however, perhaps following renewed archaeological activity in the region, started focusing on the centuries around the turn of the era. An overview of the region during this period appears in *History of the Civilizations of Central Asia* vol.II from 1996 in which Ma Yong and Sun Yutang present a short overview of the Tarim Basin in the period c. 200 BCE-200 CE and of the first Chinese expeditions into the

¹⁰ Von Richthofen 1877: Chapter 10

Tarim Basin. *A Comparative Study of Thirty City-state Cultures* from 2000 included the Tarim Basin polities in its list of city-state cultures and Nicola di Cosmo, an authority on Central Asian nomadism, gives a short presentation of the Tarim Basin city-states as they appear in the *Hanshu* as well as basing his work on archaeological material. In addition to a basic description he also points to, but does not explore, the question of the origin of these city-states, emphasizing that the archaeological material shows signs of changes occurring during the final millennium BCE.¹¹ More recently Valerie Hansen's book *Silk Road, A New History* from 2012 also deals with the Tarim polities specifically, but she uses only the introduction and the first chapter to discuss the early development of the region, focusing mainly upon the kingdom of Shanshan of which Cadota, later the Niya site, was a part. Drawing on both the wealth of archaeological material from sites in the Shanshan kingdom, as well as documents from the third and fourth century CE, she gives a vivid description of life in the kingdom, focusing specifically upon what it can tell us about the early development of Buddhism.¹² Perhaps the best "companion" to any serious study of the Tarim polities is the extensive note and appendix section in *Through the Jade Gate to Rome*, John Hill's annotated translation of the *Hou Hanshu*, summing up and tying together much that has previously been written concerning the Tarim Basin in Han times.¹³

However, much thorough work has been done on many of the important discoveries from antiquity of Sir Aurel Stein; material from mainly the Shanshan kingdom in the southeast and some from modern Khotan in the southwest of the Tarim Basin. A large quantity of numismatic material was discovered across the Tarim Basin and of particular interest to scholars and numismatists alike have been the Sino-Kharoshthi coins from Khotan. Many scholars, Kazuo Enoki in particular, has researched these coins, especially their dating, but the most likely dating so far is presented by Joe Cribb in his study *The Sino-Kharoshthi Coins of Khotan* from 1984 and 1985. Joe Cribb gives a detailed analysis of these coins where he not only points to their connection with Hellenistic, and in particular Kushan, coinage but also identifies and roughly dates a number of kings of Khotan from them. Helen Wang's *Money on the Silk Road* from 2004 also gives a very detailed description of the monetary traditions and economy of the early Tarim Polities up until c.800 CE and she raises several important points about the usage of the Sino-Kharoshthi coins as well as coinage traditions in the Tarim Basin.

¹¹ di Cosmo 2000: 405-406

¹² V Hansen 2012: Chapter 1

¹³ Hill 2009

The discovery of Kharoshthi documents from sites in the Shanshan kingdom, as well as large quantities of art with a connection to Northern India and Gandhara have led to a large debate on the extent of contact between the Tarim Basin and North India, a debate that focuses mainly on the presence of the Kushan in the Tarim Basin and the introduction of Buddhism. Edwin Pulleyblank, one of the major scholars on Central Asia-China relations, originally presented his view of it as a military conquest of the Tarim Basin by the Kushan which led to the introduction of these elements. This is found in the article *Chinese Evidence for the Date of Kaniska* 1968 now also found in the book *Central Asia and Non-Chinese People of Ancient China* from 2002. His view is shared by John Brough who also, in his article *Comments on Third-Century Shan-Shan and the History of Buddhism* from 1965, proposes that it was this Kushan invasion that carried Buddhism across the mountains from India. This view has been heavily disputed however with an alternative proposal, that it was Buddhism which carried the culture and script of northern India across the mountains. Such a view is supported by Richard Salomon in his detailed study of *Indian Epigraphy* from 1998, as well as Xinru Liu in *The Silk Road in World History* from 2010 and Valerie Hansen in her previously mentioned book *Silk Road*.

Much work has been done on the early history and development of the Silk Road and a dividing line seem to be the question of what and who drove the development and trade along the Silk Road during the periods of the Han and the Roman Empires. Lucette Boulnois in her book *La Route de la soie* (The Silk Road) from 1963 suggests that the driving forces behind the Silk Road trade were the great empires at each end, the Han Empire and Imperium Romanum, as well as the two empires in the middle, the Parthian and the Kushan; each, she claims benefited greatly from the trade and their role as middlemen respectively.¹⁴ Central to the narrative is the Roman desire for Chinese silk, a corresponding overproduction of Silk in China¹⁵ and the game of politics around the Silk Road trade, especially between the Kushan and the Parthians.¹⁶ Ferguson and Keynes in their article *China and Rome* from 1978, broadly share a similar view to Boulnois, although they place an emphasis on independent traders and direct contact between Rome and Han China.¹⁷

Diametrically opposed to this view we find Manfred Raschke who in his *New Studies in Roman Commerce with the East* from 1978 criticizes the way earlier scholars have treated the trade on the Silk Road as if it was modern trade, instead of studying it within its own

¹⁴ Boulnois 1963: 65-66

¹⁵ Ibid: 20-21

¹⁶ Ibid: 69-70

¹⁷ Ferguson and Keynes 1978: 594

socio-economic and political framework.¹⁸ Raschke points instead to the importance of nomads in the trade across Central Asia, accordingly it was not merchants but the internal mechanisms of gift-exchange and barter that transported items across the vast distance separating China and the west.¹⁹ Christopher Beckwith broadly agrees with this view in his *Empires of the Silk Road* from 2009 and goes even further suggesting that the aggressive policies of the Chinese and the Romans later caused a destabilization of the Central Eurasian trade routes and in turn a decline in Silk Road trade.²⁰

Both Raoul McLaughlin and Xinru Liu have taken a stance somewhere between these two groups. Liu, in both her recent work *The Silk Road in World History* from 2010 and in the article *Migration and settlement of the Yuezhi-Kushan* from 2001, suggests that it was the interaction between the Yuezhi, a nomadic group who moved from Gansu in northeast China to Bactria, and China that caused the rise of the first Silk Road.²¹ She does however also emphasize many of the same points as Boulnois in regard to the politics of Silk Road trade and the benefits reaped by the Parthians and Kushan. McLaughlin, although mainly concerned with the Roman side of the east-west trade, also focuses on the importance of empires, especially the Chinese, for trade along the Silk Road but he points to many of the traders being from other places, especially Sogdians.²²

As is clear there have been very few detailed overviews of the Tarim Basin politics during the first centuries CE; those available are mostly short and lacking detail. This means that the very detailed studies done on subjects related to the Tarim Basin are hard to use as no overarching context has been established. I believe this is a problem as the Tarim Basin politics, as they are placed literally at the centre of the Silk Road which has been so hotly disputed, must surely have played an important role in interaction across Central Asia in antiquity. Many later works, exemplified very well by Helen Wang's numismatic and economic study as well as di Cosmo and Xinru Liu's, appear to have moved away from the singular focus on the great empires and towards a focus on the Tarim region.²³

¹⁸ Raschke 1978: 677

¹⁹ Ibid: 606-612

²⁰ Beckwith 2009: 92

²¹ Liu 2010: 15-19

²² McLaughlin 2010: 84-90

²³ I am aware that a lot of work on the Silk Road has been done by both Chinese and Japanese scholars and where available in English I have included them as seen above. However as most of the research from both these nations are done in their respective languages, both languages in which I am not yet fluent enough to confidently read academic material, I have not, with a few exceptions, included this research in this dissertation.

1.2 Problems, definitions and parameters

This dissertation will look at the Tarim Basin from the Bronze Age to the first centuries Common Era in an attempt to fill some of empty spaces in our knowledge of the Basin's politics and discern some of the mechanisms that may have brought the Silk Road into being. The central question to start out with will be,

- What kind of societies and political structures could be found within the Tarim Basin during first three centuries CE?
- How did these structures develop?
- Is there any connection between the rise of societies in the Tarim Basin and exchange across the Silk Routes?

Geographically this dissertation will focus upon the stretch of the Silk Road from Dunhuang in the eastern end of the Tarim Basin bordering on China, to the Kushan and Parthian Empires in the Iranian world in the west beyond the Pamir and Kunlun ranges, in other words the Tarim Basin and the surrounding mountain and steppe areas in what is now Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China. Richthofen in his study of the area provides an excellent description of its boundaries, "Es reicht, in allgemeinen Umrissen, vom Hochland von Tibet im Süden zum Altai im Norden, und von der Wasserscheide am Pamir im Westen zu derjenigen der Riesenströme von China und dem Gebirge Khingan im Osten."²⁴

A wide variety of names for this region appear in the Western literature on the subject and the terms used have changed over time since the subject first appeared in the nineteenth century. Richthofen, quoted above, uses the term "Central Asia". Gustaf Mannerheim, the later Finnish President, calls the region both "Central Asia" and "Sinkiang" in his diary from his travels in the region.²⁵ Sir Aurel Stein used an even wider variety of terms, from "Innermost Asia" or "Serinda" to "Chinese Turkestan".²⁶ As Jan Romgard explains at the end of his article on Chinese research into the early history of Xinjiang what terms and language to use has become a sensitive topic after the clashes between Uyghur nationalists and Chinese authorities in recent years.²⁷ Partly because of this tension, later scholars such as Helen Wang or Christopher Beckwith use the politically neutral term Eastern Central Asia^{28,29} while modern Chinese scholars have a tendency to use Xinjiang or the older term Xiyu [Western

²⁴ Richthofen 1877: 7

²⁵ Mannerheim 2010

²⁶ Wang 2004: 3

²⁷ Romgard 2008: 51-58

²⁸ Wang 2004: 3

²⁹ Beckwith 2009: 86-89

Regions]. I have chosen to use the term “The Tarim Basin” firstly because it is a fairly neutral geographical term and because this dissertation will mainly deal with the oasis-cities and nomadic groups found within the physical Tarim Basin. The term “Tarim Basin” in this dissertation will however also include the surrounding mountain regions as well as the area immediately north of the Turfan depression which historically was part of the Jushi kingdoms.

Chronologically the first part of this dissertation will concern itself mainly with the societies of the first three centuries CE, but in the last chapter, lines of development will also be drawn, back to the Tarim Basin’s Bronze Age during the second millennium BCE. Even the period from 1-300 CE is long period of time and it is of course unlikely that the conditions throughout the period remained the same even in the Tarim Basin, indeed they didn’t, but it is for this period and place that we have sources to describe the situation in detail. The period also roughly fits the reign of the Eastern Han dynasty in China (25-220 CE) and the Kushan (c.30 to early second century CE) in Bactria, Gandhara and Northern India.

1.3 The sources

The information available for studying the period in question can mainly be drawn from three sources, the classical Chinese historians writing about the Han dynasties expeditions and wars in what they called the western region, ancient documents found within the Tarim Basin and archaeological work done the last hundred years. Many writers who touch upon the Tarim Basin, especially those writing about Roman commerce and contacts with the east, also use ancient Roman and Greek sources, of which Pliny’s *Naturalis Historia* and Strabo’s *Geographica* are the most commonly cited. These sources however do not provide good information regarding the Silk Road running through the Tarim Basin as their knowledge of this area is vague and probably based on hearsay. The *Periplus Maris Erythraei* [Voyage around the Erythraean Sea] is a much better source of Roman commerce with the east as it gives detailed descriptions of the sea trade between Rome and India, including routes, practises and wares available in the different regions, but it too tells us little of the region north and east of Bactria. I have therefore not used them, except when briefly talking of the long-distance Silk Road trade from a Roman or western point of view.

1.3.1 Chinese historians

Unlike the Romans, China had contact with the Tarim Basin as long ago as the turn of first millennium BCE and direct contact between the two was established during the second

century BCE as the Han Empire started sending expeditions and armies westwards. From the time of Sima Qian, regarded as the father of Chinese history, later historians have often included a chapter on the Xiyu [西域], translated by John Hill as the western regions.³⁰ The historians relevant to this dissertation besides Sima Qian are Ban Gu, Fan Ye and Yu Huan who will be treated individually below. All shared a classical Chinese education, were courtiers and, with the possible exception of Yu Huan about whom little is known, they all held positions at court related to recordkeeping and meet their demise due to too close connections with the wrong people.

They also all worked within the framework of the early Chinese historical tradition which in its basic form is factual and short. The anecdote is central to their historical presentations, and is often meant to illustrate a particular trend or point, and breaks up an otherwise very factual narrative with longer stories. For example after presenting the polity of Qiuci [Kucha] in the Tarim Basin Ban Gu presents the history of how the Chinese discussed and then established agricultural colonies near Qiuci [Kucha],³¹ and is meant to illustrate the good relationship with this particular polity. Sometimes the anecdotes are also meant to say something about a particular person and illustrate his qualities, such as when Sima Qian tells us how the Marquis of Liu, Zhang Liang, near the end of his life set about practising dietary restrictions, and breathing and stretching exercises in order to achieve levitation, illustrating his perseverance.³² The focus is upon personages as the drivers of the historical narratives, the tendency being to present history in the form of speeches, memoranda, letters, edicts, suggestions or conversations from and between characters in the narrative. For example, when Fan Ye describes the planning of an expedition into the Tarim Basin in 123 CE he uses two long monologues to present the suggested plans before finishing simply by stating that the emperor accepted the advice and it was done.³³ Many of these speeches and conversations must probably have been constructed by the historians, but the edicts, letters etc were quite likely available to them. After the introduction of the “record of movement and repose” or *qi ju zhu*, detailing the Emperor’s daily activities, during the Western Han one may assume more credence can be given also to speeches and dialogues attributed to the Emperor.³⁴

³⁰ Hill 2009: xvii

³¹ Ban Gu, 96A (165-177)

³² Sima Qian, 55 (113)

³³ Fan Ye, 88 (11)

³⁴ Schaberg 2011: 413

Sima Qian – *Shiji*

Sima Qian (c. 145-90 BCE) inherited both his father Sima Tang's history project, the *Shiji*, and his post at court as *Taishi*, translated as grand historian or grand scribe, responsible for astrology, divination, keeping of the calendar and historical records. During his career he fell into displeasure with Emperor Wu (141-87 CE) because he tried to support his close friend general Li Ling who had surrendered to the northern Xiongnu nomads. He was given the choice between suicide or castration, of which he chose castration so as to finish his lifework the *Shiji*.³⁵ The *Shiji* was meant to cover Chinese history from the legendary past to Sima's own time, though the most detailed parts are those close to his own time, and of interest to this dissertation is his chapter 123, the account of Dayuan [Ferghana], which tells of the first Chinese exploration and military expeditions into the Tarim Basin. His chapter 110; an account of the Xiongnu, is also of some interest as it details the struggle between the Chinese and Xiongnu for, amongst other things, control over the Tarim Basin. Sima was very close to his own sources and, in addition to the records available to him due to his position, must have had direct contact with many of the first Chinese emissaries and generals travelling west.

Ban Gu – *Hanshu*

Ban Gu (32-92 CE) was part of the prestigious Ban family who had close associations with the ruling Liu family and whose library was renowned at the time. The work on the *Hanshu* was started by his father Ban Biao (3-54 CE), something Ban Gu fails to mention, and taken up by Ban Gu after his father's death. Although he was quickly arrested by order of Emperor Ming and charged with "secretly revising state history", and the family's library being confiscated, he was discharged when the emperor was shown Ban Gu's work, aided by Ban Gu's brother the general Ban Chao insisting upon his brother's good intentions. And Ban Gu was, in the end, given a position as a scribe with access to the imperial library. He died in 92 CE after having again been imprisoned due to his association with the general Dou Xian and it was his sister Ban Zhao which finished the last chronological tables of the *Hanshu*.³⁶ His chapter 96A and B, Memoir on the Western Regions, will be central to this dissertation as it deals with the Chinese contact with the Tarim Basin until the Wang Mang Interregnum (9-23 CE) and gives a detailed account, including population figures, produce, etc, of the various polities of the Tarim Basin. Chapter 61, the biographies of Zhang Qian and Li Guangli, are also important as they led the first expeditions into the Tarim Basin. Ban Gu wrote about events very close to

³⁵ Watson 1993: XI-XV

³⁶ Durrant 2011: 485-492

his own time and the imperial library presumably had extensive records. Much of his chapter 96 was probably based on information in the reports from the Chinese Protector Generals of the Western Regions gathered from 59 BCE to 16 CE and other information obtained by Chinese officialdom in this period, although he might also have drawn on the knowledge of his brother Ban Chao who led Chinese armies in the Tarim Basin for more than thirty years from 73 CE.

Fan Ye – *Hou Hanshu*

Unlike the two previous historians Fan Ye (394-446 CE) did not live during the Han period but rather during the end of the Jin dynasty and beginning of the Song-Liu dynasty and served in the latter amongst other things as a vice-director of the imperial library. It was after he was exiled to Anhui in 432 CE, after being found inebriated at a state funeral, that he started his work on the *Hou Hanshu* and finished it before his execution in 446 CE, on the grounds of his association with a group who had attempted a coup.³⁷ The chapter *Chronicles of the Western Region* picks up where Ban Gu's *Hanshu* ends and details the events in the west until 170, after which there is no more information. Like Ban Gu he also gives a detailed description of the areas, including population figures. His *Biography of Ban Chao* will also be used here as it contains detailed information on the wars towards the end of the first century CE. Fan Ye is clearly far removed from the actual events he describes, and as Bielenstein points out he cannot have had access to the Han records as they disappeared during the burning of Luoyang in 191 CE near the end of the Han dynasty.³⁸ He did however base his work on multiple works by earlier, now lost, historians, some of whom probably would have had access to the Han records. Luckily Fan Ye tells us his sources for the chapters dealing with the Tarim Basin when initially he states that he has based his account mainly upon the reports of the general Ban Yong to Emperor An (107-125 CE) delivered at the end of that emperor's reign. These reports, in addition to material gathered by Ban Yong during his time as Chief Clerk of the western regions, probably contained a deal of material gathered by his father Ban Chao during his time in the Tarim Basin.

Yu Huan – *Weiliu*

The *Weiliu*, written by Yu Huan, has been lost and even the birth and death of Yu Huan is unknown. One chapter however, the *People of the West*, was quoted in its entirety in the *Sanguozhi* [Chronicles of the Three Kingdoms] by Chen Shou during the latter part of the

³⁷ Durrant 2011: 502

³⁸ Bielenstein 1953: 9

third century CE. Yu Huan lived during the time of the Wei dynasty (220-265 CE) and wrote his work, without official sanctioning, during this period.³⁹ The texts deal with many of the kingdoms in and around the Tarim Basin as well as further west but perhaps of greatest interest here is his detailed descriptions of the routes along which the Silk Road ran. He wrote about contemporary polities, and though much of his knowledge was probably based on hearsay, the regions closest to China, such as the Tarim Basin, seems to have been fairly accurately described.

Other Chinese sources

As well as these four historians I also occasionally draw upon later accounts by Chinese authors, mainly the two famous Buddhist monks Faxian (337-422 CE) and Xuanzang (602-664 CE) who both travelled to India via the Tarim Basin routes. However both give accounts from a period later than the one this dissertation is concerned with and as such they will not be given a detailed presentation here.

The trustworthiness of Chinese historians

There are some obvious problems with using the Chinese historians as sources for the events and societies within the Tarim Basin during the period under discussion. Firstly, none travelled to the Tarim Basin themselves but rather based their stories on other sources. They would, of course, view their material through their own culture and context, and as men close to the Chinese courts they evidently regard the western regions as places inhabited by barbarians, a term they themselves use.

However despite this, I believe the Chinese historians are extraordinarily good sources for studying the Tarim Basin, as long as their limitations are remembered, for a number of reasons. Firstly their source materials were mostly records and reports made by officials and officers in the field which was meticulously gathered and archived by the Han bureaucracy. This bureaucracy was already developed before the time of Sima Qian and as archaeological evidence has proved, they kept detailed accounts of everything, from who travelled past official posts to how much each soldier was paid. Secondly the historical tradition after Sima Qian emphasised precise, factual narratives often containing what appears to be very exact numbers and distances. John Hill, translator of the *Hou Hanshu*, attested to this by comparing the distance between places given in the *Hou Hanshu* against modern distances and as he puts it, “Most, though not all, of the distances between places given in the *Hou Hanshu*, which I

³⁹ Hill 2004, Introduction. Checked 12.05.2013

have been able to check, have proven to be surprisingly accurate, especially in areas controlled by the Chinese.”⁴⁰

Furthermore, when describing areas in which the Chinese officialdom obviously would have had no access, such as Parthia, both Fan Ye and Ban Gu simply gives the numbers of their population as “extremely numerous” and says there are several hundred small towns.⁴¹ If the other measurements and population figures given were guesswork it would be unconceivable that they would not simply invent numbers for places like Parthia as well. With a few exceptions I therefore believe that the accounts of the Chinese historians can be used as generally reliable detailed sources for the events and conditions in the Tarim Basin during the last two centuries BCE and first three CE.

1.3.2 Documents from the Tarim Basin

Significant numbers of documents from antiquity in the Tarim Basin proper have been excavated at the archaeological sites of Niya and Loulan in the south-eastern part of the Tarim Basin, at the Han “limes” near Dunhuang in Gansu and the Han governmental posts in Jiuquan and at the Xuanquan site in Dunhuang prefecture. The documental finds from Niya and Loulan come in two types, wooden slips written in Chinese and sealed wedge tablets in Kharoshthi script writing Prakrit dated to the end of the third and start of the fourth century CE. The documents from the Han “limes”, Dunhuang and Jiuquan are mostly slightly earlier, from the last century BCE and the two first centuries CE. The majority of documents were found by Sir Aurel Stein during his expeditions at the start of the 20th century, although some, especially those found in Gansu and eastern China, have been uncovered more recently by mainly Chinese archaeologists. For the Kharoshthi documents I have used the transcriptions from *Kharosthi Inscriptions* from 1901 by *Boyer, Rapson and Senart* and the translations by T. Burrows from 1940 in *A Translation of the Kharosthi Documents from Chinese Turkestan*. The translations of the Chinese documents found by Aurel Stein were taken from the appendixes of his books *Ancient Khotan* from 1975 (originally printed 1907) and *Innermost Asia* from 1928 in which Édouard Chavannes and Lionel Giles provided translations. The newer finds I have referred to were taken from Helen Wang’s *Money on the Silk Road* from 2004.

⁴⁰ Hill 2009: xxi

⁴¹ Fan Ye, 88 (23)

1.3.3 Archaeological sources

In addition to the documents found within the Tarim Basin there is a significant amount of archaeological material which this dissertation will use. At Niya, Endere, Karadong and Loulan the remains of ancient communities dating at least to the second century CE has been found but all are probably older. More scattered finds have also been excavated throughout the Tarim Basin, much of it incredibly well preserved due the region's arid climate. Wang gives a thorough presentation of the archaeological work done in the Tarim Basin since it started at the beginning of the 20th century. She divides the work done into four phases as follows, a period 1 dominated by European, American and Japanese expeditions during the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, a period 2 of joint Chinese and foreign expeditions in the 20s and 30s, a period 3 of only Chinese teams after the 1950s and finally a period 4 of renewed joint teams since the 1980s.⁴² The archaeological sources I have drawn upon can be divided into the work done by Aurel Stein and later work done by mainly Chinese expeditions.

Sir Aurel Stein

Sir Aurel Stein and his contemporaries have received much criticism especially from the Chinese who accuse them of plundering antiquities from China.⁴³ Some European scholars have also criticized their work as unscientific and Falkenhausen for example characterizes them as treasure-hunters sent from Europe, whose work can hardly be called archaeological fieldwork.⁴⁴ However, as Wang points out, Aurel Stein's approach to his work, despite no formal archaeological training, was very professional.⁴⁵ She points to his introduction to his first work, *Ancient Khotan* from 1907, where he writes as follows; "It was at least equally important that an exact and detailed record should be kept of all observations made on the ground, and that the evidence thus secured should be published with all possible care and fullness."⁴⁶ He goes on to quote Flinders Petrie saying,

To leave a site merely plundered, without any attempt to work out its history, to see the meaning of the remains found, or to publish what may serve future students of the

⁴² Wang 2004: 5

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Falkenhausen 1993: 841, note 2

⁴⁵ Wang 2004: 19

⁴⁶ Stein 1975: ix

place or the subject, is to throw away the opportunities which have been snatched from those who might have used them properly.⁴⁷

Stein stays true to his word and presents incredibly detailed and thorough reports in his books, detailing the site where something was found, its topography, condition etc. On his three expeditions into the Tarim Basin, in 1900, 1906-1908 and 1913-16, he discovered a great many ancient sites and laid down much of the groundwork for the later scholars of the Tarim Basin to base their work upon. The parts of his work which I have used can be found mainly in *Ancient Khotan* from 1975 and *Innermost Asia* from 1928, as well as *Serindia* from 1921, to which many of his contemporary scholars also have contributed appendixes and notes.

Later archaeology

Aside from Aurel Stein this dissertation draws from a variety of later, mainly Chinese, archaeological work. Jan Romgard's article *Ancient Human Settlements in Xinjiang and the Early Silk Road Trade* from 2008 gives an overview of the major finds made by Chinese archaeological teams during the last decades and highlights some of the current debates amongst Chinese scholars. The chapters 9 and 10⁴⁸, *The Culture of the Xinjiang Region* and *The Western Regions under the Hsiung-nu and the Han*, by respectively Ma Yong and Wang Binghua, and Ma Yong and Sun Yutang summaries several archaeological finds in the Tarim Region from antiquity. The extensive article *The Late Prehistory of Xinjiang in Relation to Its Neighbours* by Kwang-tzuu Chen and Fredrik Hiebert from 1995 explore in detail the archaeological research done on the Bronze Age and early Iron Age of the Tarim Basin with examples from archaeological sites and also explain the current theories on cultural zones during this period. The book *Traces in the Desert* by Christoph Baumer, a freelance author and explorer specializing on the Silk Road and Tarim Basin, from 2008 is used but briefly as Baumer was not given permission to dig, but it contains many detailed descriptions of sites visited by Aurel Stein.

As is pointed out by both Chen⁴⁹ and di Cosmo⁵⁰ the vast majority of the post 1920s archaeological work has centred on the many very well preserved graves and surface finds scattered throughout the Tarim Basin and as such very little work has gone into looking for or at settlements. This is regrettable for those who study the Tarim Basin of antiquity as there probably are sites preserved by the Taklamakan that have yet to be reported upon. And as

⁴⁷ Petrie quoted in Stein 1975: xi

⁴⁸ Harmatta 1996

⁴⁹ Chen and Hiebert 1995: 245

⁵⁰ di Cosmo 2000: 401

Romgard stresses Chinese fieldwork has also faced pressure from the many development projects in the region, forcing rushed excavations.⁵¹ Despite this I believe that the available material is of sufficient quality and quantity to answer the questions raised in this dissertation.

1.4 Disposition

This dissertation will be organized as follows. The second chapter will introduce the climatic conditions and geography of the Tarim Basin, discussing the issue of how the Tarim Basin geographically has changed since antiquity, essential to understand the societies that developed within. The third chapter will then try to answer the question of what kind of polities can be found within the Tarim Basin and discuss these in detail. Finally the fourth chapter will discuss how these polities developed and their connection to the rise of trade along the Silk Road.

1.5 On names, transcriptions and measurements

Before commencing however a few words must be said about my choice of transcription and names. When referring to modern locations I have used the name currently in use, for example Khotan or Kucha, but discussing the Tarim Basin polities I have chosen to use the names as presented in ancient Chinese sources with the modern approximate location in brackets behind, for example Yutian [Khotan] or Qiuci [Kucha]. Some of the place names mentioned by Chinese historians have not been accurately identified and this will be apparent from the bracket but for the rest I have based myself upon John Hill's identifications in his *Through the Jade Gate to Rome* from 2009. I have, following Hill, chosen to use the Pinyin throughout this dissertation but without the tonal indications as this is not relevant to ancient Chinese. Some of the quoted texts do however use the older Wade-Giles system of transcriptions and where confusion may occur I have added a Pinyin transcription in brackets. Where relevant I have also included the Chinese character itself. The Chinese measurement *li* (里) also appears in this text and as explained by Hill the Han dynasty *li* was 415.8 meters.⁵² When giving measurements in *li* I have tried to include a rough equivalent in m or km based on my own calculation or, in the case of the *Hou Hanshu*, those done by Hill.

⁵¹ Romgard 2008: 11

⁵² Hill 2009: xx

2.0 Geography and climate of the Tarim Basin

In a discussion of the states of the Tarim Basin it is prudent to give a brief introduction of its geography. This is important because most readers, having had no personal experience of the area, will be in no position to assume knowledge of how the climate, conditions and terrain severely restrict or indeed dictate the types and qualities of the societies that can be found there. There are also some discrepancies between the Tarim Basin visited by Xuanzang in the 7th century and the one in which Aurel Stein visited in the 20th century. This chapter aims to explore the climatic and geographic conditions of the Tarim Basin, starting with the climate, then discussing mountains, the Taklamakan, oases and associated rivers, and finally the infrastructure of the Basin. First however the discrepancies seen in various descriptions of the Tarim Basin must be tackled.

2.1 Changes in the climate

The Tarim Basin has undergone several climatic changes, merely in the last century. An obvious example is the disappearance of Lop Nur, the saline-lake into which the Tarim River used to run in the 20th century. What was once a lake is now but a vast saline desert, utterly uninhabitable, and this is but one example of the common problem of desertification. As pointed out by Ruiping Zu in the article *Environmental changes of oases at southern margin of Tarim Basin, China* the Tarim Basin has been an arid region for at least the past 2000 years and fundamentally the climatic conditions has remained unchanged in this 4000 year period, though there are wetter and drier phases.⁵³ According to what he calls the oasis evolution law, there are essentially three courses for the desertification of the Tarim Basin and the disappearance of oases, natural courses such as climate change and river realignment, warfare and human overexploitation.⁵⁴

Climate change manifests as drier phases when the rivers fail to reach as far into the desert as previously or change course entirely, cursing the abandonment of previously fertile land. This, Ruiping suggests, was probably what happened to Cadota in the fifth and sixth millennium.⁵⁵ This process probably also caused the route skirting the southern edge of the Taklamakan and its associated oases communities, such as Cadota or Khotan, to be pushed south by as much as 100 km⁵⁶, as shown by the “belt” of ruins north of Keriya and Khotan,

⁵³ Ruiping, Qianzhao, Jianjun and Mingrui 2003: 641

⁵⁴ Ibid: 641-643

⁵⁵ Ibid: 641

⁵⁶ di Cosmo 2000: 394

stretching from Endere in the east to Dandan-olik in the west, most of which were probably inhabited at some point in antiquity. These processes are however very slow.

The second type of change manifested especially in the late centuries of the first millennium CE when protracted warfare between the Chinese Tang dynasty and the Tibetan kingdoms ravaged much of the Tarim Basin, but as Ruiping emphasises the changes wrought by warfare are not permanent as they involve the destruction of irrigation systems which can technically be rebuilt.⁵⁷ The third and most rapid changes were brought about by human exploitation of the water and soil in the oasis regions. As Ruipings report shows very clearly this process has for the most part taken place in the last fifty years, a period that has seen dramatic climatic changes.⁵⁸ It is especially this latest period which has seen the extensive desertification of the Tarim Basin and as shall be seen above things must have been rather different in Han times.

Fan Ye, in his section on the geography of the western regions, notes the fertility of the region stating that in the eastern parts of the Basin near Yiwu [Hami] one could grow five types of grains, plus mulberry, hemp and grapes.⁵⁹ He then states that “all these places are fertile.”⁶⁰ In other words at the time of Ban Chao’s son Ban Yong [?-128 CE], whose reports Fan Ye claims he based himself upon⁶¹, the polities of the Tarim Basin mostly sustained themselves through agriculture. Ban Gu goes into even greater detail and notes in his introduction to chapter 96A, *Memoir of the Western Regions*, that, “The states of the Western Regions for the most part [have inhabitants who are] settled on the soil, with walled cities, cultivated fields and domesticated animals. Their customs differ from those of the Hsiung-nu and Wu-sun.”⁶²

Despite the notes upon the fertility of the inhabited parts of the region the Chinese sources often emphasise the desolation and dangers of the region, both the desert and the mountains surrounding it. Ban Gu quotes what the advisor Tu Ch’in is supposed to have told supreme general Wang Feng [?-22 BC] concerning the route travelled from China to the Indus Valley,

But some of the states may be poor or small and unable to provide supplies, and some may be refractory and unwilling to do so. So our envoys clasp the emblems of mighty

⁵⁷ Ruiping, Qianzhao, Jianjun and Mingrui 2003: 642

⁵⁸ Ibid: 343

⁵⁹ Fan Ye, 88 (15)

⁶⁰ Fan Ye, 88 (15)

⁶¹ Fan Ye, 88 (13)

⁶² Ban Gu, 96A (73)

Han and starve to death in the hills and valleys. They may beg, but there is nothing for them to get, and after ten or twenty days man and beast lie abandoned in the wastes never to return.⁶³

As shall be seen in the section on modern geography it is especially the eastern reaches of the desert that suffers from an extreme lack of hydration and the amount of salt in the ground. This fact is also noted by Fan Ye who tells us that already in antiquity Lop Nur was called the “Salt Swamp”.⁶⁴ Ban Gu furthermore notes that the land around Lop Nur, in the section of a state called Shanshan, is sandy and salt.

One may wonder how a meaningful study of the Tarim Basin’s climate in the antiquity can be undertaken. But, as Ruiping points out, the climatic conditions of the Han period and those of the late 19th early 20th century were probably not too dissimilar, both wetter phases which supported considerable populations.⁶⁵ Much of the following description will for this reason be based upon the observations of sir Aurel Stein, who describes the region during his expeditions in 1900.

2.2 Climate and precipitation

As the name suggests the Tarim Basin is a depression in the landscape surrounded on four sides by mountains and covering about 906500 square kilometres. To the north it is enclosed by the Tian Shan mountain range, to the west by the Pamir Mountains, to the south by the Kunlun range and to the east by the Altun Mountains. The Tarim Basin is extremely dry due to the mountains blocking moist air from the sea; the annual precipitation being generally less than a hundred millimetres with only on average 33mm in the western and 10mm in the eastern part of the Taklamakan desert making it the driest area in Eurasia. The climate in and around the Taklamakan is continental with a temperature profile dominated by extremes, an annual maximum of 39°C at the deserts eastern edge and a winter with below -20°C. Northerly winds dominate the region and meet near the centre creating a complex system of air currents, something which can be clearly observed in the complicated dune topography of the Taklamakan. Due to the strong winds, large quantities of dust rise from the desert and cover it in a shroud of dust-clouds for almost the entire year. Dust storms are also frequent, particularly in spring when hurricane-force winds fill the atmosphere with dust up to an

⁶³ Ban Gu, 96A (110)

⁶⁴ Fan Ye, 88 (13)

⁶⁵ Ruiping, Qianzhao, Jianjun and Mingrui 2003: 642

altitude of near 4000 meters.⁶⁶⁷ Sir Aurel Stein during his travel and excavation work describes some of the sandstorms he experienced, called Buran by the natives. He notes how these sandstorms frequently change direction, sometimes even between morning and evening, and thus making it near impossible to guard against it sifting into everything. The dust-haze also served to intensify the oppressive heat of the desert as the sand in the air reflects the rays during daytime and courses an equally sharp drop in temperature as the sun goes down.⁶⁸

2.3 Surrounding mountains

Around the Tarim Basin steep mountains rise and these surrounding mountains are in fact connected and quite similar in physiography, the Kunlun and Tian Shan forking out from the Pamir range in the west and running south and north respectively of the Tarim Basin, the only exception being the Alan Mountains in the extreme east. As they all rise to at least 4000 meters, the tallest peaks reaching over 7000 meters in both the Tian Shan and the Kunlun mountain ranges, the surrounding mountains form a natural bulwark around the basin, especially to the south where the Tibetan plateau and the Himalaya form a nearly insurmountable barrier.

The eastern Pamirs delimit the Tarim basin to the west and are as much a highland region as a mountain range. Indeed, the name Pamir in the local language refers to an area of high undulating grassland. The mountains of the eastern Pamir, with their mostly rounded contours, rarely exceed 1800 meters above their foundations despite reaching an average of 6100 meter above sea-level. Wide flat-bottomed valleys with quiet meandering rivers make for fertile areas where cultivation and husbandry sustains the population.⁶⁹ Aurel Stein describes open grassy plains stretching out before him with villages surrounded by cultivated fields.⁷⁰ The Tian Shan range, characterized by alpine type mountains, sloping sharply and with glaciers along their crests, is dominated by a combination of mountain ranges and intervening valleys and depressions, many of which are forested or steppe-like in character. Good, and for this dissertation relevant examples of these valley systems, include the Ill river valley depression, which unlike most of Central Asia is fairly moist and fertile, and the Ferghana valley with a climate is comparable to the Tarim Basin. The peaks of the Tian Shan are also much higher than the Pamir's the tallest peak, Victory Peak, reaching 7439 meter in

⁶⁶ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/583570/Tarim-Basin> Last checked 26.10.12

⁶⁷ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/581237/Takla-Makan-Desert> Last checked 15.10.12

⁶⁸ Stein 1903: 451

⁶⁹ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/440419/Pamirs?anchor=ref495336> checked 30.11.2012

⁷⁰ Stein 1903: 85

the central cluster and as such forms a far more impressive obstacle. Especially the central chain, due north of the Tarim Basin, is near impassable, the crossings lying in the eastern and western ends of the mountains. Another defining trait of the Tian Shan is the altitude difference between the outer mountain ridges and the plains at their feet, meaning that streams running down from the mountains commonly form sharp gorges as they plunge down the mountain sides before fanning out into wide fertile deposits of silt and mud, ideal for irrigation.⁷¹

This phenomenon also holds true for the Kunlun range to the south. It is given a thorough description by Aurel Stein as he surveyed the area and noted that it is, on the side facing the Tarim Basin in particular, dominated by deep-cut valleys and serrated ridges descending from the main range, created and cut by streams that run down town towards the basin. The majority of the gorges are covered by gravel and coarse sand, creating a cold and desolate landscape with scarcely any vegetation. The valleys along the rivers however do provide grazing grounds for sheep and yak, and in the village Karanghu-tagh Stein found cultivated fields of oats, though he comments they seemed scarcely sufficient to feed the village population.⁷² At lower elevations bogs, moors and saline depressions are common. Much like the Tarim Basin itself the Kunlun Mountains are also subjected to temperature extremes and very strong winds, Stein also notes how the dust-storms of the desert reach into the northern fringes of the mountains.⁷³

2.4 Of deserts, rivers and oases

The Taklamakan, one of the world largest sand-deserts, dominates the centre of the Basin and covers an area of approximately 320000 square kilometres filled with little more than sand-dunes. The dunes vary in shape and type; the largest being pyramidal dunes raising up to 300 meters but more common are the hollow dunes between 30 to 150 meters, formed by the wind conditions of the basin and forming natural vast networks and large sand-dune chains, this being especially predominant in the central and eastern part. At the edge of the desert cluster sand-dunes with sparse vegetation and clayey regions of disconnected sand dunes dominate. Sir Aurel Stein likens the Taklamkan to a sea of sand noting how it resembles an ocean due to its wavelike dunes which predominantly run from the northwest to the southeast.⁷⁴

⁷¹ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/595280/Tien-Shan> checked 28.02.2013

⁷² Stein 1903: 206-215

⁷³ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/325007/Kunlun-Mountains> checked 30.11.2012

⁷⁴ Stein 1903: 154 and 278

Plant life in general is extremely sparse in the Taklamakan, except for a few depressions amongst the dunes where desert vegetation like tamarisk and reed grow, the thick strata of moving sand means that almost the entire region is without plant cover.⁷⁵ Stein, in his account of his first expedition, states that vegetation in the form of tamarisk and scrubs continues over about one day's march from the Yurung-kash river after which it ceases to exist.

The Tarim Basin is in its entirety drained by the Tarim River, hence the name of the basin, and its many tributaries all flowing from west to east. The Tarim starts out as the Yarakand and Kashgar rivers in the western part of the basin, draining water from the Pamir and Kunlun mountain ranges, and flows northeast along the foot of the Tian Shan where it is joined by the Aksu and Kothan rivers and then finally reaches the saline Lop Nur Lake in the east. The volume of water carried by the Tarim River and its tributaries varies considerably year by year and their beds and banks shift frequently, sometimes completely changing their paths. In fact only one of its tributaries, the Aksu River, flows the entire year. As shown by ancient riverbeds, especially from the south, crossing the Taklamakan this was probably not the case in antiquity. Groundwater also provides some sustenance in certain areas of the desert where Aurel Stein notes hillocks are covered in tamarisk scrub. At these points sub-soil water can be found at an average of 5 to 7 meters depth.⁷⁶ Due to irrigation and damming in the 20th century the lower course of the Tarim and Lop Nur completely dried out by the 1970s leaving a vast salt encrusted flat where it once lay. The vegetation within the Tarim Basin is mainly to be found along the rivers, shrubs and stunted trees at the edge of the desert and thin forests of poplar in the river valleys. These stretches along the rivers are also suitable for irrigation and agriculture.⁷⁷ Aurel Stein's description of the landscape around the oasis towns and rivers remind him of the Hungarian Alföld plain and give an idea of the prevailing conditions, with vast fields of wheat stretched out towards the horizon, hedged by poplars and mulberry trees.⁷⁸ Wheat, rice, millet, oats and Indian corn are the main cereals with fields of lucerne providing fodder for the many animals while in modern times cotton is also an important product. In addition to poplars and mulberry trees as recounted by Stein, he also notes the plum-tree, other fruit trees and the weeping willow in and around the oasis towns.⁷⁹ Today many of the oasis towns grow fruits, for example Kucha is famous for its pears, figs, grapes

⁷⁵ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/581237/Takla-Makan-Desert> Last checked 15.10.12

⁷⁶ Ibid: 275

⁷⁷ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/583578/Tarim-River#ref280439> Sjekka 29.10.2012

⁷⁸ Stein 1903: 153

⁷⁹ Stein 1903: 443-445

and melons and Kashgar for its melons, grapes, peaches, apricots and cherries and also for the olives that are commonly grown there.

Areas of cultivated and fertile land around the rivers can in fact be quite large, for example the area of the Khotan oasis between the Kara-kash and the Yurung-kash rivers cover an area of more than 540 square kilometres of arable land while the cultivated area of modern Khotan covers roughly 77 km from east to west. Even larger stretches of cultivated land make up the modern Yarkand oasis with its 3,210 square kilometres along the Yarkand River⁸⁰ and the Kashgar oasis covering an area of roughly the same size, approximately 3,300 square kilometres. The oases on the northern side of the Taklamakan are just as large, the Kucha oasis for example irrigates more than 2800 square kilometres and the Karashar oasis roughly the same area.⁸¹ This is quite unlike the tiny palm strewed clumps of vegetation often associated with the term oasis. But these measurements are of the modern oases and the area of arable land are, due to the use of modern irrigation and reservoirs, probably larger than in antiquity, and yet it illustrates the amount of land that can be made productive by drawing water from the rivers of the Tarim Basin. Aurel Stein, after visiting the Khotan oasis in 1900-1901, also comments upon the likely size of the ancient oasis.

Despite the oasis being at most 32 kilometres from east to west at the time of his visit he comments that it is only a lack of manpower and population that limits it to this size and he estimates that in ancient times the oasis must have been far larger, this to account for the ruins and remains of communities he found nearly 25 kilometre north-east of Khotan.⁸² The Khotan oasis is in many ways archetypical for the Taklamakan oases, both in the way it is irrigated and the natural conditions. The Khotan oasis rests upon a natural plateau running along the foot of the Kunlun range for a distance of about 30 kilometres and rises significantly above the surrounding desert. This plateau is created by the two rivers the Kara-kash and the Yurung-kash, each supplying the oasis with water after depositing their continuous supply of silt upon exiting the narrow mountain gorges. The layers of loess, a slit-sized sediment, is then carried off by the wind and settles where the ground contains sufficient moisture to bind it, a process that has over time formed the terrace of loess upon which the oasis sits. Loess is extremely fertile and is found in many of the agriculturally most productive regions of the world.⁸³ The roads he encountered in the oases were also invariably lined by trees, flanked by fields and fruit gardens. Though the fertility of the soil is important, agriculture would still be

⁸⁰ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/652067/Yarkand> Checked 18.01.2013

⁸¹ Measured by means of satellite pictures provided by Google-Earth.

⁸² Stein 1975: 126

⁸³ Stein 1975: 123-127

impossible without irrigation supplying the fields with water but Khotan is also aided by the topographic character of the loess deposits. The natural height difference and slope created by this terrace not only allow the area between the rivers to be fully irrigated but make it possible for water to be distributed and carried a significant distance from the river. As an example Stein cites the village of Lop which draws its water from the Yurung-kash more than 25 kilometres to the west.⁸⁴ The need for irrigation also means that agriculture in the region necessarily relies upon a large workforce.

2.5 Infrastructure

Modern roads and other infrastructure has perhaps made the Tarim Basin far more accessible than before but studying satellite photos shows that the routes and access points are still severely restricted by the natural conditions and especially by the surrounding mountains. Approaching from the east the Hexi (Gansu) corridor provides a natural entrance to the Basin from the area around the upper Yellow River Valley. This “corridor” runs between the Kunlun Mountains to the south and Gobi desert to the north, and is an area of mostly barren flats with forests and greener areas along the slopes of the mountain.⁸⁵ The other “easy” access to the Tarim Basin is on the western edge where caravans can cross over the Pamir and Karakoram ranges both westwards and southwards. Frank Harold in his article *Over the High Passes* states that besides the multitude of smaller routes used by locals there are essentially six routes going west and south, three to the Indian subcontinent, two to ancient Bactria i.e. today’s Afghanistan and one to Sogdiana, as well as one going northwards.⁸⁶ They usually follow the rivers and passes through the mountains which, as noted earlier, are comparatively smaller in the west.

There are three main routes to cross from India; the southernmost of these routes, the one leading directly to the Indian plains, is the famous Karakoram route which for a caravan would take roughly sixty days to cross. It lies directly south of Yarkand and after crossing the great Himalayas themselves the caravan would descend to Leh on the Indus in Ladakh. Further west in today’s Pakistan lies the less arduous but more dangerous Gilgit route. From Gilgit the route makes its way north past Tashkurgan to end near Kashgar, passing through the land of Hunza renowned for its caravan robbers. Harold quoting Skrine states about the gorges of the lower Karakorum that they are “as difficult a tract of country as can be found

⁸⁴ Ibid: 126

⁸⁵ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/311386/Gansu/71499/Land?anchor=ref591764> checked 22.02.2013

⁸⁶ Harold 2009: 76

anywhere in the world".⁸⁷ The third route from India runs up along the Kabul River by way of Chitral and crosses the Hindukush at the Baroghil Pass which gives access to the area of Wakhan, the upper headwaters of the river Oxus (Amu Darya). Following the Oxus and then crossing the Pamir this route then reaches Tashkurgan and from there runs on to Kashgar.⁸⁸

Running westwards are the two main routes into Bactria and to Samarkand in ancient Sogdiana; the southernmost one being the Faizabad route going from Faizabad by way of the previously mentioned Wakhan gorges to reach Kashgar. A far more inviting route however is the one that runs up the Kyzyl Ssu valley in today's Tadjikistan and crosses the grassy and low Irkeshatam pass before going onwards to Kashgar across the Pamir Highland. Both British col. Henry Yule and Stein argued that this would have been an important route for traffic in ancient times, based on the ease of crossing and the rich pastures in the valley which would have been ideal for caravans.⁸⁹

The northern Tian Shan range can also be crossed, mainly in its eastern and western ends. In the east one can cross north of Turfan through the mountains and into the massive Dzungarian depression which affords access to the vast Eurasian steppe. In the west are the two last crossings, one going northwest and one due north. From Samarkand travellers can travel along Syr Darya up the Ferghana valley before crossing the Terek pass southwards. The route then turns east and crosses the previously mentioned Irkeshatam pass to end in Kashgar. The final route in the western Tian Shan crosses either the Bedel pass near Aksu or the Muzart pass further northeast between Aksu and Kucha, both passes entering into the steppes near lake Issyk Kul. The Tian Shan are rugged and high, making both crossings challenging prospects even for well-equipped and supplied travellers while the Muzart pass is open only in summer.⁹⁰

2.6 Conclusion

Based on the comparatively similar descriptions of conditions in the first century and 20th century, I will maintain that studying the modern conditions of the Tarim Basin is a worthwhile task, since much can be gleaned from such a study. The exact locations of places and their local conditions have, as shown by for example Keriya, changed considerably with time, but on a more general level it seems that the oases, river valleys, mountains and indeed

⁸⁷ Harold 2009: 78

⁸⁸ Ibid: 76-78

⁸⁹ Ibid: 78-79

⁹⁰ Ibid: 79

even the routes have undergone what are comparatively small changes. The oases still rely greatly upon irrigation and the life-giving water of the rivers, the mountains still form massive barriers and the desert is still as lethal today as it was for the envoys of Han.

Both in ancient times and today the Tarim Basin contain regions, such as the Taklamakan, which would have been impossible to cross without local guides and knowledge of how to survive. Furthermore, as the size of the oasis areas is much dependent upon irrigation, the area would have been far more arid without human efforts. But through these irrigation efforts a sustainable basis for comparatively large human settlements were created and as explored in this chapter they provided a stable and varied base of sustenance. Finally discussion on the various routes into the Tarim Basin has shown that they were, and are, very few in number and, as shall be seen, closeness to and control over these important crossings would be a factor contributing to the prosperity of a polity. These conditions must be kept in mind as the next chapter discusses the polities found within the Tarim Basin in antiquity.

3.0 Polities in and around the Tarim Basin

Having explored the natural conditions of the Tarim Basin this chapter will be dedicated to the polities within and around the Tarim Basin and the question of what kind of societies they were and the kind of political structures they interacted with. Initially, when looking at the Tarim polities as presented in the Chinese sources, the term City-state leaps to the fore as a good term with which to describe them, but is there any basis for calling them that? In order to better structure the debate of this chapter and to present a model against which to measure the Tarim societies, while also answering whether they can be called city-states or not, I have decided to base myself upon Mogens H. Hansen's concept of a city-state.⁹¹ Mogens Hansen is one of the leading scholars on the Greek polis and city-states in general and, in the book *A Comparative Study of Thirty City-State Cultures*, which he edited and contributed to, the Tarim Basin polities are listed amongst thirty identified City State Cultures from throughout world history.⁹² Hansen provides a list of twelve broad points common for many city-states that I have chosen to sum up in the following way:

1. City-states are micro-states; the territory they control is comparatively small and has an urban centre that is also the economic centre. The majority of the population lives

⁹¹ M Hansen 2000: Introduction

⁹² Ibid: 21

in this urban centre surrounded by a mainly agrarian hinterland. The population also is small, not usually exceeding a five-digit population total.⁹³

2. The city-state has its own army and the urban centre is commonly fortified.⁹⁴
3. City-states have a highly institutionalized and centralized government within the urban centre. They are not necessarily independent but have internal self-government, its own army and control within its own territories.⁹⁵
4. Economically the city-state is not self-sufficient, as it has a high level of labour division and specialization, and it is characterized by a high degree of economic interaction with its neighbours in order to obtain resources.⁹⁶
5. City-states are characterized by a political identity centred on the city-state as opposed to an ethnic identity often shared by neighbouring polities. The name city-state is also either identical to or derived from the name of the urban centre.⁹⁷

As Hansen also emphasises that the polity sketched out above is of an ideal set of parameters, but a useful base for comparison none the less.⁹⁸ Based on these five points the first subchapter will deal with the “political” situation in the Tarim Basin at the start of the Common Era, or rather with describing where different political entities could be found, the size of their territory and population, and what kind of relationship they shared, focusing on the questions of centres vs. periphery and discussing which polities dominated the Tarim Basin. The second subchapter discusses the “Walled Cities”, meaning the city-like entities within the Tarim Basin, and tries to give an account of what kind of entities they were and how they compare to Hansen’s ideal type. The final subchapter focuses on the nomadic or semi-nomadic groups in and around the Tarim Basin, while discussing what kind of entities they were, how they interacted with other Tarim polities and to consider if it is possible to talk of nomadic polities.

3.1 The Tarim Basin – The political situation

According to both Fan Ye and Ban Gu, at the start of the common era, there were thirty-six kingdoms in the parts of the Western Region that were under Chinese control during the reign of Emperor Wu [140-87 BCE], roughly the Tarim Basin, and the majority of what Ban Gu

⁹³ Ibid: 17-18

⁹⁴ Ibid: 18

⁹⁵ Ibid: 18-19

⁹⁶ Ibid: 18

⁹⁷ Ibid: 18

⁹⁸ Ibid: 17

terms “Walled Cities”. [Map.1-2] These later split up until there were more than fifty smaller entities, according to Ban Gu⁹⁹ and fifty-five according to Fan Ye.¹⁰⁰ Both Ban Gu and Fan Ye, in their respective chapters on the Western Regions, give martial-like, concise accounts of these places; being perhaps influenced by their source material largely drawn as it is from the reports of the Protector Generals of the Western Regions (59 BCE-16 CE), Ban Chao (32-102 CE) and his son Ban Yong (?-c. 128 CE), detailing distances, populations, sizes of their armies, resources and government. The likely political situation of the era may be based on such material; while giving a sense of the size of the polities; which of them acted as centres and which were more peripheral. In the table found in appendix I the details from the *Hanshu* and the *Hou Hanshu* are compiled, as well as those of Yu Huan’s *Weilue*. Although he does not give a full account of the western territories in the *Weilue*, he does give a detailed list of which polities were dependencies upon whom.¹⁰¹ While a full overview of the names of the various polities, the given distances and populations can be found in the table, I will mainly focus on identifying centres and the areas they may have controlled. For the sake of convenience all general references to distances, inhabitants etc can be found in the table.

3.1.1 Size and resources

Population-wise the table reveals a wide variety of size, from the 81000 individuals of the Tarim’s largest polity Qiuci [Kucha] to the 194 individuals given as Danhuan’s population. The majority of the polities do however end up somewhere between these two extremes with four digit numbers for the smaller polities and five digits for the larger. Following the Chinese accounts moving southwest and then northeast, the major polities were Shanshan [Lop nor area], Jumi [Keriya], Yutian [Khotan], Suoju [Yarkand], Shule [Kashgar], Kumo [Aksu], Qiuci [Kucha], Yanqi [Karashar] and, if some leeway is given, the two Jushi kindoms [Turfan area]. All of these appear in the *Hanshu* account, though only Yutian, Suoju, Shule, Yanqi and the Further Jushi feature prominently as large polities, with over ten thousand inhabitants in the *Hou Hanshu*. The *Weilue* mentions Shanshan, Yutian, Yanqi, Qiuci, Shule and Further Jushi as the polities to which the others are dependencies.¹⁰² The disappearance of many smaller polities in the latter two works probably reflects a gradual rise of larger polities, conquering and taking control over the others, eventually leaving only the five as described by

⁹⁹ Ban Gu, 96A (71)

¹⁰⁰ Fan Ye, 88 (3)

¹⁰¹ In the table I have not included the states outside the Tarim Basin or across the surrounding mountains, nor have I included the Wusun.

¹⁰² Yu Huan, Sec.9 and 5

the *Weilue*. This supposition fits well with the historical narrative as presented by the Chinese historians, for example the two invasions of Jumi [Keriya] by Yutian [Yutian]. It is peculiar that so many seemingly important polities do not get their own in the account of Fan Ye, such as Qiuci which in the *Hanshu* is given as the largest polity amongst the “Walled Cities” or Shanshan which must have been in close contact with the Chinese throughout the period. It may be that the reports upon which he based his statistics had no new information on them, or perhaps parts of the original texts have been lost, but either way they are still present in his narrative, both seemingly important, especially Qiuci [Kucha] which is frequently mentioned as a powerful state.

With the exception of Shanshan, described as salty, unsuited for agriculture and that the people led semi-nomadic lives, all of the major polities mentioned above by the *Hanshu*, were situated near major oases and do in fact between them cover all of the major oases found in the Tarim Basin, both in our time and at the time of Aurel Stein’s expedition. All of them, with the same exception as above, also lay by rivers which probably were a condition for sustaining a population of the size described by the Chinese historians. If one can assume that the territory controlled by each polity was roughly the equivalent of the oasis it occupied, which seems plausible as there are no examples of two polities around one oasis or river, then the territory of each polity would fit snugly with Hansen’s ideal type. He emphasises that one city-state would usually control hinterland roughly one day’s walk from the urban centre¹⁰³, which is indeed what seems to have been the case with many of the Tarim polities in the first century CE. Furthermore, it is also telling that most of the major polities, with the exception of Shule [Kashgar] and the two Jushi [Turfan area], is cited as having one or more important resources within their territory. Qiuci [Kucha] for example made iron and lead while Yutian [Kothan] produced “an abundance” of jade stone for which this city has always been famous. Certainly the control and a presumed monopoly over these important resources, must have been important in giving these polities their leading role in the area.

3.1.2 Centres and polity constellations

Whether or not the “lesser” polities described by Ban Gu were controlled by their larger neighbours during the first century CE is a question without a definitive answer. It would seem at least and would be logical to assume, given the population differences, that the larger polities exercised a great deal of power over the smaller ones. Looking at them in turn it is

¹⁰³ M Hansen 2000: 17

natural to start with Shanshan [Lop Nur region] which, according to the *Weilue*, dominated the eastern part of the southern route as far as Jingjue [Cadota/Niya], including Qiemo [Cherchan] and Xiaoyuan [Tura], during the time of the Wei dynasty (220-265 CE) and possibly earlier.[Map.3] This seems quite plausible, based on their respective given populations and distances, and is supported by the *Hou Hanshu* where it is noted in the chapter concerning Yutian [Khotan] that; “Meanwhile, the king of Shanshan [Lop Nur region] has also begun to prosper. From then on, these two kingdoms [Yutian and Shanshan] were the only major ones on the Southern Route in the whole of the region to the east of the Congling [Pamirs].”¹⁰⁴

This passage is mentioned in the context of Yutian [Khotan] defeating Souju [Yarkand] in 61 CE so that would place the prosperity and rise of Shanshan [Lop Nur region] to about this period. The *Hou Hanshu* further states that it was after this, and the death of Xian king of Souju [Yarkand] the following year 62 CE, that the various polities started attacking and subduing each other and he reports Shanshan [Lop Nur region] taking control over Xiao Yuan [Tura], Jingjue [Niya] and Qiemo [Cherchan] as well as Ronglu [Minfeng] which the *Weilue* lists as a dependency of Yutian [Khotan].

After Shanshan the next major polity encountered along the southern route was Jumi [Keriya] according to the *Hanshu* with a population slightly larger than its close neighbour Yutian [Khotan]. Its only apparent dependency however could be Qule which supposedly lay to the south but close to Jumi [Keriya]. Commentators to the *Hanshu* however added that Qule was annexed by Yutian [Khotan], something also mentioned in the *Hou Hanshu*, before disappearing into the desert, a fate that seems to almost have befallen Jumi [Keriya] as well.¹⁰⁵ The *Hou Hanshu* mentions two separate invasions of Jumi [Keriya] by Yutian [Khotan], one in 129 CE and one in 175 CE during which the king of Yutian [Khotan] placed his son on the throne only for the Chinese to depose him on both occasions.¹⁰⁶ Both invasions were only stopped by Chinese intervention however, and it seems to indicate something about the respective strength of the two polities. As the table shows the *Hou Hanshu* indicates a dramatic fall in Jumi’s [Keriya] population of more than 50 percent, an astonishing number that would be hard to explain as none of the sources mention any reason for such a decrease in population, both invasions happening at dates later than the likely date of the reports upon which the population figures are thought to be based. This drastic fall however is most likely

¹⁰⁴ Fan Ye, 88 (17)

¹⁰⁵ Ban Gu, 96A (96)

¹⁰⁶ Fan Ye, 88 (17)

due to a textual error in the Hanshu, as John Hill points out in his notes on the Hou Hanshu with the mistake likely being that er 二 has been given in place of yi 一.¹⁰⁷ Should this be the case then Jumi [Keriya] would in the Hanshu have a population of 10040 individuals as opposed to 20040 making the dominance of Yutian [Khotan] far more believable. Yet even with such a revised population figure Jumi [Keriya] does not seem to fall under the sway of Yutian [Khotan] before the end of the second century CE as no source mentions it as a dependency of Yutian [Khotan] before the *Weilue* in the third century.

Yutian [Khotan] is the third of the major polities found in the Hanshu and, in addition to the previously discussed Jumi [Keriya], the *Weilue* lists Qule [South of Keriya], Pikang [Pishan/Guma] and Ronglu [Minfeng] as its dependencies during the third century. [Map.4] The *Hou Hanshu* states that it together with Shanshan [Lop Nur region] formed the major powers along the Southern Route after 61 CE, something the *Weilue* confirms. Yutian [Khotan] was strategically located between the two rivers of Karakash and Yurungkash, in an area both rich in fertile loess soil and with an abundance of the extremely precious jade, upon which more will be said later. Considering the location and size of the surrounding polities it seemed more probable they would be dominated by the far more populous Yutian [Khotan]. The *Hou Hanshu* goes on to state that Qule [South of Keriya] and Pikang [Pishan/Guma] was conquered and fully occupied by Yutian [Khotan] in 62 CE giving us a likely terminus post quem for Yutian's [Khotan] assertion of its dominance over these polities.¹⁰⁸ This left Yutian [Khotan] in control of a large area encompassing most of the major oases along the southern route, from Ronglu [Minfeng] in the east to Pikang [Pishan/Guma] in the west.

The fourth major polity encountered in the text of the Hanshu, moving westwards, is Souju [Yarkand] on the Yarkand River. [Map.5] None of the text mentions Souju [Yarkand] as ever having any dependencies with the exception of in the reign of king Xian who, according to the *Hou Hanshu*, first subdued Jumi [Keriya] and Xiye [Karghalik] before he came to dominate the entire Tarim Basin.¹⁰⁹ King Xian will be discussed later, but the possibility of Souju [Yarkand] dominating Xiye [Karghalik] is worth pursuing as both the difference in population and geographical conditions, Xiye [Karghalik] being just south of Souju [Yarkand], make such a scenario seem likely. Yet as said none of the sources mention such a relationship of subordination rather it is noted in the *Hanshu* that the people of Xiye [Karghalik] are nomads and in the section of Souju [Yarkand] there is also an official

¹⁰⁷ Hill 2009: 185

¹⁰⁸ Fan Ye, 88 (3)

¹⁰⁹ Fan Ye, 88 (35)

mentioned who bears the title “Master of Pei His-yeh”¹¹⁰ which translates imprecisely to “Master of the defence against the Xiye”. This indicates in my opinion a rather different relationship between the two polities, where it was the nomadic Xiye who threatened Souju [Yarkand] and not vice versa. Towards the end of the first century CE the sources also show a weakening of Souju [Yarkand] until it in turn is made a dependency. In the section of Souju [Yarkand] in the *Hou Hanshu* there is a description of how Guangde king of Yutian [Khotan] annexed Souju [Yarkand] for a short period before the Xiongnu intervened and he had to submit and release it, when it then came under the dominance of Shule [Kashgar].¹¹¹ The *Hou Hanshu* actually suggests that this last move was done willingly, though this can hardly be verified, as Souju [Yarkand] sought protection from its powerful neighbour in the southeast.

It was this “annexation” of Souju [Yarkand] which according to the *Hou Hanshu* was what propels Shule [Kashgar], the fifth of the major polities in the *Hanshu*, to a position comparable with Yutian [Khotan] and Qiuci [Kucha] as a powerful polity within the Tarim Basin.¹¹² Shule before these events, at the beginning of the second century CE, does not seem to have had any dependencies, though it was certainly a hub for trade on the east-west routes as all three historians testify. The only exception could possibly be a location mentioned in the *Hou Hanshu* called Zhenzhong, identified with the Arach area northeast of Maralbashi, but which seems to have been more of a fortified post than an actual oasis community; all that is mentioned of it is that it was attacked for more than forty days without falling, leading one to believe that such was the case.¹¹³ Another possible dependency could also be Weitou [Akqi] to the northeast, but the description of the nomadic Weitou [Akqi] in the *Hanshu* states that due to the mountain roads being the only roads south to Shule [Kashgar] communication is not possible and this makes it unlikely that Shule [Kashgar] held any sway to the northeast. During the second century CE the fortunes of Shule [Kashgar] must have changed dramatically as the *Weilue* gives no less than twelve kingdoms as its dependencies, including Zhenzhong [Arach], the nearby Souju [Yarkand] and Xiye [Karghalik]. Several of these kingdoms also mentioned in the *Hanshu* are assumed to be located in the Pamir ranges to the west and southwest such as Yinai [Tashkurgan] and Manli [Modern Karasul], as well as some previously unknown kingdoms which seem to belong to the same general area such as Juandu [Irkeshtam] and Xiuxiu [Karakavak].

¹¹⁰ Ban Gu, 96A (139)

¹¹¹ Fan Ye, 88 (41)

¹¹² Fan Ye, 88 (43)

¹¹³ Fan Ye, 88 (45)

Northeast of Shule [Kashgar] crossing the hills of Bel-tagh and its southern offshoots lay the sixth major polity according to *Hanshu*'s listed population, namely Gumo [Aksu] in the Aksu region.[Map.6] In the narrative of the *Hanshu* Gumo [Aksu] appears to have been the strongest and certainly the most populous polity in the Aksu oases and it describes how, at the time of Wang Mang's civil war in China (9-23 CE), the king of Gumo [Aksu] Cheng killed the king of neighbouring Wensu [Urchturpan] and annexed his polity.¹¹⁴ It is also possible that Gumo [Aksu] came to control the area of Weitou [Akqi] to the southwest as it constituted an important strategic area, controlling the roads westward to Kashgar and also the passes into the Ferghana valley, but it appears that at some point during the first or second century CE Gumo [Aksu] itself fell under the domination of Qiuci [Kucha]; population-wise the largest of the polities mentioned by Ban Gu in the Tarim Basin. No date is given for this event, but it must have happened before the third century CE when Yu Huan wrote the *Weilue*, as he included Gumo [Aksu], Wensu [Uchturpan] and Weitou [Akqi] in his list of dependencies under Qiuci [Kucha].¹¹⁵ Neither the *Hanshu* nor the *Hou Hanshu* gives detailed accounts of Qiuci [Kucha] in the first two centuries CE, the *Hanshu* giving but an overview and the *Hou Hanshu* not even providing it with its own section, but based on Qiuci's [Kucha] appearance in the sections dedicated to the other polities, it appears to have been a very important polity, for example it attacked and conquered Shule [Kashgar] in year 73 CE prompting the Chinese to intervene.¹¹⁶ Qiuci [Kucha] and Yutian [Khotan] are listed by Fan Ye as major polities of such magnitude that Shule [Kashgar] and Suoju [Yarkand] had to unite to compete. After gaining control of both the Kucha and Aksu oases this should come as no surprise however, and together with Yanqi [Karashar] Qiuci [Kucha] would have constituted the major polity along the northern route.

Yanqi [Karashar] by the Baghrash Kul, was separated from Qiuci [Kucha] by hazardous and easily defensible passes and surrounded by mountains on four sides according to the *Hou Hanshu*¹¹⁷. It was the second major polity that seems to have dominated the northern parts of the Tarim Basin. Yanqi [Karashar] was located on an extremely strategic spot, for the afore mentioned mountains could only be crossed by passes the lowest of which are as high as Mont Blanc, yet as has been pointed out by Stein and others, its position is also especially vulnerable if attacked from the Ili valley north, a favourite route taken by

¹¹⁴ Ban Gu, 96B (162)

¹¹⁵ Yu Huan, Sec. 9

¹¹⁶ Fan Ye, 88 (43)

¹¹⁷ Fan Ye, 88 (45)

nomads.¹¹⁸ This troubled relationship with its northern neighbours is perhaps also reflected in the wide variety of court titles concerning the fighting of or defence against nomads that are mentioned in the *Hanshu*.¹¹⁹ The Weilue gives Weili [Korla], Weixu [Hoxud] and Shanwang [western Kuruk mountains] as dependencies of Yanqi [Karashar] and this seems likely to have been the case at the beginning of our era as all are located quite close to Yanqi [Karashar] and with significantly smaller populations. The Hou Hanshu, though not defining them as dependencies, places both Weili [Korla] and Weixu [Hoxud] in the same section as Yanqi [Karashar] so that while they are said to have had independent kings their actions are constantly in keeping with the wishes of the ruler of Yanqi [Karashar] making their subordination quite apparent.¹²⁰

The two last major polities that remain to discuss are the two Jushi polities in the Turfan area, Nearer Jushi [Modern Turfan] and Further Jushi [Jimasa]. [Map.7] Jushi actually used to be one polity according to the *Hanshu*, but during the early days of Chinese penetration into the Tarim Basin around year 100 BCE it was split into two kingdoms of Jushi as well as six smaller polities some of which seems to have been nomadic and others containing more permanent settlements and agriculturalists.¹²¹ The *Hanshu* gives Nearer Jushi [Turfan] as the larger of the two in terms of size and it seems to have been a common battleground between the Chinese and Xiongnu. But this must have changed, possibly due to Chinese dominance over Nearer Jushi [Turfan], and during the first centuries CE it is Further Jushi [Jimasa] apparently the dominant state in the Turfan depression and surrounding areas. Perhaps naturally, seeing as their given population is very small, many of the surrounding polities appears to have been dependencies of Further Jushi during their period, though in the *Hou Hanshu* it is simply stated that Jushi [Both Turfan and Jimasa] destroyed Yuli [Fukang], Danhuan, Guhu [Dawan Cheng] and Wutanzili.¹²² Two of these, Danhuan and Wutanzili reappear on the Weilue's list of dependencies belonging to Further Jushi [Jimasa] together with Eastern and Western Jumi [Near Dashito and Mulei respectively], Bilu and Pulu [Barkul area].¹²³

¹¹⁸ Stein 1921: 1180

¹¹⁹ Ban Gu, 96B (178)

¹²⁰ Fan Ye, 88 (45)

¹²¹ Ban Gu 96A (75-78)

¹²² Fan Ye, 88 (3)

¹²³ Yu Huan, Sec.23

3.1.3 Issues of population figures

In addition to revealing a lot about the likely political structure and the hierarchy amongst the polities of the Tarim Basin the comparison between the *Hanshu* and *Hou Hanshu* also reveal something else, a significant discrepancy in the population figures given. Most striking perhaps is Yutian [Khotan] which rises from a given 19300 individuals in the *Hanshu* to a staggering tripling of the number to reach 83000 individuals in the *Hou Hanshu*. Similarly, Yanqi [Karashar] on the Northern Route sees a 62% increase in its given population while Eastern Jushi in the north eastern part of the Basin has its population nearly tripled as well. Chinese historians are, as discussed in chapter one, generally fairly precise when giving numbers and not prone to exaggerations but in this case an easy explanation would of course be that one of the authors gave exaggerated figures. As Ban Gu lived during the Han dynasty with only a maximum of a generation between himself and the time he describes he would have the sources readily available and was the least likely to exaggerate or invent his own numbers, The Fan Ye however lived much later, being born in 398 CE and living most of his adult life during the Southern and Northern Dynasties period (420-589 CE), and as such was not contemporary with the time under review. As previously mentioned Hans Bielenstein points out that Fan Ye could not possibly have had direct access to the sources he based his work upon, in this case Ban Yong's reports to emperor An, although he did have access to other histories who used these sources. However, despite his distance from the sources it seems unlikely that Fan Ye simply fabricated his numbers. Perhaps it would make sense to exaggerate such numbers in a battle, so to glorify the actions of the victory or explain why one side lost, but to do so in what is meant to be a mere description of distant areas seems counterproductive. Furthermore, if these numbers are mere fabrications one would expect these fabrications to have been made equally for more distant areas such as Anxi [Partian Empire] and Da Qin [Roman Empire] but this is not the case and their populations are simply given as "extremely numerous".

What this leaves us with is the probability that both numbers are fairly accurate (conditions considered) meaning that between the time the two sets of numbers were collected the population of some polities within the Tarim Basin experienced an enormous growth. The *Hanshu*'s population figures are probably based upon the reports of the Protector Generals (59 BCE-16 CE) and the *Hou Hanshu* upon the reports of Ban Yong delivered towards the end of the reign of emperor An (107-125 CE) giving roughly a century in which this growth took place. As a population growth like that over such a short span of time must be considered nearly impossible, even under ideal circumstances, I believe that rather than reflecting simply

the growth in the population the *Hou Hanshu*'s numbers reflect a growth in the polities in question and the political consolidation into larger polities as discussed above. This is also supported by the wording of the *Hou Hanshu* which, with the exception of Yanqi [Karashar], gives how many are controlled by each king, not how many live in each polity. A comparison of the population figures given in the *Hanshu* and the *Hou Hanshu* thus shows not only a growth in the population but also supports the assumption that the rise of larger polities in the Tarim Basin starts as early as the first century CE.

As the table illustrate the polities of the Tarim Basin were micro-states with small populations and covering fairly small stretches of territory in the first centuries CE. Furthermore if our Chinese sources are to be believed, that the fifty-five kingdoms of the Western Regions underwent major political changes during this period that would have promoted larger polities gaining control over smaller or less populous ones, creating a typical pattern of centre-periphery relations across the Tarim Basin. Indeed, for every major polity there can be listed at least two, three and commonly more dependencies, by the end of the second century CE. There is also a marked increase in the population of most of the larger polities of the basin, probably partly due to their conquering of smaller polities. This raises the question of what caused these tendencies, a question which will be discussed in chapter 4.

3.2 The Tarim Basin – “The walled cities”

In order to at least partly answer the previously asked question of what kind of political entities one could find in the Tarim Basin this subchapter will deal with the “Walled-cities” or sedentary polities of the Tarim Basin. Various aspects of these polities will be discussed with the aim of comparing these polities to the city-state model presented by Mogens Hansen. First the walls and the cities will be discussed, then the organization of the government and finally the polities' economic basis.

3.2.1 Walls and warfare

Cities in the antique world, whether city-states or otherwise, were frequently fortified and this reveals much about whether the community had enemies and the level of its organisational sophistication. Ban Gu in the *Hanshu* refer to the cities of the Tarim Basin as “Walled Cities”¹²⁴, but was this a correct observation? Sen-Dou Chang in his article *Some Observations on the Morphology of the Chinese Walled Cities* notes that from ancient times it

¹²⁴ Ban Gu, 96A (73)

appears the Chinese has been a wall building people and that walls in China had a greater significance than their defensive qualities alone.¹²⁵ City walls have played a significant role in Chinese history, filled as it is with sieges and heroic defences of cities, and evidence of wall building can be found as far back as the pre Qin states of the Warring States period (475-221 BCE). The walls defined the city within and at the same time its gates signified the knots tying the urban and the surrounding rural areas together. The importance of a wall for the constitution of a city can be clearly discerned from the Chinese language, as the traditional Chinese character for city, 城, also carries the meaning of wall or castle. Chang further notes that, as almost all Chinese cities have traditionally been walled, a city without a wall wouldn't really be considered a proper city.¹²⁶ It is thus quite possible that Ban Gu, who probably never himself saw the Tarim Basin, uses the term "Walled Cities" when referring to cities that didn't necessarily have walls and the term simply is a result of a peculiarity of the Chinese language.

However, evidence from other sources, both written and archaeological, sheds some light on the likelihood of these "Walled Cities" actually having city walls and also of their likely construction. One indication of the presence of walls is the frequent reference to sieges by Chinese historians writing about the Tarim Basin. Sima Qian for example, in his chapter about Dayuan, describes how both the city of Luntou and Ershi had to be besieged before they submitted to the Chinese expedition attacking Dayuan (Ferghana) and he even mentions Ershi having an inner wall.¹²⁷ Even more convincing proof to the presence of walled cities in the Tarim Basin are the archaeological discoveries of fortified sites made by Aurel Stein at Endere, where the wall surrounds the remains of a Buddhist temple, and at Ak-sipil. Judging from Endere and Ak-sipil the fortifications in the Tarim Basin most likely followed the same patterns as the Chinese of the period, which may have inspired them, and were constructed of hard-stamped clayey loess creating earthen ramparts. These ramparts found at Endere and Ak-sipil were of considerable height, 5 metres and 3,3 metres respectively, and both more than 9 meter thick at the base. The top of the ramparts, somewhat more narrow than the base, was covered in horizontal layers of brushwood embedded into the clay and a parapet of sundried bricks rising another one and a half to two meters above the rampart itself. Both ramparts were circular in construction with a gate flanked by bastions and in the case of Ak-sipil the

¹²⁵ Chang 1970: 63

¹²⁶ Chang 1970: 63-65

¹²⁷ Sima Qian, 123 (248-249)

parapet had loopholes on two levels probably meant for throwing, pouring or shooting missiles through when defending.¹²⁸

Both these sites are of uncertain date, for although they both yielded wuzhu coins of probable Han origin, in circulation in the Tarim Basin from the second through to the eighth century CE, and this cannot give any exact dating¹²⁹, though Stein believes the Endere site to be of significant antiquity.¹³⁰ This assumption was later confirmed on his second visit to the site where he, with the aid of a local man named Sadak, discovered a document in the Kharoshthi script that Baumer uses to date the Endere ruins to the first century CE.¹³¹ If the sites of Endere and Ak-sipil were built at a later date, the fact that quite significant fortifications were raised around very small communities indicates that larger cities would have similar and probably even larger fortifications. Archaeological excavations of the Yanbulake site, dated at the middle of the Tarim Basin's Bronze Age (second millennium BCE), has also revealed what appears to have been a simple wall of mud bricks and stamped earth encircling a small settlement (50 X 60 m).¹³² The Han Chinese for their part constructed a large number of forts and watchtowers throughout the eastern part of the Tarim Basin in a system that seems to have been comparable to the Roman limes, and if not already present this would have given the local polities of the Tarim Basin an ample base which they could copy for their own purposes.¹³³ The Tarim Basin and surround area furthermore holds an abundance of ruined fortifications of a later date, including walled cities. Perhaps the most spectacular example of this is Karakhoto in western Southern (Inner) Mongolia, a large town whose huge walls measuring roughly nine meters are made essentially with the same stamped clay technique seen at Endere and Ak-sipil.¹³⁴ The art of building fortification must thus have been known to the first century polities of the Tarim Basin, and would have been commonly practiced in large cities. To conclude on the walls of the "Walled Cities" I find it highly likely, based both on literary and archaeological material, that at least the major population centres of the Tarim Basin were indeed enclosed by walls, probably of a type similar to the walls found at Endere and Ak-sipil and indeed similar to Chinese walls of the same period or even the walls observed around Kashgar by Aurel Stein in 1900. Literary evidence from Sima Qian suggests walled cities existed in the Tarim Basin as early as the Dayuan expedition, sometime

¹²⁸ Stein 1975: 433-435 and 474-475

¹²⁹ Wang 2004: 27

¹³⁰ Stein 1903: 419

¹³¹ Baumer 2008: 147

¹³² Chen 1995: 263

¹³³ For more on the Han limes see Stein 1928: Chapter 10-12.

¹³⁴ Stein 1927: 435-439

at the end of the second century BCE. These walls, in addition to serving as defences against enemy states and nomad raids, may also, as often seen in China, have served against flooding rivers and as a barrier at which toll and taxes could be raised by the local ruler.

As well as walls and fortifications there is both literary and archaeological evidence for the military of the Tarim polities, though the material is somewhat sparse. Ban Gu also relates how many of the polities had direct access to metal and manufactured weapons in a similar way to the Han, i.e. by means of casting techniques. At times he also goes into more details, explaining for example that the Ch'o has iron in their mountains and for military weapons they make "bows, lances, short knives, swords and armour."¹³⁵ Excavations by Aurel Stein in and around the Loulan site in the Lop Region yielded a variety of weapons, especially arrowheads in bronze were frequent finds, but he also found an iron sword.¹³⁶ The Niya site also yielded weapons in the form of a bow made of Tamarisk wood and what Stein took to be the shaft of a spear.¹³⁷ Probably armed with weapons such as these, bows, spears and swords, and armour both the *Hanshu* and the *Hou Hanshu* also provide estimates of the polities possible military strength regarding how many men could bear arms. In the Tarim polities this varies considerably between the *Hanshu* and *Hou Hanshu*, which will be discussed in the next chapter, but even in the early period of the *Hanshu* the larger polities could field armies of a few thousand men. Yutian for example has 2400 men able to bear arms, which is roughly one tenth of the population, while Shule had about 2000 men¹³⁸ As Di Cosmo points out the percentage of men able to bear arms was far higher in the polities with a nomadic element and even more in nomadic polities.¹³⁹ This is clearly the case, for example Shanshan, described as having few fields but nomadic elements, among only 14100 inhabitants still mustered 2912 men able to bear arms, which is about one fifth of the population.¹⁴⁰

3.2.2 The cities

Having discussed the walls of Ban Gu's "Walled Cities" the next topic comes quite naturally, namely the nature of the cities within. Compared to fortifications and shrines not to mention stupas very few towns and no cities from early antiquity have been found in the Tarim Basin

¹³⁵ Ban Gu, 96A (81)

¹³⁶ Stein 1928: 278-279 and Plate XXIII

¹³⁷ Stein 1975: 397

¹³⁸ Ban Gu, 96A (97) (141)

¹³⁹ Di Cosmo 2000: 397

¹⁴⁰ Ban Gu, 96A (83)

and literary sources do not go into detail. One of the reasons for the lack of archaeological remains is quite possibly the fact that new structures and even fields have taken their place utilizing roughly the same area, as seen in the Khotan oasis. A few remains are however available to us and when discussing the layout and construction of the cities of the ancient Tarim Basin here I have selected two archaeological sources of to illustrate how they might have looked, the Yotkan site and the Niya site.[Map.8] The Yotkan site, near modern Kothan, is believed to be the ancient capital of the state of Yutian [Khotan], called Xicheng [Western Town] in Chinese sources, and although it is today more akin to a swamp due to irrigation in the area, it has furnished a great yield of archaeological material such as coins, seals, figurines etc. Exactly when and why the site was abandoned is uncertain, but its location is compatible with the distances given in Chinese sources, and the quantity of objects suggests a large settlement.

Niya on the other hand is an ancient site discovered by Sir Aurel Stein in 1900 when a community of multiple dwellings was excavated as well as sheds, fences, orchards and other man-made structures. The Niya site is named after the Niya River which runs into the desert and disappears some distance to the south, although it seems likely that in ancient times the river would have flowed further into the desert or possibly that irrigation works had taken the water further, thus allowing the Niya community to sustain itself. The Niya site is definitively one of considerable age as Hulsewe identifies the site as Jingjue [Niya/Cadota], a state mentioned in the *Hanshu* as having 480 households and 3360 inhabitants and whose location matches fairly well the distances given from Chang-an, 8820 li.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, Aurel Stein's excavation of the site yielded a multitude of documents one of which has a clearly intelligible date, that of the fifth year of the Tai-shi era corresponding to the year 269 CE.¹⁴² It can thus confirm that the site was inhabited at least as early as the mid third century and, given the abundance of Han coins found and the frequent use of Han style Chinese, and that the site seems that to have been that mentioned by both Ban Gu, Fan Ye and Yu Huan, it should be safe to assume it was inhabited long before that date. From the Niya site a lot can be gleaned about the likely construction and style of dwellings and interior in the Tarim Basin during the first centuries CE.

The buildings excavated by Aurel Stein at Niya mostly follow the same pattern of construction, a pattern shared with the majority of other buildings so far excavated in the Tarim Basin. The building is constructed around a framework of *Terek* (White Poplar) wood,

¹⁴¹ Ban Gu, 96A (93-94)

¹⁴² Chavannes in Stein 1975: 537

massive heavy beams laid down as the foundation for up to several rooms, fitted together and shaped according to the importance of the wall supported. On this foundation wooden posts are planted to support the roof and form the framework for the walls with smaller upright posts at regular intervals between them and crossbeams resting upon those. To this framework a matting of tamarisk was fastened and hard white plaster applied to make the walls usually between 6 and 8 inches thick. In some cases standing reeds were used instead of tamarisk. These structures were sturdy enough to support the weight of a second floor. A third method of wall construction was the use of closely packed rushes strengthened by branches and covered with a layer of mud plaster, although Aurel Stein notes that this somewhat rougher method was in the twentieth century almost exclusively used for sheds, stables and outhouses of various kinds.¹⁴³ The houses had many different comforts or arrangements built into them, for example, the use of a raised plaster grate over the fireplace in the ancient kitchen of the dwelling N.III and an ice-pit discovered in N.II.¹⁴⁴ In addition to the dwellings excavated at Niya, Stein's expedition also found other man-made structures, mainly fences and orchards and arbores which they hedged, as well as lanes protected by lines of rushes or poplar and even a bridge whose stream had long since disappeared. The arbores and orchards, whose content will be touched upon later, were neatly ordered with the trees planted into either straight lines or squares in a design similar to the one still common in the Tarim oases.¹⁴⁵ They were probably on the whole not very large and fairly cramped. Di Cosmo, referring to Sheng's report on Niya, states that the site must have been larger than Stein's original estimate of 6,43 km from east to west and 22,5 km from north to south.¹⁴⁶ How much of this fell within the city itself is however not known. Xuanzang, the famous Chinese monk who travelled to India, suggests the circumference of some of the polities in the Tarim Basin during the seventh century have the dimensions of 17-18 li, the circumference of the capital of Qiuqi [Kucha].¹⁴⁷ This would be about 7 km and gives an approximate diameter of 2 km, a rather modest size. Though Xuanzang's measurements cannot be taken as absolutely reliable it seems to indicate that the Tarim cities were fairly compact and small, at least the parts within the walls.

From the archaeological evidence it might also be possible to infer a little of how these cities would have looked. Certainly, like all cities, the cities of the Tarim Basin were probably

¹⁴³ Stein 1975: 317

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*: 329-332

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*: 337

¹⁴⁶ Di Cosmo 2000: 403

¹⁴⁷ Xuanzang, (19)

decorated, especially the important buildings, the buildings of the rich and religious buildings. Faxian (337- c.424 CE), a Chinese Buddhist monk that travelled to India via the Tarim Basin, tells of how the houses of Khotan stood apart and all had a small tope in front of their doors.¹⁴⁸ Archaeological evidence suggests that walls might have been painted as indicated by some of the dwellings uncovered at Niya, showing signs of decoration such as the painted fresco, a design of geometrical patterns and flowers on the wall of what was probably a central hall in the dwelling N.III.¹⁴⁹ This flower pattern, together with animal patterns, must have been common in other parts of the Tarim Basin as well, judging from the abundance of wooden panels found at Shanshan [Lau-Lan] with similar designs. In fact, a lot of the decoration uncovered suggests the widespread use of wood for decorative purposes, for example that found in the upright wooden balustrades, wooden capitols carved with flower patterns and the wooden model of a stupa all found at Lau-Lan.[Fig.2] Stucco and Terracotta were also used to create decorative pieces, seen perhaps best in the court of statues around the Stupa at Rawak some distance south of Khotan. This site, also excavated by Aurel Stein during his 1900-1901 expedition, is hard to date as only numismatic evidence of the uncertain wuzhu type has been found, but it is probably connected with the early Buddhism in the Tarim Basin, which made its appearance in the first three centuries CE, judging from the style reminiscent of Gandaran style Buddhist art. Supporting the importance of clay based decorations, multiple large stucco statues were found here, mostly depicting various Buddha and Boddishivata, while finds at Yotkan were of hoards of Terracotta statues, depicting grotesque humans, monkeys and other animals, It also seems likely that decorations or at least layering of gold was commonly used. At Yotkan vast quantities of gold was discovered, indeed it was the main reason for its discovery, and Aurel Stein identified some of it as leaf-gold quite distinctly different from the specks of gold found in rivers near Khotan.¹⁵⁰ Leaf gold was certainly used for the decoration of Buddhist shrines and monasteries, attested to not only by the patches of gold-leaf found on one of the stucco statues at Rawak but also by the Chinese monk Faxian, mentioned above, who writes about the great monastery outside Khotan,

It may be 250 cubits in height, rich in elegant carving and inlaid work, covered above with gold and silver, and finished throughout with a combination of all the precious

¹⁴⁸ Faxian, (4)

¹⁴⁹ Stein 1975: 333

¹⁵⁰ Stein 1975: 193-194

substances.... The beams, pillars, venetianed doors, and windows being all overlaid with gold-leaf.¹⁵¹

It is of course possible that this use of gold-leaf was first introduced with Buddhism, but I find no reason to believe that the “Walled Cities” many of whom were centres of commerce and/or had access to gold from mines or rivers, could not have decorated their important buildings in this way even earlier.

The infrastructure of the ancient Tarim Basin which linked the various polities is difficult to describe in any detail, as we have no direct sources describing modes of travel, states of roads etc. The routes described by the ancient Chinese accounts of the Tarim Basin very much agree with the modern roads in the region, one route running north through Nearer Jushi [Turfan] and skirts the slopes of the Tian Shan range until reaching Kashgar. This route seems mostly to have followed the Tarim River, at least after reaching Yanqi [Karashahr]. The southern route follows the northern foothills of the Kunlun range past Yutian [Khotan] and Suoju [Yarkand], though it passed further north than the modern routes.¹⁵² Chinese historians they tell us where the routes went but neglect to describe the conditions and quality of these routes, we are thus left looking for comparable areas and archaeological clues in order to say more of the state of infrastructure. In the days before the car and the lorry, transportation of goods happened by means of donkeys, mules and camels across Eurasia. Especially the camels; in this case the double humped “Bactrian” camel which is native to much of Central-Asia, were essential for travel into the desert even at the time of Stein’s expedition, and unlike its one-humped cousin the “Bactrian” camel is well adapted for the cold with its thicker fur. While donkeys, the other major beast of burden, could survive with but a minimum of fodder the camels are even hardier, an invaluable quality in the vast Taklamakan. Only half a pound (0.22 kg) a day of rape seed oil was enough to keep their stamina high during desert marches which required them to go for days without grazing, fodder and sometimes water.¹⁵³ Full grown Bactrian Camels can carry as much as 220-270 kg about 30-40 km daily, though in difficult desert conditions this can be considerably slower. They do well in the cold climate of the Central Asian winters, but do not tolerate heat as well as their Arabic cousins. But even so, as Potts emphasises, they must have been the major beast of burden throughout the Tarim Basin and Central Asia in ancient times.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Faxian, (20)

¹⁵² Fan Ye, 88 (13)

¹⁵³ Stein 1903: 273

¹⁵⁴ Potts Sjekka 10.05.2013

The main routes, north and south of the desert, were also, at the time of Stein's travels, dotted with sarais or caravanserais, caravan stations. These stations are usually constructed as square high walled structures surrounding a central courtyard. The courtyard and ground floor has space for camels, mules and storage of wares while the first floor has lodging for travellers. One example of a Central Asian caravanserai from Stein's first expedition is the caravanserai at Kosh Langar found in the middle of a barren wilderness of gravelly wasteland. There were a group of buildings in hard-burned bricks with ample room for both men and beast, and in this particular example, provided with a tank into which water from the outer hills flowed through a small canal. Caravanserais of this type must have been essential for the larger and slower caravans as they crossed the barren regions of the Basin. A precaution found along the caravan routes are wooden posts erected at short intervals, essential to prevent travellers from losing their way at night or during sandstorms.¹⁵⁵ Marco Polo describes the dangers of desert travel and explains that the greatest dangers lies in losing the right way, for, "[they] follow those voices and go out of the right way so they are never reunited to their fellows and found, and news of them is never heard."¹⁵⁶ Proof of any accommodations of the kind previously mentioned from ancient times is quite scarce but at Karadong Aurel Stein believed he had found something that could have been the remains of an ancient caravanserai in connection with a settlement. He discovered a ruined quadrangle of around 22 square metres formed by a mud rampart topped with rows of timber-built rooms. The enclosed area was accessible through a large wooden gateway similar to the ones found in the Chinese Yamens. Situated along the Keriya river Karadong would make an ideal stop on the journey north-south from Khotan to Kucha as it lies about halfway between the two lines of oases. Though it could very well be nothing more than a fortified post the ideal location does suggest a caravanserai. A system of caravanserais would certainly not be unheard of in antiquity and is strikingly similar to the Persian "King's road stations" offering very good resting places that Herodotus, in his *Histories*, states can be found along the Persian royal road.¹⁵⁷

3.2.3 Kings and governments

Having looked at the walled cities of the Tarim Basin it is clear that these fairly large and certainly complicated urban units would have had some form of central government. Chinese historians, mainly from Ban Gu's detailed descriptions but supplemented by Fan Ye, give a

¹⁵⁵ Stein 1903: 180-181

¹⁵⁶ Marco Polo, *Book of the Marvels of the World* I.XXXIX.

¹⁵⁷ Herodotus 5.52 checked 6.12.12

comprehensive picture of the governmental structure of the polities of the Western Regions, nearly always under the rule of a Wang(王), a Chinese term commonly translated to mean king. These rulers do in fact refer to themselves as kings, more specifically the king of Yutian [Khotan] and of Shanshan [Lop Region] did so, and they also referred to themselves with a number of epithets. Although dated at the third and possibly the fourth century CE, documents from sites in the Shanshan kingdom, Niya and Lop Nur, have also shown that the ruler of this polity used epithets, in fact some of the first known kings of the line have many. The first king called Pepiya is known to have ruled for at least eight years, possibly longer, and based on Brough's assumption that king Amgoka's reign started in CE 247, Pepiya probably ruled sometime during the first decades of the third century CE.¹⁵⁸ He is designated in the following manner in a sales contract for land by a monk in Niya:

“Maharayasa rayatirayasa mahamtasa jayamtasa dharmiasa [sacadamasti]dasa pracachadevada nuava maharaya Pepiya devaputrassa.”¹⁵⁹ meaning “Great king, king of kings, great man, holder of the right, conqueror, living in the light, protected by the gods, great power, great king Pepiya, son of heaven.”¹⁶⁰ Another even more impressive title on stone was discovered by Christoph Baumer near the Endere ruins in 1999 and it too is believed to have been the title of one of the early third century Shanshan kings, although the king's name and the date were illegible. Written in Kharoshthi on a pair of greyish stones were the following titles: “In the year ... of the lord, the great king, the king [of kings] ..., crusher of his enemies, who is his own army, whose ... who is worshipped ... who set forth on the Great Vehicle [Mahayana], who is fixed in the true dharma, of great majesty,”¹⁶¹

At a later date, apparently during the reign of king Amgoka, this impressive array of titles used by the kings of Shanshan does undergo a marked change and a much shorter list of epithets is employed, a custom which is for the most part retained by his successors. This change has led to some theories suggesting that the kings of Shanshan came under renewed Chinese control during Amgoka's reign and this has also sparked a debate about the dating of king Amgoka, but as neither of these debates is strictly relevant to this dissertation it has not been included.¹⁶² Unfortunately there are no material remains from the other major Tarim Basin polities, such as Shule [Kashgar] or Qiuci [Kucha], which evidence epithets were used to define the kings, but it is certainly not improbable that they were. Indeed considering their

¹⁵⁸ Brough 1965: 604

¹⁵⁹ Tablet number 655, Rapson 1920: 326 (Table of Kings and Regnal Years)

¹⁶⁰ Enoki 1965 p.255-256

¹⁶¹ Baumer 2008: 201 note 26

¹⁶² For more on this debate see Brough 1965 and 1970 as well as Loewe 1969.

proximity and frequent interaction with the southern polities it would be altogether surprising if they did not use them.

But not only is the presence of epithets interesting, the choice of epithets used is also significant. “Great King” and “King of Kings” are both titles frequently associated with Iran and Iranian culture, employed by both the Parthian and the Kushan kings, and have a long history in the Iranian cultural sphere. The title was already in use by the Achaemenid dynasty prior to the conquest of Alexander, who himself took the title and it was later used by his successors in Central Asia, the Bactrian Kings. The Kushan kings used both titles continuously, both on coinage and inscriptions starting at the time of the first ruler Kujula Kadphises with the titles appearing on some of his later coins.¹⁶³ Kujula also used the title “Dhramathida” which is translated by Kumar as “Steadfast in faith” very much reminiscent of the, “who is fixed in the true dharma” epithet from the unknown king from Endere.¹⁶⁴ In the Rabatak inscription written in Bactrian for Kanishka I, perhaps the best known Kushan emperor/great king, all his epithets are listed. Amongst them are “the autocrat worthy of divine worship” which can be compared to the Endere inscriptions, “Who is worshipped”. Here he is also called “son of God” and has the epithet “Righteous”, perhaps similar to Papiya’s “Holder of the right”.¹⁶⁵ Vima Taktho is also referred to as “Righteous” in an inscription DN1 at Dasht-e Nawur, and on DN 4 in Kharoshthi he is similarly called “Righteous” written as “dhrami[ka]”.¹⁶⁶

Underneath these great kings the Chinese historians present a variety of officials and bureaucrats, giving a glimpse of the polities’ political organization. An excellent example to illustrate the way Ban Gu presents the organization of the polities of the Tarim Basin can be found in the section dedicated to the Qiuci [Kucha]; population-wise the largest of the Tarim polities.

[There are the following officials:] the supreme commandant, the assistant, the noble of Fu-kuo (support of the state), the noble of An-kuo (peace of the state), the noble of Chi-hu (assault on the nomad), the commandant of Ch’üeh-hu (resistance to the nomad), the commandant of Chi Chü-shih (assault on Chü-shih), the leaders of the left and the right, the commandants of the left and the right, masters of the cavalry of the left and the right, the masters of Li-fu (strong support) of the left and the right, two

¹⁶³ Hill 2009: 604

¹⁶⁴ Hill 2009: 608

¹⁶⁵ Sims-Williams 1998: 81-83

¹⁶⁶ Sims-Williams 2012: 76-80

chiefs of thousands respectively for the divisions of the east, west, south and north, three masters of Ch'üeh-hu (resistance to the nomad) and four interpreters-in-chief.¹⁶⁷ This is of course an attempt to chart the top layers of the bureaucracy of a large and populous polity and other much smaller polities with correspondingly fewer officials, for example the state of Western Jumi [Mulei] which according to Ban Gu only has 1926 inhabitants and only “the officials: the noble of Western Jumi, the leaders of the left and the right, and the masters of the cavalry of the left and the right,”¹⁶⁸ giving a striking contrast to Qiuci's [Kucha] massive number of officials. Ban Gu presents a bewildering number of titles and officials, some clearly military, such as the masters of cavalry of the left and the right, while others are clearly engaged with civil matters, such as the interpreters-in-chief. These comprehensive lists of officials are only presented in the *Hanshu*, and although Fan Ye's *Hou Hanshu* does not itemise them many of the titles do appear throughout his narrative, such as the Marquis of the Left, in Hills translation, Yuanmeng who is made king of Yanqi [Karashar] by the Chinese.

What this in my opinion clearly reflects is the presence of an actual bureaucracy or at least some form of organized government. But that conclusion raises the question of what kind of organization the Chinese historians were referring to. One possibility is of course that the polities of the Tarim Basin, after encountering the Han Empire of China, were influenced enough by them to utilize the style of the Chinese system of governance which would account for many of the Chinese sounding titles. They might even have copied the Chinese writing system, as there is nothing to indicate a native system during the period. But, if this were the case, it is questionable as to why many of the titles given to the officials in the Tarim Basin are very un-Chinese, such as the commandant of Chi Chü-shih (assault on Chü-shih) or the masters of Li-fu (strong support), that have no known equivalent at the Han court. It is also worth considering that both Ban Gu and Fan Ye functioned at the Chinese court and in a Chinese context that emphasized precise systems, ordered lists and extensive record keeping. This opens a second possibility suggested by Loewe in the introduction to Hulsewé's translation of Ban Gu's *Hanshu*, that the Chinese historians simply superimposed their system on others and noted down appropriate titles for the system as they perceived it to be. One can perhaps go further and suppose that the Chinese historians tried ordering what might have been a rather chaotic and loose system of government by enforcing upon it a system of their own.¹⁶⁹ Without other sources to the systems of government of the polities in the Tarim Basin

¹⁶⁷ Ban Gu, 96B (163)

¹⁶⁸ Ban Gu, 96B (181)

¹⁶⁹ Loewe 1979: 28-29

this could perhaps be the case, but luckily there are other sources from which we can draw, more specifically the written documents that have been discovered in the Tarim Basin.

There are examples of documents from multiple sites both north and south of the Taklamakan, although the majority of the finds have been at the Niya and Loulan sites which would have been part of the Shanshan kingdom. Indeed, it is from these documents that the titles of Pepiya and his descendants are known. These documents come in two varieties, those written in Chinese script and those in Kharoshthi script respectively. The documents in Chinese are mostly found at Han and later Jin sites in the eastern part of the Tarim Basin and are written vertically on thin wooden slips. This was the common medium on which to write in China, prior to the discovery of paper as a writing medium¹⁷⁰, which occurred sometime during the first or second century CE, and these wooden slips would, if the text was longer than one slip, be tied together to form longer documents. Only a few of the wooden slips have been precisely dated but the wooden slips in the Tarim Basin are thought to date from between the first century BCE to the fourth century CE, the Chinese slips found at Niya having been dated as early as 269 CE.¹⁷¹ These Chinese texts are however mainly written by Chinese and only a few of the slips, for the most part found at Niya, refer to local conditions while the majority refer to Chinese official affairs. The second group of documents are those written in Kharoshthi, which seems to have been the dominant written language in the Tarim Basin after the withdrawal of the Han dynasty and its collapse shortly after, or perhaps even before that time. The Kharoshthi script was based on the Aramaic script and was used to write mainly in Prakrit, a middle Indo-Aryan language, of a dialect associated with the Gandhara area. The Gandharan kingdom was located mainly in the Peshawar and Kabul river valleys, centred on the area surrounding the modern cities of Peshawar and Taxila. Gandhara was occupied by the Kushan early in the dynasties history, as attested by both Chinese and archaeological sources, and the Prakrit language of the region quickly became important in Kushan administration as well as featuring in inscriptions and on the early Kushan coinage. Kharoshthi and the Gandhara area also played a prominent role in the early development of Buddhism.

The Kharoshthi documents, of which many hundreds have been found, are also written on wood, although instead of slips an ingenious sealed tablet was commonly used. These documents consist of two wooden tablets each with one side to write on and the two sides with writing would be put together before the two tablets were bound together with a rope and

¹⁷⁰ Paper in China goes back to the first century BCE.

¹⁷¹ Wang 2004: 47-58

the whole thing then sealed. The Kharoshthi documents are usually dated between the third and fourth century CE,¹⁷² but the documents found at Niya provide an excellent source of knowledge of governmental practices in the region during this period, although the only dated document from Niya Lin Meicun dates to the reign of King Sulica of Shanshan, between c.336-59 CE.¹⁷³ In these documents we encounter a vast variety of different local officials who operate in a complex hierarchy and with clearly defined roles such as scribe, tax-collector etc. There are also a variety of other titles where the exact role is unknown, for example the Cozbo Tamjaka who received the following decree from his king,

To be given to the *cozbo* Tamjaka. His majesty the king writes, he instructs the *cozbo* Tamjaka as follows: Lyipeya makes a complaint here now that soldiers of Saca carried off two cows of his. One cow they sent back, one they ate. This dispute must be carefully investigated by you in person and a decision made according to law; if you are not clear about it there, they must be sent here in custody.¹⁷⁴

The *cozbo* whom we see dealing with theft in this example is a type of official who is given a variety of roles but often appears as a governor or at least an official with good knowledge of the law and the right to pronounce sentences in the name of the king. The presence of such a developed system in the third century does, I believe, make it reasonable to assume that these titles and official posts go even further back in time. Although no *cozbo* is mentioned in Chinese sources it does not rule out the possibility of a *cozbo* being present and being defined otherwise, with one of the many titles on their list.

Considering both the accounts of the Chinese historian and the documents discovered in the Tarim Basin it is evident that the Tarim polities at least in the second and third century CE, and probably in the first century as well, were controlled by centralized and institutionalized governments under various kings. The Chinese, as they asserted their influence over the Tarim Basin, most likely came into contact with these quite developed systems of government that had their own titles and organizations, though quite possibly influenced by the Chinese at some earlier point in time. The polities in the Basin were, according to the available accounts, led by a “King” under whom one surmises there was an officialdom that was partly, if not entirely, made up of local nobility. When reporting back to the Emperor’s court, as is suggested by Loewe, it became common Chinese practise both amongst court officials and historians, often one and the same, to superimpose Chinese titles

¹⁷² Wang 2004: 65-66

¹⁷³ Meicun 1989: 3

¹⁷⁴ Burrows, Doc.1

upon officials from other polities and to choose Chinese titles or invent new ones to integrate the said foreign officials into the Chinese official hierarchy. Loewe also makes the point that in doing so they were not only given a position vis-à-vis their Chinese counterparts but it also meant that the Chinese recognized them as people with the power to exercise leadership and government. With this requirement fulfilled it became possible for Chinese officials, both civilian and military, to co-operate with them on an effective basis.¹⁷⁵

3.2.4 Sustenance and basic products

As seen in the table presented in appendix I some of the Tarim polities were quite large. Such vast populations required agriculture to be sustained, agriculture on a large scale, and naturally most polities of the Tarim Basin were located near rivers and oases. The main livelihood of the people living in and around the “Walled Cities” must have been the labour-intensive irrigation based agriculture around the rivers and oases.[Fig.1] The result of the extensive irrigation efforts in the area where loess rich rivers reached the desert was the creation of a microclimate with more stable temperatures and sometimes increased rainfall as described by Chen¹⁷⁶, essential for survival in the regions surrounding the Taklamakan. The Chinese sources mention multiple cases of irrigation-based agriculture, Ban Gu providing an example of irrigation in a quoted recommendation to the emperor from Sang Hung-Yang, commandant for the collection of grain,

To the east of old Lun-t'ai there are Chieh-chih and Ch'ü-li which are both ancient states. The land is extensive and rich in water and pasture, and there are over 5000 ch'ing of irrigated arable land. The place enjoys a warm and temperate climate; the land is fine and it is possible to dig more ditches and canals and to sow the five field crops, which will ripen at the same time as they do in China.¹⁷⁷

The ancient Chinese accounts are supported by the archaeological discoveries of the early archaeological expeditions into the Tarim Basin. Simply surveying a map of the archaeological finds will reveal that almost all settlements were located along one of the Basin's rivers, as is the case with the Niya site, the assumed location of Yotkan, the ruins at Khitai and most others. In the city of Jaohe, ancient capital of Nearer Jushi [Turfan], sophisticated systems supplying more than 300 wells has been found, a few of which dates back to the western Han dynasty [206 BCE – 6 CE] though the majority have been dated

¹⁷⁵ Hulsewé and Loewe 1979: 28-29

¹⁷⁶ Chen 1995: 245

¹⁷⁷ Ban Gu, 96B (166)

between the fifth century and the end of the Tang Dynasty [907].¹⁷⁸ The Chinese historians also mention the kinds of cereals grown, stating as seen in the quote above that the “Walled Cities” could grow the five field crops, namely rice, two kinds of millet, wheat and beans, in addition to mulberry, hemp and grapes.¹⁷⁹ This is supported by the find at Karadong of ancient cereals preserved in a room above the gatehouse. Here, in the rubbish covering the floor, millet was found as well as rice, barley, lentils and a handful of blackcurrant, all which had survived in the dry sand. Some roots were also discovered in the same room and although Stein could not determine what exactly they were, the expedition’s chef held it to be some kind of turnip.¹⁸⁰ Archaeological finds of pottery show grapes to be a frequent motif for decoration in the Tarim Basin, as seen for example on some of the vases Stein acquired from the Yotkan site, supporting its presence in the region.¹⁸¹ More convincing proof still is the discovery of an ancient vineyard by Stein at the Niya site where some of the vines were still intact.¹⁸²

Products from domesticated animals must also have played an important role in feeding the “Walled Cities”, as they still do in parts of the Tarim Basin. Ban Gu mentions domesticated animals many times in the *Hanshu*, informing that these are being held in several of the Tarim polities, all of which had the same stock-animals as in Han, except where otherwise noted. In the description of many polities he also goes into greater detail as for example the polity of Shanshan which he states had “asses, horses and a large number of camels”.¹⁸³ The textual evidence is supported by the find of what is thought to have been a cattle-shed at Niya.¹⁸⁴ As well as having domesticated animals some polities such as Yanqi [Karashar], on the shores of Lake Baghrash Kul, had access to fish. Fish can also be found in the rivers of the Basin so one can assume this was a source of food for at least some of the inhabitants of the Basin. In addition to cereals and domesticated animals some polities, such as Yutian [Khotan], are described by Ban Gu as growing various fruits, and archaeological evidence supports this. One example are finds from Yotkan of pottery decorated with grape motifs, but more convincing perhaps are the finds of ancient arbours and orchards at Niya. Near the ruins marked N.x by Stein was found a fenced orchard in which his native diggers managed to identify multiple fruit bearing trees, peach, apricot, mulberry and Jigda (oleaster),

¹⁷⁸ Bertrand 2010: 33

¹⁷⁹ Fan Ye, 88 (15)

¹⁸⁰ Stein 1975: 448

¹⁸¹ Ibid: 216, see object Y. 0016 for an example.

¹⁸² Ibid:145

¹⁸³ Ban Gu, 96A (85)

¹⁸⁴ Stein 1975: 317

all trees with which they were familiar from their own homes.¹⁸⁵ Of course, not all the polities mentioned by the Chinese historians could have had access to all these sources of sustenance, exemplified by the state of Shanshan situated in the extremely inhospitable Lop Nur region. Here, according to Ban Gu, the people seek to obtain cereals and agricultural product through barter as their land is too sandy and salty for agriculture, the same is also true for the state of I-Nai in the extreme western end of the Tarim Basin.¹⁸⁶

Metallurgical knowledge was highly developed in the Tarim Basin during the period under consideration and Ban Gu quite frequently mentions the kinds of metals that can be found in the various polities, and while iron is by far the most common he also mentions copper and lead.[Map.9] The minor polity of Mo'shan [Mountains south of Turfan] extracted iron from the nearby mountains and in Qiuci [Kucha] there was lead and the people cast iron, while Gumo [Aksu] produced copper, iron and orpiment from its land.¹⁸⁷ Archaeological evidence supports this as Han era mining sites for iron and copper have been found at A'a Shan, Minfeng and other places in the Tarim area in addition to an abundance of iron tools and utensils. The finds at A'a Shan also included crucibles; iron slag, ore and a pottery bellows all suggesting actual casting of metal and not just the mining of it.¹⁸⁸ Tin, important in the manufacture of bronze, is not mentioned in the accounts of the Chinese historians, nor have any tin mines been found within the Tarim Basin to date. Tin is however found in significant quantities in the Tianshan and Alatai mountains surrounding the Tarim Basin to the north and east,¹⁸⁹ and ancient tin-works have been discovered in Ferghana, near Lake Issyk Kul, in the upper Irtysh Basin and in the Altai.¹⁹⁰ It is distinctly possible that tin was mined in the northern Tarim Basin during the first three centuries CE, for the monk Xuanzang describes Qiuci [Kucha] as producing tin in the seventh century CE, but even if it was not, tin would probably be available from the surrounding nomadic polities. Other materials Ban Gu does not mention either are precious metals like silver or gold. Excavations have produced multiple gold objects, and as noted earlier, proof of leaf-gold having been used to decorate buildings, but the possibility of import is apparent as Yong and Yutang allow when discussing the find of a golden ring in the northern part of the Tarim Basin.¹⁹¹ Gold was washed in the Kothan oasis during the early nineteenth century, indeed Stein observed that many made a

¹⁸⁵ Stein 1975: 337

¹⁸⁶ Ban Gu, 96A (85)

¹⁸⁷ Ban Gu, 96B (162-164) (183)

¹⁸⁸ Yong and Yutang 1996: 232

¹⁸⁹ Penhallurick 1986: 35

¹⁹⁰ Ibid: Chapter 3-4

¹⁹¹ Yong and Yutang 1996: 233

living from such work during the agricultural off season, but this was probably gold originating from ruins of the ancient Yotkan.¹⁹² Gold was also mined in Jumi [Keriya] during the nineteenth century but as Hill stresses there is no way of knowing whether this was also the case in antiquity.¹⁹³ Gold must however have been available from neighbouring regions, as the Altai mountains, to the northeast, yield an abundance of gold and also gemstones; each being mined there since ancient times; the name Altai literally translating as ‘gold mountain’.

Not all the “Walled Cities” had access to the same resources, as shown on the table in appendix I, and at least to a degree most were not self-sufficient. Metals like iron, copper and tin would have to be bartered or bought, possibly also different types of foodstuff, cloth and other important basic substances. This means that the interaction between the various polities, especially before the rise of larger units, must have been significant. That the “Walled cities” were not entirely self-sufficient was evident also from the wealth of imported goods discovered at the ancient sites of the Tarim Basin and without long-distance trade the prosperity of the oasis cities, evidenced in the remains of decorated shrines and of precious objects scattered through the area, would probably have been impossible. Textual evidence suggests contact and trade between China and the Tarim Basin had started already before the rise of the Han dynasty since the ancient economist Guan Zhong (645 B.C.E) records the Yuezhi, to be suppliers of jade from the west, and under the Han dynasty, trade seems to have prospered, especially during the Eastern Han.¹⁹⁴ That the cities of the Tarim Basin did actually acquire a lot of items from China, whether by trade or by other interaction, is further evident judging from archaeological finds at sites dated to the Han era. These archaeological finds confirm that lacquer ware, bronze mirrors, paper and of course various types of silk were brought to the Tarim area from China.¹⁹⁵ Equally both written accounts and archaeological finds indicate that the Chinese also desired the goods of the Tarim Basin, foremost amongst which was the much treasured jade. Trade, both bartering and long-distance trade, must have been the lifeblood of the Tarim cities from an early point in their development, something which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

3.2.5 Exports and trade

A wide variety of items were exported from the Tarim Basin, but most iconic was certainly jade. Jade can refer to two different kinds of metamorphic rock, nephrite jade and jadeite, but

¹⁹² Stein 1975: 193

¹⁹³ Hills 2009: 187

¹⁹⁴ Liu 2001: 265

¹⁹⁵ Yong and Yutang 1996: 234

both appear fairly similar and both are usually called jade. Nephrite jade, which is the type of jade common to the Tarim Basin, has a pale green-cloudy colour, it is less luminous than jadeite, and is one of the toughest stones in the world due to its layered structure. Even striking it with a hammer will scarcely destroy it while a diamond, if subjected to the same treatment, will shatter.¹⁹⁶ Due to this quality, as well as to its beauty and the details into which it can be worked, this rock has always had a high value attached to it by the Chinese who even ascribed it magical properties such as being a key to immortality or to have the property of warding off decay and foul spirits alike. Indeed, it is recorded that emperor Wudi, one of the most renowned emperors of the Han dynasty, had a device built at his palace, Jian Zhang, for collecting dewdrops because he believed that drinking morning dew and jade powder from a jade cup would bestow him with longevity.¹⁹⁷

Yutian [Khotan] and Suoju [Yarkand], as well as Shanshan [Lop Nur region] and the Baikal region where true jadeite could be found, played a central role in the jade trade with China and much of the jade found in China from the Han period is in fact the pale nephrite jade from Yutian and Suoju. For example, finds from the tomb of the king of Yue in southern China from the second century BCE contained multiple jade discs, pendants, rings and tubes all made from Yutian jade. The same king had been placed in a jade coffin while wearing a suit of jade armour, his nine orifices plugged with jade plugs so to preserve his body after death.¹⁹⁸ This is just one example and excavated Han era tombs have consistently yielded an abundance of jade objects, everything from jade weapons, especially axes, to jade rings and even a jade bear found at Beidongshan.¹⁹⁹ But the particular use of jade exemplified by the king of Yue, to make a suit of armour for a departed noble or king, is a striking example of the importance ascribed to jade on a religious or spiritual level and James Lin suggests that it must have been envisioned as protection against the trials of the afterlife, much like the terracotta army of the first Qin emperor Shihuangdi was meant to guard him in the afterlife.²⁰⁰ In our context there is another important point to be made about the jade suit as well as jade in general, namely its function as a status gift. As Lin points out, the manufacture and ownership of these jade burial suits were strictly controlled by the imperial Liu family, the ruling family of the Han dynasty, and those emperors would sometimes grant favoured courtiers or foreign

¹⁹⁶ Finlay 2006: 368 and pp.402-403 quoted in Hill 2009: 614

¹⁹⁷ Lin 2012a: 80

¹⁹⁸ Lin 2012b: 82-87

¹⁹⁹ Rawson 2012: 96

²⁰⁰ Lin 2012b: 88

leaders such a suit in order to buy their loyalty.²⁰¹ One can imagine, given the comparative scarcity of such suits and the difficulty of acquiring jade, that such a gift would have been highly valued and, as in almost all contemporary societies at the time, the granting of rare and precious gifts would have been important in cementing the emperor's power and prestige.

As well as the archaeological evidence suggesting the importance of the jade trade, written sources also make frequent mention of this important resource, indeed it seems to be one of the reasons for Chinese interest in Yutian [Khotan] and the Tarim Basin in general. The jade trade from Central Asia is mentioned as early as the seventh century BCE in the *Guanzi* attributed to Guan Zhong. In his chapter entitled "*Methods for exploiting the earth*" he mentions the Yuezhi, which at that time lived northwest of China, as living near the mountains that from which jade originated.²⁰² In the chapter called "*Calculations and Measures*" he goes into further details, stating that white nephrite comes from the Yin Mountains, a northern spur of the Kunlun range on the border of today's Xinjiang, while jade comes from the mountains bordering the territory of the Yuezhi, probably referring to the main Kunlun range in the Tarim Basin.²⁰³ In the chapter of "*Qing Zhong economic policies, A*" a people from the Kunlun Wastes are also mentioned. Presumably these people were inhabitants of the Tarim Basin and they are described as valuing lapis lazuli and a substance known as *langgan*²⁰⁴ which it seems they traded with China, perhaps a very early form of east-west trade as lapis lazuli was almost exclusively found in Afghanistan.²⁰⁵ Much later, when he discusses the different "Walled Cities" of the Tarim Basin Ban Gu notes that Yutian has "an abundance of jade-stone,"²⁰⁶ and that in Souju [Yarkand] "the land produces blue-green jade."²⁰⁷ He also mentions that in order to pass into the Tarim Basin one had to pass through either the Yumen or the Yang barrier, and Yumen means simply "Jade Gate", probably named for the important trade using this crossing. Other place names can also give us a hint of the importance of Jade, as seen in the two rivers of the Khotan Oasis, Karakash and Yurungkash which means "Black Jade River" and "White Jade River" respectively.

Another much desired product from the Tarim Basin were textiles, especially woollen cloth but also flax for linen and later cotton probably introduced from India. The Chinese did

²⁰¹ Lin 2012b: 88-89

²⁰² Guan Zhong, XXIII.77.II.84.8 (425)

²⁰³ Guan Zhong, XXIII.78.XI.89.11 (438)

²⁰⁴ What substance Langgan was has not been identified but it is thought to be a type of jade, perhaps reddish brown in colour.

²⁰⁵ Guan Zhong, XXIII.80.XVIII.100.9 (464)

²⁰⁶ Ban Gu, 96A (97)

²⁰⁷ Ban Gu, 96A (140)

have access to wool, but the manufacture and use of silk was extremely widespread already during the Han period and Boulnoise points out that silk was used not only by aristocrats but landowners, officials and even merchants whom the Chinese considered to be of a low status.²⁰⁸ An ode from the Shih-ching (Classic of Poetry) said to have been composed by Confucius illustrates the low worth ascribed to silk compared to other cloth already during the seventh century BCE,

A simple-looking lad you were,
Carrying cloth to exchange for silk.
But you came not so to purchase silk,
You came to make proposals to me.²⁰⁹

Textiles discovered at sites in the Tarim Basin, such as the well preserved rugs found at the Niya site, had been lavishly decorated, sometimes with geometrical shapes and sometimes with humans, beasts and plants. They were also dyed by with the use of wax, and used indigo to give various bright and lively colours such as can be seen in the piece of a woollen carpet or rug found by Aurel Stein at the Loulan site.[Fig.3] The Chinese used these textiles for bed coverings, carpets and hangings and it appears they were considered fairly valuable as they have been found in tombs such as the husband-and-wife tomb found in Minfeng County.²¹⁰ Chinese sources also mention other trading goods such as grapes and possibly wine, alfalfa for fodder and a substance, called “white grass” by Ban Gu, by which he may be referring to either the sorrel vine or more likely to the bittersweet/woody nightshade, with both its leaves and fruits being poisonous to humans and livestock. According to Fan Ye,²¹¹ this “white grass” was used in poison arrows by the people of Xiye [Karghalik]

It is evident that during the first three centuries CE the Tarim Basin was dominated by fairly populous polities whose existence relied upon irrigation farming. These “Walled Cities” as the *Hanshu* terms them did appear indeed to have walls and were probably quite large, with stretches of hinterland around them, comparable it appears to contemporary cities in China or indeed in the West though probably a little smaller. The polities show evidence of a complex system of governance capable of mustering small armies, organizing the irrigation and enforce their laws, headed by a king or ruler under whom we find a class of nobility and officials with a wide range of different tasks and organized in a ranked hierarchy. The polities were, as said, based upon irrigated farming with a wide range of products produced, yet it

²⁰⁸ Boulnoise 1966: 19

²⁰⁹ Shijing, Odes of Wei, Mang

²¹⁰ Yong and Yutang 1996: 230-232

²¹¹ Fan Ye, 88 (19)

appears most polities were not self-sufficient, as important metals could not be found in every polity's territory. It therefore seems equally clear that trade played a central role in their economy, including long distance trade in luxury products. Jade, woollen textiles, wine and probably horses as well were exported in return for silk, pearls, lacquer-ware and various other products from China and jewellery, seals and various other products from the West. There are perhaps also signs of a political identity as opposed to an ethnic identity in the Kharoshthi documents from Niya were, in document 661, there is talk of "a man of the city called Khvarnarse."²¹² People are also often identified in these documents by which city they are from, such as Khotanese or Cadotan. As people in these cities probably would have spoken the same language and broadly would have shared the same culture it can perhaps indicate an identity not tied to ethnicity. But neither of these documents can be taken as proof of the identity of the local population. Unless more substantial evidence can be found it is simply not possible to say exactly how the people the Tarim polities constructed their own identity. Thus with the exception of Hansen's point on the citizens identity, the "Walled Cities" of the Tarim Basin clearly qualify as city-states within his ideal type.

3.3 The Tarim Basin – Nomadic polities

Up until this point the discussions have been centred on the sedentary people of the Tarim Basin, but as mentioned here there is another group of people present in the Tarim Basin, or rather in the peripheral regions of the Tarim, the semi-nomadic and nomadic groups. These groups are also included in the accounts of the Chinese historians and in order to fully understand the situation in the Tarim Basin during the first three centuries of the Common Era these groups must also be examined. Little is known of the material culture and economic life of these nomadic people, as aside from what little can be gleaned from Chinese sources there are few archaeological sources to draw from. But those of the nomadic polities that practised agriculture probably produced cereals of the same type as the "Walled Cities" and their animals were probably also the same, including cattle, horses, camels and sheep. As the nomadic polities do not seem so different from their settled neighbours I will not discuss at length their way of life and basic social structure but instead I will try to look at points which differentiate them from their neighbours. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly in this subchapter I will try to say something about the interaction between the sedentary and nomadic polities in and around the Tarim Basin.

²¹² Burrow, Doc.661

3.3.1 The land of the nomads

The Chinese historians are not always entirely clear when describing the various polities of the Tarim Basin, and it can at times be unclear how the people in the region we have discussed lived. This is seen in the section of *Da Yuan* where people are described as skilled in horsemanship, yet, at the same time, seem to reside mainly in cities. These two traits are of course not mutually exclusive, but the point is that the mere mention of an abundance of horses and perhaps also large contingents of mounted archers does not automatically indicate a nomadic way of life in the polity, although it can perhaps allude to a nomadic heritage. In many cases however, especially those within a reasonable distance from China, the Chinese historians are wonderfully clear about who practised nomadism and who did not. According to them there was a “belt” of nomadic polities in and beyond the mountains both to the west, north and northeast.[Map.10] In the west there were two types of nomads mentioned. There is the group of polities in the Pamir/Karakorum area consisting of the polities of Xiye [Karghalik], Manli [Karasul], Yinai [Tashkurgan], Wulei [Pamir valleys] who are all said to be of the same race and are described as living nomadic lives, hoping to obtain cereals from their neighbours.²¹³ Then there is a group in the northern Pamir/Western Tian-Shan region consisting of the polities of Xiuxiu [Karakavak area] and Chüan-tu [Karategin area], both of which are said to be of the Sai [Saka] race and live in the fashion of the Wusun (ie as nomads), as well as the Wusun themselves in the Ili river valley to the northwest of the Tarim Basin.²¹⁴ These are actually the only ones specifically labelled as nomads by the *Hanshu*, though some of the people of Shanshan are also said to move around with their stock animals in search of water and pastures indicating a semi-nomadic way of life and the people of Weitou [Akqi] are said to both farm a little and move around with their animals²¹⁵. The *Hou Hanshu* however elaborates further upon a few of the north-eastern polities. In the *Hou Hanshu* the people of the polities of Pulei [Barkol area] as well as Yizhi [Barkol area] and Eastern Jumi [Dashitou] are all described as living nomadic lives, moving about with their animals, though Pulei [Barkol] and Eastern Jumi [Dashitou] also practise some agriculture, suggesting that they lived semi-nomadic lives.²¹⁶ It seems likely that more of the north-eastern polities mentioned in the *Hanshu*, Western Jumi [Mulei], Wutanzili [Ebinor], the two Beilu, Chieh [Ürümqi] and Ku-hu [Near Lukchun], were semi or completely nomadic as well, and although there is no

²¹³ Ban Gu, 96A (100-103)

²¹⁴ Ban Gu, 96A and 96B (138-144)

²¹⁵ Ban Gu, 96A (85) (142)

²¹⁶ Fan Ye, 88 (47)

direct mentioning of this in the text, the fact that for all of them there is no town mentioned as the king's seat, but rather a valley would confirm this.²¹⁷ That a valley is given as a seat of the polities government is only seen in the case of nomadic polities elsewhere in the *Hanshu*, and seems to indicate at least a lack of permanent settlements. This belt thus would seem to stretch around the Tarim Basin with nomadic groups living in the harsh fringes where climatic conditions such as the lack of water or fertile soil made agriculture impossible. One can also identify two types of nomads, semi-nomadic people who practise some agriculture and the true nomads that seem to be found mainly in the mountainous southern fringes as well as the northern steps.

3.3.2 Nomads as barterers and traders

In the Chinese sources the most common way of describing nomadic people is by saying that they live, “moving about in search of water and pasture,” and most of them are also said to “hope to obtain cereals from neighbouring states”. Trade in food probably constituted the most basic form of nomad-agriculturalist interaction, as they could supply each other with different kinds of nutrition. The nomads produced protein rich food, mainly meat and dairy products, and as Laszlo Torday points out they must have had to reduce their stock substantially every winter as pastures grew scarce, thus some of the herd had to be slaughtered for the others to survive. The slaughter of animals also gave another useful by-product, namely skins, hides and wool which were probably also traded with the oasis polities. Then finally, the nomads could also offer their animals for trade if they had a surplus.²¹⁸ The oasis polities on the other hand mainly produced food rich in carbohydrates which the nomads generally lacked. The cereals produced by the sedentary farmers could also be stored and would last far longer than the easily perishable meat and dairy products of the nomads, something that was essential for both the settled and nomads alike during the hard winter months of the Tarim Basin. Trade between local nomads and farmers must have been a natural way to make up for deficiencies in their diet and getting access to more varied foodstuffs.

Trade played a very important role not only in the economic but also the social life of nomads across Eurasia as described in detail by Beckwith. The majority of the larger nomadic empires in history were ruled by a single ruler who surrounded himself with a large group of warriors, his “friends” or *Comitatus* as Tacitus calls them. For the smaller nomadic polities

²¹⁷ Ban Gu, 96A (179-182)

²¹⁸ Torday 1997: 12-13

too this constituted the upper echelon of the social hierarchy and as Beckwith points out, the way the rulers controlled them was through the giving of gifts, acquired through warfare or more commonly through trade.²¹⁹ When it comes to goods suitable for long-range trade the nomads produced textiles of wool, whose role in the trade with China has been discussed in the section on the “Walled Cities”, and jade from Xiye [Karghalik] as noted in the *Hanshu*²²⁰ while the *Hou Hanshu* records that they produced the infamous “White Grass”.²²¹

There was however one resource more important than these; and much coveted by the Chinese, which the nomads could supply, namely strong horses. The Chinese interest in obtaining stronger, larger horses from the Central Asian nomads stemmed from their continuous conflict with the Xiongnu. The value attached to horses and the importance of acquiring them is made apparent by the repeated Chinese expeditions to Dayuan with the hope of acquiring horses, more of which will be said later. The Ban Gu and Fan Ye also frequently notes which of the polities of the western region possessed good horses and Fan Ye in the *Hou Hanshu* Pulei [Barkol Area], as well as Yizhi [Barkol] and Eastern Jumi [Dashitou], were said to produce good horses.²²² Their horses were thus probably one of the most important items of long distance trade held by the nomads. That the nomadic polities in and around the Tarim Basin did in fact participate in long range trade is amply proven by archaeological finds. At Alagou in the modern Turfan county a group of graves has been unearthed that are associated with the Wusun nomads and dated to between the fourth and second century BCE. These graves contained significant quantities of luxuries goods much of which had obviously travelled from different regions afar and were not of nomad make, such as agate beads, pearls, silk goods and lacquerware, the latter two indicating a trade link with China.²²³

An even more splendid burial was afforded to the six people buried in the Tillya Tepe tombs from Afghanistan where an extraordinary amount of gold and precious gems had been buried with the dead. The grave from the first century CE held everything from shark teeth probably from India and a Greco-Bactrian necklace with a cameo, to a boot buckle with a Chinese looking chariot and a foldable crown made entirely out of gold.²²⁴[Fig.4] Evidently items were also traded back to China, not only horses but also luxury items, as for example

²¹⁹ Beckwith: 12-27

²²⁰ Ban Gu, (101)

²²¹ Fan Ye, 88 (19)

²²² Fan Ye: 47

²²³ Yong and Binghua 1996: 220

²²⁴ Schiltz 2011: 232-293

seen in the many artfully shaped belt clamps with distinctive nomad motives that have been found in Chinese tombs of Han period. It is likely that the nomads in the “belt” around the Tarim Basin played an important role in the east-west trade as they moved and lived in the mountains and highlands separating the Tarim Basin from the polities in Bactria and Sogdania as well as on the vast northern steppes. This topic has been studied by many scholars but Raschke in particular emphasise the importance of nomads. Through gift exchange, trade, raids or marriage the various nomadic groups would acquire luxuries and tradable goods which could be dispersed over vast distances as it was transported by the highly mobile nomadic groups. This mechanism he believes spread manufactured goods from the great agrarian empires across the Eurasian continent, examples of Chinese bronze mirrors and worked jade items making it as far as the Pontic Steppe already in the sixth to fifth century BCE.²²⁵ This meant that trade lay at the core of the nomadic polities’ sustenance base as well as their social system and helps to explain their reliance on trade. Then when trade was not possible or otherwise denied them nomadic societies would often turn to raiding.

3.3.3 The nomadic threat

With so many nomadic groups relatively close by one can wonder how these nomadic polities interacted politically with the “Walled cities” of the Tarim Basin. One may expect that the nomads would dominate the settled agriculturalists but this seems not to have been the case, at least if the Chinese sources are to be believed. They give no indication that any of the nomadic polities of the Tarim Basin held dominance over others, but rather the *Weilue* states that many of them became dependencies of the major polities of the Tarim Basin by the end of the second century CE, such as Xiuxiu [Karakavak] becoming a dependency of Shule [Kashgar] or most of the north-eastern polities which came to be dominated by Further Jushi [Jisama].²²⁶ One of the reasons for this, perhaps the main reason, is the size of the populations of the nomadic polities who, with the exception of the Wusun, is usually given as quite small. The largest is Xiye [Karghalik] which the Hou Hanshu reports to be at more than 10000 people, still a small number of compared to the ca 80000 recorded to be living in neighbouring Yutian [Khotan] during the same period.²²⁷ But what the nomadic polities seemed to have practised were frequent raids and attacks on the sedentary people of the Tarim Basin, a behaviour pattern commonly seen almost in any setting where nomads and sedentary

²²⁵ Raschke 1978: 610

²²⁶ Yu Huan, Sec. 9 and 23

²²⁷ Fan Ye, 88 (17-19)

people live close, especially as discussed above when trade was denied them. There are but a few mentions in the text of actual attacks by nomadic groups, but there are two polities noted for their banditry namely Yizhi [Barkol] and Chieh [Ürümqi]. The name Chieh [Ürümqi] in Chinese simply means robbery²²⁸ while the *Hou Hanshu* states that the people of Yizhi [Barkol] were brave and hardy in combat and that robbery and pillaging was their normal occupation.²²⁹ In another part of the *Hanshu*, the biography of Zhang Qian and Li Guangli, Shanshan and Gushi are also accused of attacking and robbing the Chinese emissaries. The polity of Gushi was later crushed by Han and split up into multiple smaller polities, amongst them Pulei [Barkol area], Yizhi [Barkol] and Chieh [Ürümqi].²³⁰ Further proof that the nomadic polities posed a problem or even a threat to the “Walled Cities” is found by noting the many officials charged with the office of protecting against the nomads. Especially amongst the polities of the northern Tarim Basin an official entitled noble or commandant of Ch’üeh-hu (Resistance to the nomads) is very common in the *Hanshu*, and many also have a military official for Chi-hu (Assault on the nomads). In Suoju [Yarkand] here is an even more specific title namely the master of defence against Xiye [Karghalik] which was Suoju’s [Yarkand] neighbour to the south and seems to have been a source of problems for this polity.²³¹ These titles all clearly indicate that there were military confrontations between the sedentary polities and their nomadic neighbours, though it probably took the form of raiding and pillaging rather than wars of conquest. Indeed, it is likely that part of the reason for the presence of “Walled Cities” in the Tarim Basin is the need for fortifications with which to defend oneself against the nomadic polities. This would significantly hamper the raiding and pillaging and probably gave the settled communities an edge against their nomadic neighbours. This practise is perhaps exemplified by the Chinese warring states and the later dynasties who repeatedly built large walls along their northern borders, mainly to ward off nomadic raiders and later conquer nomadic lands.

Unlike the vast majority of the polities described by Ban Gu in the *Hanshu* many of the nomadic polities to the west and northwest have no listed officials of any kind. This is the case in Xiye [Karghalik] and the adjacent polities to the south and west, Manli [Karasul], Yinai [Tashkurgan] and Wulei [Pamir valleys], as well as the polities of Xiuxiu [Karakavak] and Chüan-tu [Karategin area] to the west of Shule [Kashgar]. Interestingly, the other Tarim nomads described by the Chinese historians, those such as Weitou [Akqi] who seem to have

²²⁸ Ban Gu, 96A (182)

²²⁹ Fan Ye, 88 (47)

²³⁰ Ban Gu, 61 (223)

²³¹ Ban Gu, 96A (139)

been only semi-nomadic and the Wusun that controlled a huge area beyond the Tian Shan range, are named as having officials of roughly the same type and styles as those of the “Walled Cities” with the noticeable difference that there are no officials charged with dealing with nomads. The title of the Wusun ruler has also been preserved in the Chinese sources and he is not styled as king but rather as the Kunmi and later Kunmo. As was the case with the officials of the “Walled Cities” this could merely be Chinese historians trying to bring order to a chaotic material, but far more likely is the scenario where the nomadic polity has copied parts of the social structure of their settled neighbours, as is often seen amongst later nomadic groups. But the fact that some of the nomadic polities to the north and north-east have listed officials makes the lack of any such in the western polities all the more curious. Why this is the case can only give rise to speculation, there being of course the possibility that Han envoys and/or military personnel never reached them and thus knew very little of them. One could also propose that it tells us something about the dispersed and unorganized nature of these people reflecting that these groups who lived under extremely challenging natural conditions made any form of central control nearly impossible. This is very much supported by the nature of the Karakorum Range with its rocky valleys and near impassable peaks, though the Pamir range is far more habitable if still a challenge to central authorities.

In summary it is clear that the nomadic polities played an important role in the local political and the economic life in the Tarim Basin. The Tarim Basin was an area where settled agrarian societies lived with nomadic groups as their close neighbours, and as such, understanding the interaction between them is important in order to understand the region as a whole. The nomads and oasis communities acted as natural trading partners for each other and the nomads connecting the oases with the east, west and north as they carried items and perhaps also ideas and even culture between the various settled communities. At the same time they must have posed a significant threat by raiding and pillaging the oasis polities, as reflected in many of the official titles found there and testified by Chinese accounts. At the same time it is equally apparent that the smaller nomadic groups in later times were no match for the much better organized polities which, during the second and third century CE, appear to have conquered many of them.

3.4 The Tarim Basin – Conclusion

As the analysis above has shown there were two distinct types of polities within the Tarim Basin during the first three centuries CE, the sedentary and the nomadic polities. The sedentary polities, I believe, fits surprisingly seamlessly into the model provided by Mogens

Hansen for city-states.²³² In their earliest form the Tarim polities were small states centred on an urban centre occupying the surrounding oases and with relatively small populations. The urban centres were walled and the polities were capable of mustering their own armies, though not on the scale of the neighbouring nomads or great powers. The urban centres were compact but organized towns and cities built using local methods and probably decorated in a variety of ways. Ruling the city were kings, at least some of whom used epithets of an Iranian and Hellenistic tradition, presiding over a centralized and institutionalized bureaucracy who, at least during the third and fourth century CE, used the Kharoshthi script writing Prakrit. Economically the city-polities based themselves on extensive agriculture supplemented by various local resources as well as crafts such as weaving. Not self-sufficient within their territory they engaged in frequent exchanges with their neighbours as well as long-distance trade to acquire important metals, silks etc.

The only one of Hansen's points which cannot be concluded upon is the one pertaining to identity. It does seem, from certain Kharoshthi documents, that there is a tendency for thinking along city lines, but this does not in any way exclude an ethnic identity. Nor does, as Hansen lists amongst his characteristics²³³, the name of the territory seemingly need to necessarily align with the cities name, at least if the Chinese transcriptions are to be believed. In some cases such as Shule [Kashgar] the name of the state and urban centre align, but the urban centre of Yutian [Khotan] for example was known as Xicheng and the king of Nearer Jushi lived in Jiaohe.

The nomadic polities on the other hand appear to have been far less organized and centralized, as indicated by their ruler residing in valleys as opposed to towns. They lived nomadic or semi-nomadic lives in the harsher and less hospitable areas surrounding the oasis belt, and consequently had a much smaller populations than their settled neighbours. Furthermore, as nomadic economies are very much dependent upon contact and exchange with others, they probably interacted frequently with neighbouring polities, peacefully through trade or, when trade was not possible, through raiding and pillaging. Due to their mobility and this great incentive to trade, nomads played a very dynamic role in the region, probably already from ancient times. For example, it was quite possible that the presence of nomads was what spurred the building of walls around the early Tarim polities in an effort to become less vulnerable.

²³² Mogens Hansen 2000: 17-19

²³³ Mogens Hansen 2000: 18

The Tarim Basin polities are a varied group and both eastern as well as western tradition and influences seem to have played a major role in their development. The region is characterized as having a high degree of interaction between very different societies, the agrarian “Walled Cities” of the oases and the nomadic or semi-nomadic groups in the mountains and on the steppe. Their main shared trait is a lack of self-sufficiency which makes exchange and interaction with neighbouring polities essential. Clearly the interaction between these two groups and their common incentive to trade must have been very important in shaping the Tarim Basin as a whole and this is precisely what shall be discussed in the following chapter.

4.0 Interaction of empires and polities in the Tarim Basin

The highly organized and structured societies that have so far been discussed did not develop overnight, nor did they develop without any kind of outside stimuli. Furthermore the Tarim Basin in the second and third century had clearly absorbed influences both from the east and the west, and their culture shows these influences from various cultural zones. This chapter will pursue the second line of inquiry proposed in my introduction and will attempt to trace the origin of the Tarim Basin polities discussed in the previous chapter from prehistoric times to the second century CE. The focus will naturally be on the latter part of this long period, but as almost no attempts have been made to reconcile the Bronze and Iron Age finds with the later polities this chapter will also attempt to chart this early development. Central to this chapter will of course be the rise of the Silk Road and its importance in the development of the Tarim Basin polities as well as the perhaps equally important question of whether the appearance of the Tarim Basin polities played an important role in the development of the Silk Road trade.

4.1 Analytic tools

I will start by presenting some of the analytic tools I will use in order to better describe the various forms of interaction between the societies under examination in this chapter. Firstly I have chosen to divide this chapter into four “periods” defined chronologically as can be seen in appendix II. There is, perhaps naturally, some overlapping between these periods but as a tool for analysis this does not prove a problem. Secondly I have chosen to define various types of exchange. Throughout human history exchange has taken on many different forms but the forms discussed in this dissertation all fall into one of three categories, the categories

being ‘gift exchange’, ‘bartering’ and ‘long-distance trade’. These naturally are not mutually exclusive, nor set in stone, but can none the less be defined as follows:

Gift exchange I define as the most basic form of exchange where goods and sometimes services are given as gifts, and as such almost always from one person to another without haggling or similar behaviour. Gift giving usually entails a form of obligation to give something in return, while not necessarily material, it may just as often take the form of political or social capital. Gift exchange therefore carries much heavier social connotations than regular exchange would.²³⁴²³⁵ Gift giving can allow items to travel substantial distances but usually very slowly and on a random basis. It must however be stressed that gift-giving exists in all societies at all times.

Barter is defined here as the exchange of resources for other resources not restrained by the social constraints of gift exchange. The exchange may be quite organized, i.e. certain goods are exchanged at a certain time or place at a set rate, more loosely organized, involving haggling, or a combination of the two. Barter does however not go through other mediums such as money, but is simply the swapping of resources. In this dissertation barter, as opposed to long-distance trade, is also used to denote exchange over shorter distances, from one group, settlement or region to another. Repeated barter exchanges may also carry items over significant distances while a demand for a certain resource may increase the speed across that distance.

Long-distance trade is here used to denote the far more organized forms of trade between groups geographically distant from each other. Long-distance trade also entails the loose organisation of the exchange of resources, , but unlike the bartering system it importantly involves the use of money in the form of coins or other items like shells, silk and precious metals. Also unlike bartering, long-distance trade crosses far greater distances faster, bypassing the many regions where bartered items usually travel. Long-distance trade can in turn be divided into the two levels upon which it operates, namely as state organized trade or as independent trade organized by more or less independent tradesmen.

In addition to distinguishing between different types of exchange it will also be beneficial to differentiate between different “levels” of political, social and economic complexity in a

²³⁴ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/233393/gift-exchange> Checked 06.05.2013

²³⁵ Marcel Mauss 2011

society. I have decided to base my different “levels” upon Sanders and Webster’s theory of the evolution of complex societies in prehistoric and early historic times.

Egalitarian societies, also called tribes, are in Sanders and Webster’s definition characterized by a low population size and density while social differentiation is based upon personal achievement and equal access to basic economic resources; in many ways it is the basic agricultural society. Despite being called egalitarian these small scale societies do have a hierarchy and a leadership, often based upon personal qualities. Social stratification is thus low, and although such a society may consist of multiple communities this is not a necessary prerequisite.²³⁶

Stratified societies are in Sanders and Webster’s theory defined by the unequal access within a population to important resources such as productive land, water etc. Unequal control of wealth confers not only status but also allows for the formation of a dominant (patron) and subordinate (client) relationship. Unlike a fully-fledged polity however these stratified societies lack the complex social, economic and political institutions that are the characteristics of a polity. Stratified societies may well develop from loosely ranked societies however and generally will tend to change towards a full polity over time.²³⁷

In the characterisation of a state or polity, Sanders and Webster list seven criteria that are usually fulfilled. They have: 1) large, dense populations within defined territories 2) a highly centralized government with 3) specialized and centralized political institutions.

Economically they have: 4) economic stratification and 5) complex economic specialists for the production of both subsistence and non-subsistence goods. 6) The coercive force is monopolized and 7) the society is split into several “classes”. In short, it is a highly stratified society with a complex political, social and economic life.

Sanders and Webster do however emphasise that divergence from these points, rather than complete adherence, is the norm and that usually these points are fulfilled only partly by most ancient polities²³⁸ as they are for all intents and purposes Weberian ideal types.²³⁹

²³⁶ Sanders and Webster 1978: 268-269

²³⁷ Ibid: 272-273

²³⁸ Ibid: 274-275

²³⁹ Weber 1982

4.2 Period one – The first settlements

Semi-sedentary or sedentary societies in the Tarim Basin can be traced back to approximately the beginning of the second millennium BCE, the period at which the first archaeological sites of the Gumugou culture have been dated.²⁴⁰²⁴¹ Due to the region's extreme aridity, unusually large numbers of burials have been uncovered throughout the Tarim Basin and surrounding mountains, with most modern archaeological work since being centred upon these sites.

[Fig.5] As is pointed out by Chen and Hiebert the Bronze Age culture of the Tarim Basin must not merely be viewed as a periphery of the great empires to the east and west of it, but rather as a unique “core” area of its own, largely cut off from Central China in prehistoric times.²⁴² According to Chen and Hiebert the early Bronze Age people of the Tarim Basin seem to have arrived from the west, more specifically from Western Central Asia. In this area the so called “Oasis model” was already highly developed and a mode of sedentary life was able to be conducted here. The otherwise inhospitable and barren regions were made fertile through a combination of settlements in natural river delta, where the river meets the desert, and the extensive use of irrigation. The first agricultural oasis in western Central Asia can be traced back to before the second millennium BCE and it seems likely that this mode of life was carried across the mountains into the Tarim Basin. Such a theory is further supported by the close resemblance seen in Gumugou II cultural²⁴³, and Ke'ermuqi cultural²⁴⁴ grave goods, especially pottery, when compared with the early Andronovo culture of the Transoxanian region north-west of the Tarim Basin as well as the even closer connection seen in the Xintala²⁴⁵ pottery, bronze and burial culture.

Unlike the people living by the great rivers in China the early sedentary inhabitants of the Tarim Basin cultivated wheat, probably introduced from western Central Asia as it is not native to East Asia.²⁴⁶ In the early sites of the Gumugou culture (RC dated 2000-1550 BCE), found first at Gumugou in the Lop Nur region, bones and stone artefacts make up the majority of the remains including fragments of copper or bronze while even nephrite beads were discovered.²⁴⁷ Traces of wheat as mentioned above, as well as the bones and some woollen textiles, show that the people of Gumugou not only held animals but probably also farmed

²⁴⁰ Chen and Hiebert 1995: 250

²⁴¹ Before the appearance of these sedentary societies there are evidence of Neolithic and perhaps earlier humans living in the Tarim Basin, but these seems to have been displaced by people arriving later.

²⁴² Chen and Hiebert 1995: 245

²⁴³ Ibid: 257

²⁴⁴ Ibid: 271

²⁴⁵ Romgard 2008: 14

²⁴⁶ Chen and Hiebert 1995: 245-247

²⁴⁷ Ibid: 253

wheat.²⁴⁸ Later Bronze Age cultures that have been identified, Yanbulake (RC dated 1750-1300 BCE), Adinghu (RC dated 1400-700 BCE), Xintala (RC dated 1700-1470 or 1680-1490 BCE) and Haladun cultures (not dated), have on the whole similar types of grave goods as the earlier graves at Gumugou, though the graves of a later date have more and better crafted bronze artefacts and more decorative items. The different cultures are mainly marked by differing styles of pottery as well as different burial traditions, and each is limited to a fairly small region. For example, in Gumugou and Adinghu the graves contained either individuals or pairs of bodies, but at Yanbulake some of the graves also held multiple bodies buried together while at Xintala no graves have yet been discovered, so the number of bodies buried together is unknown.

These Bronze Age finds show little evidence of inter-regional contact or contact with the areas east of the Tarim Basin. A few items of precious metals or stones have been uncovered, such as a gold ear pendant with an agate bead, a silver hairpin and cowry shells found at Yanbulake and a nephrite axe at Xintala,²⁴⁹ but these items are extremely rare and spread across multiple tombs and burials. These artefacts might be signs of limited regional contact, cowries for example being not obtainable near the Yanbulake sites, and the small humanoid figures carved in wood found throughout the sites show such contact. Tin and copper to make bronze items, attested by the grave material, could have been a basis for some regional barter but it does not appear to have triggered long-distance trade as seen elsewhere in the world. The reason for this is likely that both metals were locally available in the early cultures, the majority of which were based along the Tian Shan.[Map.9] Barter trade must have been infrequent and happened on a fairly random basis within a regional framework, as proven by the regional differences in burial and pottery culture. The similarity in the grave goods between different tombs in one site, as far as such evidence goes, also make it probable that the Bronze Age Tarim cultures had very low levels of social stratification. Weapons were found both at Yanbulake, where arrowheads, knives and swords were discovered²⁵⁰, and at Xintala where the previously mentioned nephrite axe as well as knives and arrowheads were found. The comparative scarcity of weapons however, as well as the lack of social stratification and contact between the regions, indicates regional warfare to be an uncommon occurrence.

²⁴⁸ Romgard 2008: 20

²⁴⁹ Chen and Hiebert 1995: 267

²⁵⁰ Ibid: 262

The remains of settlements, all of very limited size, have been discovered with the excavation of burial sites, and at Yanbulake a seemingly enclosed compound, although this has not yet been properly excavated.²⁵¹ Both the enclosing wall at Yanbulake as well as domestic structures discovered at Xintala sites were constructed of mud bricks indicating these to be permanent settlements rather than temporary constructions. Early oasis communities in Bactria and Margiana are also constructed buildings in a similarly fashion, suggesting a common origin.

Migrating in from the north and west the Bronze Age cultures of the Tarim Basin settled in small oasis communities and survived by a combination of farming and husbandry. They produced bronze items but the majority of their tools were made from wood, stone and bone, with only the occasional appearance of rarer or more luxurious items. Despite being heavily reliant upon extensive irrigation there is no evidence for an increased stratification in the early settlements. Judging by the grave finds the Bronze Age inhabitants of the Tarim Basin lived in communities with a low level of social stratification; probably what can be termed egalitarian societies of varying sizes. Although gift exchange and some regional barter took place there was no demand, such as the demand for tin, to drive exchange and each culture seems to have been largely independent with little if any contact with areas outside the Tarim itself.

4.3 Period two – Rise of the Tarim Polities

However, during the time Chen and Hiebert have termed the “late period” (1000-400 BCE) of Xinjiang archaeology a change appears to occur, both in grave culture and content, a change which seems to reflect a new stage in the history of the Tarim Basin polities. There are generally three cultural zones identified within the Tarim Basin during this period, the Sidaogou culture (RC dated 1000-200 BCE) in the Turfan depression and east of it towards Hami, the Chawuhugoukou culture (RC dated 1000-400 BCE) centred on lake Boston and the Qunbake culture (RC dated 800-400 BCE) further west between modern Karashar and Kucha. These pottery and burial “zones” are much larger than previously seen, the Sidaogou for example covering the area previously inhabited by people of the Yanbulake and the Audinghu cultures. Equally the tombs are apparently more substantial and elaborate in this period, as seen in the tombs of the Sidaogou culture at Lanzhouwanzi. Here a large stone mound revealed a subterranean two room structure where 17 people had been buried, from infants to

²⁵¹ Ibid: 259-269

elderly women, and has led to speculation as to whether it might once have been an early regional centre.²⁵² Many of the tombs of the Sidaogou culture still hold the graves of many people buried together as was also common in the Yanbulake culture that existed in the same area. Early graves from both Chawuhugoukou sites and Qunbake sites commonly have many people buried in one grave, although in some cases it might be as a result of reburial, but later tombs usually contain a single body or a pair of bodies. The grave goods also undergo marked changes in this period as, in addition to a rich assemblage of bronze items, iron makes its appearance in these graves. Marking the start of the Iron Age within the Tarim basin there are iron tools, such as needles and awls found, and for example iron sickles as well as iron weapons at Qunbake sites²⁵³ also jewellery at the Chawuhugoukou sites. Some archaeological cultures of this period show signs of what Chen calls a “nomadic” orientation, especially evident in the Chawuhugoukou culture.²⁵⁴ The deceased were buried in kurgans, a kind of tumulus graves, in a fashion reminiscent of nomadic cultures in the Issyk Kul and Pazyryk area.²⁵⁵ Horses also appear in the graves during the middle of this period, graves from the Chawuhu site, dated by DNA as being between 2500-3000 years old, were furnished both with horse-bits and the remains of actual horses.²⁵⁶ There are also signs of increased regional exchange in the form of items or at least crafting techniques crossing between various archaeological cultures. One example is from the previously mentioned tomb at Lanzhouwanzi where a so called “Scythian” cauldron was discovered; the “Scythian” cauldrons being common across the northern step region as far west as the Black Sea.²⁵⁷

A particularly good example of the change that occurs to oasis communities in this period are the pebble graves of Alagou in the Turfan depression, so named because pebbles were used for walls in the grave pits, which has been dated with Carbon-14 tests to between the eighth and the second century BCE.²⁵⁸ The early pebble graves from this site all contain several people buried together with textiles of mainly wool, tools of wood and bronze as well as decorative artefacts of jade and other precious stones, shells, bronze and gold. The material culture puts these graves within the Chawuhugoukou cultural zone, although the tomb styles have similarities to graves in the Shanshan County. In these early graves the only sign of foreign items are silk hairnets with which some of the deceased were buried, the textiles were

²⁵² Chen and Hiebert 1995: 273

²⁵³ *Ibid*: 272-281

²⁵⁴ *Ibid*: 274

²⁵⁵ *Ibid*

²⁵⁶ Romgard 2008: 24

²⁵⁷ Chen and Hiebert 1995: 273

²⁵⁸ Yong and Binghua 1996: 213

probably imported from China. Graves from the later period however are markedly different. Firstly the later graves are always graves for either one or two people, completely replacing the earlier practise of multiple burials, and although the basic structure of the tomb remains, the same wooden pillars and a wooden bench were added. Secondly the previous bronze items, weapons and tools, have been replaced almost exclusively by iron. And finally material culture suddenly incorporates not only locally produced items but also luxurious items that are almost certainly to have originated in China. The most striking evidence is of course significant quantities of silk, some of it embroidered with patterns such as the phoenix, commonly found in china in the same period, but also lacquerware and new previously unseen types of pottery.²⁵⁹ [Fig.6]

The Alagou area has also furnished another site dated to between the fourth and second century BC but belonging to a distinctly different grave culture than that of the Chawuhugoukou culture previously discussed. More specifically Yong and Binghua believe that the so called wood chamber graves, constructed with a chamber-coffin placed and sealed in a pit filled with sand and piled stone, belonged to the Wusun nomads that Chinese historians suggest would have lived in the area during the period in question. They base this judgement not only on the literary evidence, but also on the finds of animal figures strongly reminiscent of finds from the Ili valley, an area the Wusun are known to have inhabited later, and to a strong resemblance of worked gold and silver items found in other nomadic tombs.²⁶⁰ For example, and of great interest, is the discovery of as many as a 100 artfully shaped gold flakes probably once used as decoration for clothing as well as beaten golden plaques probably used on belts. [Fig.7] These items are finds strikingly similar to the gold leaves, plaques, belt buckles and other decorative pieces uncovered at the Tillya Tepe site in modern Afghanistan.²⁶¹ However it is not clear, whether the people of these graves were Wusun or not, what is clear is that these graves also represent a different kind of grave from those of the Bronze Age grave culture. In addition to the abundance of gold items, clearly showing the importance of the people buried here, there is a quantum of imported goods; pearls, silk, lacquer ware, trays and cups in all likelihood acquired from China proper and are a clear sign of Chinese artefacts being spread into the Tarim Basin.²⁶²

One way of explaining the changes seen in the grave culture of the people of the Tarim Basin during the middle part of the first millennium BCE is the changing social structure and

²⁵⁹ Yong and Binghua 1996: 213-218

²⁶⁰ Ibid: 218-221

²⁶¹ For the Tillya Tepe treasure see Afghanistan, Crossroad of the Ancient World.

²⁶² Yong and Binghua 1996: 220

presumably increased stratification within the societies. As Kent Flannery points out, the presence of tombs are somewhat uncertain clues when identifying a stratified society, as there are examples of extremely luxurious tombs from societies with a low level of stratification, but they can often be a clue to its presence.²⁶³ Many comparable tombs have however been shown to belong to rulers of nascent polities, for example the Sipan tombs from the Moche culture (100-600 AD) in Peru. In the Lambayeque Valley Sipan Tomb 2, is shown to probably have been a royal tomb, it contained a richly decorated man buried with several “servants”. The man was adorned with ornaments of gold, silver and turquoise, much like the gold, silk and pearls of the people buried in the wood chamber graves at Alagou. Accompanying him were large quantities of pottery, copper items and other artefacts, as well as offerings of human hands and arms, probably from defeated enemies.²⁶⁴ With the exception of the severed body parts the other items were also to be found in both types of later Alagou graves, though neither seemed to have contained any “servants” buried with the dead. But as the Tillya-Tepe tomb, undoubtedly a royal burial tomb, and other burial sites from the region show such practises do not seem to have been very common in the Central Asia during the period, although a parallel might be drawn to the tomb at Lanzhouwanzi. The Chawuhugoukou grave culture, to which the Alagou graves are thought to belong, does however furnish some examples of sacrificed animals placed in pits around major graves.²⁶⁵

4.3.1 The importance of Trade

As these examples show there is undeniably a period of significant change during the first millennium BCE and the question this raises is of course what caused these changes. It is quite possible that the spread of the Chinese influence was an important factor in an increasing stratification suggested by the archaeological finds. Yong and Binghua suggest, after having discussed their appearance, that these changes show that the inhabitants were increasingly influenced by Chinese culture and economy²⁶⁶. Indeed it was around the period in question that many of the Chinese states, at the time locked in intense competition and frequent spats of warfare, started expanding northwards fighting a people called Rong and Di.²⁶⁷ The archaeological evidence as seen above, in the form of silk and other Chinese luxuries in the Tarim Basin, and jade, lapis and other Tarim luxuries in Chinese tombs, make

²⁶³ Flannery 1998: 46

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*: 47-50

²⁶⁵ Chen and Hiebert 1995: 275

²⁶⁶ Yong and Binghua 1996: 218

²⁶⁷ di Cosmo 2006: 15

it very clear that there was interaction in some form since items passed from one region to the other on a frequent basis. A model commonly used to explain the appearance of increasingly complex and stratified societies during the Bronze Age is the rise, first of so called “big-men” and later a so called “palace” culture. The key here is redistribution, i.e. that one person or a small group controls the internal distribution of goods in society and especially the distribution of items acquired from exchange with other settlements.²⁶⁸ Such a system is also the essential component in a stratified society according to Sanders and Webster. In their article on the development of early societies they emphasise that stratification occurs when important resources such as capital, land or water is not equally available for all members.²⁶⁹ In the context of the Tarim Basin it seem unlikely that it was the monopolization of land or water that caused the changes, the development came long after both land and water were heavily utilized, and capital was, as far as we know, not developed during this period. Furthermore tin and copper was as we have seen not resources scarce enough to fill this role.

In the Mediterranean the early political structures came into being as a result of increasing interaction, particularly trade, with the large Bronze Age empires of the Middle East. A prime example is the Minoan rulers who in all likelihood based their rule upon controlling trade.²⁷⁰ Similarly Beckwith in his discussion of the rise of the nomad empires of Central Eurasia also emphasises the importance of foreign exchange as a tool allowing the leader to form a *Comitatus*, a core of loyal warriors; a fact he believes to be central to the formation of these first nomadic empires.²⁷¹ Raschke also discusses this tendency, pointing to the great wealth of luxuries found in the graves of Central Eurasian nomads.²⁷² I find it quite plausible that a similar system, centred on the redistribution of items and resources from distant regions, could have arisen in the Tarim Basin at the end of prehistoric time (c. 1000-200 BCE) which in turn would lead to the presence of relatively developed societies as attested by later Chinese written records. For such a model to work in the Tarim Basin however it would require two conditions to be fulfilled; firstly the presence of one or more resources that could be monopolized and exchanged for foreign and exotic goods allowing those who controlled them access to foreign goods with which to gain a central position in society. Secondly, it also required a way to bridge the gap between the Tarim settlements and

²⁶⁸ Meyer 2006: 42-44

²⁶⁹ Sanders and Webster 1978: 272

²⁷⁰ Meyer 2006: 63-67

²⁷¹ Beckwith 2009: 26-28

²⁷² Raschke 1978: 607-609

the regions both east and west, a gap clearly shown by the lack of external influence on the “period one” settlements.

The commodities which could have featured in such a system are probably the same as those mentioned as important commodities of the Western Regions in later times, and there are few commodities that were as easy to monopolize and as frequently traded as jade. As discussed in chapter three commodities like lapis, gold, horses and even woollen textiles could also have bartered. But as China proper has always had abundant supplies of copper, tin and iron it seems unlikely for none-precious metals to have played a major role. Valuable and desired objects for exchange were thus clearly available, but the gap between China proper and the Tarim Basin was still one of such magnitude that any direct long-distance trade link does not seem to have existed, nor is such contact mentioned in Chinese sources.

It was during the start of the Iron Age, in the centuries around the turn of the first millennium BCE that “true” nomadism first appeared on the Eurasian steppes. While people living partly nomadic lives existed long before this time, “true nomads” in the sense of people living almost entirely nomadic lives is generally agreed to have appeared around the start of the Iron Age, a development discussed in detail both by Raschke²⁷³ and Beckwith²⁷⁴. As Beckwith describes it, “With the perfection of equestrian skills and development of the techniques and life-style of mounted horse nomadism around the beginning of the first millennium BC, the steppe zone core of Central Eurasia belonged to the Northern Iranians.”²⁷⁵ Truly nomadic people started appearing north, northwest and east of the Tarim Basin and some of them, like the Wusun mentioned above, even entering into the Tarim Basin itself. It was also in the latter half of this millennium that the first nomadic confederation/empire came into existence in modern Mongolia, the Xiongnu. Truly nomadic people were, as discussed in chapter three, particularly reliant upon trade to supplement their sustenance basis, as well as getting access to a variety of luxury items, and it is unlikely that these nomadic people would barter items with the Tarim settlements, move southeast, and exchange items with Chinese. Indeed Guan Zhong (c. 720-645 BCE), an ancient Chinese economist, notes that as early as the Spring and Autumn period (771-476 BCE) jade was acquired from the western regions via the Yuezhi people; nomads at that time lived in the Gansu area.²⁷⁶

The nomads did what the settled agriculturalists could not, cross vast distances on a regular basis, and I believe they became the key that triggered changes seen in the Tarim

²⁷³ Raschke 1978: 607

²⁷⁴ Beckwith 2009: 58-60

²⁷⁵ Ibid: 58

²⁷⁶ Guan Zhong, XXIII.78 and II.84.8 (425)

Basin graves. This is still not long-distance trade but rather barter on a much larger scale and of greater intensity. Through new links between China and the Tarim Basin, which were not, according to archaeological evidence, in direct contact during the Bronze Age, they would be able to exchange goods, thus now allowing persons in the Tarim Basin to capitalize upon Chinese demand for the resources they possessed.

4.3.2 Importance of External Threats

However, “proto-kings” or “Big-men” did not rule because they controlled the distribution of resources only but also because they served other important leadership roles, such as organizing communal building projects in the settlement or leading the settlement men in warfare.²⁷⁷ Perhaps just as important as their ability to trade would be the external pressure the “true” nomads could exert upon the agricultural communities of the Tarim Basin in times of conflict, a form of pressure other settlements could not wield. Nomadic people’s reliance on trade, especially in periods of natural calamities or of changing climate, also meant that if denied trade they would quickly have to turn to raiding and warfare to acquire the goods they needed. As mounted archers spending most of their life in the saddle they were certainly militarily superior to the early agriculturalists and would have constituted a significant threat. External pressure would probably allow important individuals to amass more power, and the complex task of building walls and similar structures for defence would also be a factor promoting the rise of a small group, or even of a single leader. Repeated raids by nomadic people could perhaps also make many smaller oasis communities band together in larger units as a form of defence, a process that would aid the urbanization of the Tarim Basin. The first Chinese accounts of the region, those presented by Zhang Qian in c. 125 BCE, does in fact specify that the people of Loulan [Later Shanshan] and Gushi [Later Jushi] lived in fortified cities, as did the people of Dayuan [Ferghana].²⁷⁸ Walls and barriers would of course also allow the nascent ruler to more effectively control the population they aspired to rule.

4.3.3 The rise of the Tarim Polities

Yong and Binghua put the changes seen in the Tarim Basin graves during the first millennium BCE down to the inhabitants being “increasingly subject to the influence of the culture and economy of China”.²⁷⁹ This is of course true in the sense that they gained access to Chinese

²⁷⁷ Meyer 2006: 43

²⁷⁸ Sima Qian: 223

²⁷⁹ Yong and Binghua 1996: 218

goods, but China during this same period experienced centuries of instability, internal warfare and decentralization, hardly a state wherein culture and economy would be expected to spread. The Chinese culture and economy had furthermore already matured during “period one” and yet no major changes can be detected before the very end of this period. Valerie Hansen on the other hand finds evidence for a rise of long-distance trade during this period providing another possible explanation for the changes.²⁸⁰ And yet Chinese sources give no evidence for direct trade with people within the Tarim Basin.

I would therefore propose that the changes in the first millennium BCE reflect an increased exchange on a regional basis taking the form of bartering, an exchange where items moved from group to group, but on a larger scale than previously seen, in which the nomads played a crucial role. With the rise of true nomadism the distance between China and the Tarim Basin, or probably also the Tarim Basin and the west, would be bridged, allowing goods of various kinds, and perhaps also ideas, to be exchanged on a scale that made it a meaningful powerbase. Such a system would allow resourceful individuals or families to monopolize the exchange or at least be controlled, this in turn would lead to their political power increasing, a development reflected in the increasing stratification seen in tombs of the period. As seen in many Bronze Age societies the monopolization of regional trade could eventually transform local “big-men” or chiefs into kings and local rulers whose position, and monopolies, probably became inheritable. The threat of nomadic people would also be an incentive for the construction of defensive measures, a task which could perhaps further enhance the position of the leader.

While there is no definitive proof it seems probable, considering that the Chinese describe encountering complex polities a few hundred years later, that the first millennium BCE saw a significant stratification of societies throughout the Tarim Basin and a development towards more complex societies. A theory such as this is also supported by Harmatta who believes urbanization of the Tarim Basin started in the third century BCE.²⁸¹ This stratification and increased wealth in all likelihood also reflects the development of more complex and larger societies which interacted with others on a regional basis and traded through bartering. The rise of kings and regional trade would encourage urbanization, made possible by the extensive irrigation of the areas between the mountains and the deserts, as wealth was centred on a person, a family or a clan. Urbanization, with an increase in social complexity, would probably also enhance the position of the ruler. This in turn would in time

²⁸⁰ V. Hansen 2012: 13

²⁸¹ Harmatta 1996: 488

spark the development of walls to protect the urban centre, a bureaucracy to gather taxes and organize barter trade and the multifarious specialists required by an urbanized society.

But as Sanders and Webster point out a stratified society doesn't necessarily mean the immediate development of a state with all the associated economic, political and cultural advances.²⁸² In this regard the archaeological work is still insufficient to give a definitive verdict; there are no clear signs of either writing, monetary systems or anything indicating heavy competition or warfare between the nascent polities. Indeed if we follow Flannery's "Ground Plans of Archaic States" there is only one of his four hallmarks for states, the presence of rich or even royal tombs, which can be proven within the Tarim Basin in this period. The three others, settlement hierarchy, palaces and major temples, have not been found, although this is perhaps partly due to the insufficient archaeological study of ancient settlements.²⁸³ On the other hand the development pattern suggested above does fit fairly well with one of Mogens Herman Hansen's models of the emergence of city-states, as he writes, "In a period of demographic and economic upsurge, urbanization and state formation take place simultaneously or in close sequence. The city-state period is preceded by a pre-state period. The formation of city-states is gradual and often imperceptible."²⁸⁴

The rise of the Tarim Basin polities did however clearly enter a new phase between the third and second century BCE as the region became one of many battlegrounds between the Han dynasty of China and their main enemy throughout the dynasties history, the Xiongnu.

4.4 Period three – China and the Xiongnu

Han involvement with the Tarim Basin came about as a reaction to the presence of their main rival, the Xiongnu, in the region during the second century BCE. The first mention of the Xiongnu subjugating the Tarim Basin is found in the *Shiji* where, in a supposed letter from the first Shanyu Maodun (ruled 209-174), the Xiongnu Wise King of the Right [West] are said to have conquered the Loulan [Lop region], Wusun and Hujie tribes as well as twenty-six nearby states.²⁸⁵ According to the *Hanshu* the Xiongnu had established a commandant in charge of controlling at least parts of the Tarim Basin, a commandant the *Hanshu* names as "Commandant of the Slaves". This "Commandant of the Slaves" had his seat in the Baghrash Kul area near Yanqi [Karashar] and his task was to levy taxes upon the various polities of the

²⁸² Sanders and Webster 1978: 272

²⁸³ Flannery 1998: Chapter. 2

²⁸⁴ M. Hansen 2000: 17

²⁸⁵ Sima Qian, 110 (140)

Basin.²⁸⁶ Just what kind of levies existed is not clear, but it was considered an important source of wealth for the Xiongnu, at least from a Chinese perspective, as the Chinese later referred to their conquest of the Tarim Basin as “cutting off the right arm” off the Xiongnu.²⁸⁷ The Xiongnu during this period of strength had attacked and defeated the Yuezhi in Gansu, driving them westwards, and had the Wusun tribe under their domination. As the Shanyu boastfully claimed in the above mentioned letter, “All the people who live by drawing the bow are now united into one family and the entire region of the north is at peace.”²⁸⁸

Chinese exploration of the western regions started in the midst of their wars with the Xiongnu in modern day Mongolia, when a plan was devised to ally with enemies of the Xiongnu in the western regions, more specifically with the Yuezhi nomads by now lived somewhere beyond west of the Pamir. A call for someone to undertake a journey to the west went out and Zhang Qian, a palace attendant, was chosen as an envoy to the Yuezhi. Zhang Qian returned around 125 BCE after thirteen years of travelling bringing back no alliance, but a deal of new knowledge and a fairly detailed description of the “western regions”. Based on his report the Han interest in the western regions increased and more envoys were dispatched in the following years.²⁸⁹ This also coincided with the great Chinese military victories over the Xiongnu under the leadership of the generals Wei Qing and Huo Qubing who decisively defeated the Xiongnu in a campaign in northern Gobi in the year 119 BCE. The campaign came about after the defection of the Hanyu king from the Xiongnu to Han. According to Chinese sources by the time the Chinese army returned it had killed or captured 19000 enemies with the *Shanyu* nearly being captured as well.²⁹⁰ Though the number might not be exact, these victories solidified Chinese control of the Gansu, opening the way to the Tarim Basin and Chinese expansion in that direction. Between 119 and 104 BCE the easternmost polities came under increasing Han domination though both Loulan [Lop Nur region] and Gushi [Unified Jushi] who are described as have been somewhat hostile to the Han, harassing envoys and aiding the Xiongnu which resulted in a Chinese attack in roughly 109-108 BCE. Gushi was conquered and the king of Loulan taken prisoner. The Chinese line of posts and defences were also extended to the edge of the Tarim Basin and Dunhuang by the Yumen [Jade Gate] established as the westernmost Chinese holding.²⁹¹

²⁸⁶ Ban Gu, 96A (73)

²⁸⁷ Sima Qian, 123 (238)

²⁸⁸ Sima Qian, 110 (140-141)

²⁸⁹ Sima Qian, 123 (231-233)

²⁹⁰ Sima Qian, 111 (173-177)

²⁹¹ Sima Qian, 123 (242-243)

Yet Chinese involvement in the Tarim Basin wasn't very heavy before 104 BCE when the expedition under Li Guangli (?-90 BCE) to Dayuan [Ferghana] set out. As explained in the previous chapter the Chinese wished to acquire better horses for military purposes and as a result sent envoys in the hope of trading horses. The envoys, despite bringing a large amount of gold was rejected and answered with insults which caused the nobles of Dayuan [Ferghana] to have them killed and their goods seized. With the pretext of righting this wrong and at the same time obtaining the fabled "blood sweating horses" the expedition set out on a march across the Tarim Basin. The journey took a heavy toll on the large army, supposedly between 26000 and 36000 strong, suffering as they did from the small polities along the way hiding behind their walls and refusing to supply the Chinese. The army arrived in tatters at the easternmost town of Dayuan, Yuchang, and after being soundly beaten in the battle Li Guangli his generals decided to withdraw. The *Shiji* states only one or two tenths of the original force managed to return to Dunhuang two years after setting off. Despite this first expedition being an utter disaster the emperor, in disregard of his minister's advice, threw the resources of the empire into forming a second expedition which set off c. 101 BCE with roughly 60000 men, once more under Li Guangli's command. This time the expedition also took hydrologic engineers, far more supplies and a system to organize transportation of further supplies for the army. Furthermore, after having attacked and massacred the city of Luntou en route the local polities decided it best to aid the Chinese with gifts of food. After diverting the water supply of Yucheng, causing distress and hardship in the city, the army continued to Ershi, seat of the king of Dayuan, where a siege of over forty days brought the city to its knees. The nobles of Dayuan killed their king and surrendered their best horses to be taken back to China, garnering the Chinese great prestige. The *Shiji* states that from this time the rulers of the polities of the Tarim Basin started sending their sons and brothers as hostages to Han, a practise that would become common practice later.²⁹²

The result of the second successful expedition, beyond the acquisition of the wanted horses, was as the *Hanshu* puts it, "After the Ershi general's attack on Dayuan, the Western Regions were shocked and frightened,"²⁹³ it goes on to detail how submissive they became and how they began to present tributary gifts to Han. Such a development is perhaps not very surprising when considering the fate of Luntou. In the century that followed, Chinese control over the Tarim Basin seems to have been near absolute, as it slowly expanded to cover most of the polities within and around it. The Gushi polity in the Turfan depression and the north-

²⁹² Sima Qian, 123 (246-251)

²⁹³ Ban Gu, 96A (76)

eastern part of the Tarim was defeated and split into many smaller polities.²⁹⁴ Meanwhile Loulan was brought into line as the Chinese had the king Angui assassinated and his younger brother Weituqi put on the throne in his stead; the polity being renamed Shanshan and the capital moved.²⁹⁵ During this period Xiongnu attempts at reaffirming their control over the area were also repeatedly repulsed and after internal warfare amongst the Xiongnu, ca 60 BCE, they completely ceased to be a meaningful rival to the Chinese in the Tarim Basin. As the *Hanshu* puts it, “From this time onwards the [post of] Commandant of the T’ung-pu (Slaves) was abolished. The Hsiung-nu became increasingly weaker and was unable to approach the western regions.”²⁹⁶ This state of affairs was reflected in 59 BCE by establishing the post of “Protector General of the Western Regions”²⁹⁷ with responsibility for “protecting” the polities along both the northern and southern route., Zhang Ji (?-49 BCE), the first to fill this post, oversaw the establishment of agricultural colonies and garrisons, as well as establishing the seat of the protector general at Wulei centrally on the northern route around the Tarim Basin. These events initiated a period of Chinese nominal control over the Tarim Basin which would last until the Wang Mang’s interregnum (9-23 CE) when all relations were severed and not reopened again before well into the second half of the first century.²⁹⁸

The Chinese accounts and official reports as presented in the *Shiji* and the *Hanshu* are arguably too quick in claiming the awe of the “Western Barbarians” and to exaggerate their influence in the area. To discover the true extent of Chinese influence, analyses of archaeological finds to supplement Chinese accounts are essential. For the sake of convenience the following discussion will be divided into four parts focusing on: the Chinese military domination in the Tarim Basin and official’s interaction with local governments, the influence of the Chinese language and the economic impact of the Chinese in the Tarim Basin.

4.4.1 “Pax Serica” - Chinese hegemony

The most discernible signs of Chinese military control over the Tarim Basin today are the commonly found remains of Chinese military installations, there. Both the *Hanshu* and *Hou Hanshu* mention the presence of Chinese military personnel in the eastern part of the Tarim Basin on several occasions; the *Hanshu* noting that installations were first erected in the years shortly following the war with Dayuan around the turn of the first century BCE. It states that:

²⁹⁴ Ban Gu, 96A (77)

²⁹⁵ Ban Gu, 96A (90-92)

²⁹⁶ Ban Gu, 96A (78)

²⁹⁷ 西域都護府(Xiyu Duhu Fu)

²⁹⁸ Ban Gu, 96A (76-79)

Government posts were erected at frequent intervals in a series running westwards from Dunhuang to the Salt Marsh, and a complement of several hundred agricultural conscripts was stationed at both Lun-t'ai and Ch'ü-li. A colonel [for the assistance of imperial] envoys were established to protect them and to provide supplies for the Han envoys who were proceeding to the outer states.²⁹⁹

A garrison was also established at the request of the new king of Shanshan near this polity around year 77 BCE when the Chinese had had the old king Angui killed and installed their own candidate in his stead.³⁰⁰ The *Hou Hanshu* also mentions garrisons in the eastern Tarim Basin, the most interesting perhaps being Gaochang where a fortress has been excavated.³⁰¹ [Map.11]

This is not a unique example since many of the installations mentioned by the Chinese historians are reflected in the archaeological finds; a large number of outposts, watchtowers and forts having been excavated in the eastern end of the Tarim Basin. The smaller types of installations are the watchtowers and posts north, west and east, of Dunhuang, called Han "Limes" by Sir Aurel Stein. Much like the Roman limes these installations seem to have been charged with keeping watch on the border of China proper and consisted of small watchtowers at regular intervals along the Sulohu River. These four and five meters high towers were invariably located on small hills, knolls and similar natural rises. Following common Chinese wall-building conventions they were made of stamped clay interwoven with reed fascines or other locally available material, but some of the limes were also made of sun-dried bricks, and most had a small house adjoining the tower itself, presumably for the watchmen to live in. As a testament to their solid construction these limes and the stamped clay walls linking them are still visible today.³⁰² [Fig.8] Proof that at least some of these limes must have been in use during the reign of the Han dynasty is provided not so much by the find of wuzhu coins, which are unreliable source of dating, but by the discovery of dated documents among the refuse covering the ground near the stations. Near the station labelled T. XXII d. by Stein,³⁰³ he recovered about a dozen wooden slips containing Chinese characters, a few of which carried dates. The slip marked as T. XXII. D. 015 found by Stein was later identified as bearing a date corresponding to the 16th of December 47 CE while two slips

²⁹⁹ Ban Gu, 96A (76)

³⁰⁰ Ban Gu, 96A (92)

³⁰¹ Fan Ye, 88 (13)

³⁰² Stein 1928: 348-351

³⁰³ See Stein 1928: 345 for a full description of the site and finds.

marked T. XXII. D. 018 and 019 recorded deliveries made in CE 64 and a fourth wooden slip, T. XXII. D. 024 was thought to be a fragment of a calendar dated either 10 BCE or 115 CE.³⁰⁴

Further into the Tarim Basin archaeological evidence for Chinese installations of this type are rarer but still not uncommon, good examples being the watchtower L.J and the nearby fort L.E³⁰⁵ at the Loulan site in the Lop Nur region, illustrating both the typical construction method and variety of the Chinese installations in the Tarim Basin. The fort at Loulan was a large³⁰⁶ rectangular enclosure with stamped clay walls arranged slightly differently from the traditional Chinese arrangement of lining up with compass directions, but this may be accounted for by accommodation to the prevailing east-north-east winds . The construction work however is very much in keeping with the style seen in China proper and on the “Limes” north of Dunhuang, namely hard stamped clay with layers of reed or tamarisk fascines. Within the fort was found the barely recognizable remains of structures, badly damaged by wind erosion, large quantities of potshards, a wuzhu coin, two bronze arrowheads and a small collection of documents in Chinese, some of which could be dated to 266-267 CE,³⁰⁷ giving a likely terminus ante quem for the fort being used by the Chinese.

Further proof that these installations were indeed Chinese was found close to the watchtower L.J in the form of a long line of coins strewed across the ground for nearly 27 meters. These coins were described by Stein as almost completely free of wear and without any clipping marks indicating that they were fresh from the cast. In total he found 211 wuzhu coins on the line, spread out as if slipping out of the swaying bags of a moving animal.³⁰⁸ Of the fifty of these coins today in the Stein Collection all have been by Wang identified as being from the reigns of emperors Shaodi [86-73 BCE] to Aidi [6-1 BCE]. If they or at least some of them, as suggested by Helen Wang, were almost fresh from the mint, this could indicate Chinese activity in the area as early as the time of the Western Han penetration of the basin.³⁰⁹ Indeed, such an assumption is supported by the note in the *Hanshu* of the establishment of an agricultural colony in the kingdom of Loulan to support the reigning king under the leadership of a Guard Major, in approximately 77 BCE.³¹⁰ In the vicinity, in fact on the same line and perhaps once on the same road, a heap of bronze arrowheads was found by Stein of the type and make common to the Han period and these too seemed freshly made and

³⁰⁴ Stein 1928: 345-346 Translation by M. Maspero

³⁰⁵ Stein use L. followed by a letter to denote sites in the Lop Nur region.

³⁰⁶ Ca 16577 square meters measured on the outside.

³⁰⁷ Stein 1928: 260-262

³⁰⁸ Ibid: 290-291

³⁰⁹ Wang 2004: 26

³¹⁰ Ban Gu, 96A (89-92)

hardly used. Their positioning would indicate they may have come from the same convoy or at least from convoys using the same route while their presence confirms not only that money was brought into the Tarim Basin with the Chinese, but could also confirm the presence of a Chinese garrison in Loulan or further west, or even at the fort L.E, as early as the first century BCE as the *Hanshu* suggests. In all likelihood the coins were brought to the garrison in order to pay the soldiers there. Further finds of Chinese coins, weapons and utensils in iron and bronze along the route Stein believed to be the old Loulan-Dunhuang route support this conclusion.³¹¹

The archaeological sources thus seem to confirm the Chinese accounts of a strong military presence, complete with garrisons and soldiers, in the eastern part of the Tarim Basin, especially in the Lop Nur region. Beyond the Lop Nur region one must rely almost entirely on Chinese literary sources for information of the Chinese domination. Luckily the *Hanshu*, and later the *Hou Hanshu*, describes this in some detail, albeit dispersed, throughout the texts. In the beginning of his section on the “History of the Western Regions” in the *Hou Hanshu* Fan Ye gives an account of how a post of Colonel in charge of Envoys was established during the reign of Emperor Wu [140-87 BCE]³¹² which, as seen above, was also presented in the *Hanshu*. This post of Colonel was later changed to the rank of General and in the first chapter about the Western Regions of the *Hanshu* Ban Gu describes the establishment of an office of Protector General of the Western Regions in 59 BCE³¹³ The duties of the Protector General were to keep under observation the various outer states and report their activities as well as any incidents to the Han court. The text goes on to say that where the situation was “suitable” for a peaceful settlement he settled it peacefully, but when military action was required he would launch an attack.³¹⁴ The Protector General’s task thus broadly seems to have been to enforce Chinese hegemony in the Tarim Basin, as well as acting as a viceroy of sorts for the Chinese government. His seat was a small settlement named Wulei³¹⁵ which is said to have been situated in the middle of the Tarim Basin and which lay somewhere between Qiuci and Yanqi [Karashar].³¹⁶ In the vicinity of Wulei, or possibly as part of the same colony, there had previously been an agricultural colony for the three regiments at Luntai during the reign of emperor Zhao [87-74 BCE]³¹⁷ Although they have not been thoroughly excavated the remains

³¹¹ Stein 1928: 290-291

³¹² Fan Ye, 88 (3)

³¹³ Ban Gu, 96A (78)

³¹⁴ Ban Gu, 96A (79)

³¹⁵ In the Chinese text it is not mentioned as a Gou [state/polity].

³¹⁶ Ban Gu, 96B (164)

³¹⁷ Ban Gu, 96B (174)

of walls and irrigation works have been found near the presumed location of both Wulei and Luntai, as evidence supporting the account of the *Hanshu* and *Hou Hanshu*.³¹⁸

Subordinate to the Protector General were two colonels³¹⁹ called the Wuji colonels, in charge of agricultural colonies whose posts were established at the time of Emperor Yuan [40-33 BCE], although here had as noted been agricultural colonies further east near Luntai to support the Protector General prior to this date.³²⁰ The Wuji colonels were stationed in the territory of the polity of Nearer Jushi [Turfan] and at least one of the two colonels, together with his regiment, was stationed at the fortress of Gaochang which has been identified as being the ruined fortress called Kara-Khoja today.³²¹ The agricultural colonies were common under Han whose regiments of men in addition to acting as garrison troops and soldiers when needed, were expected to farm the land so to be self-sufficient and ideally harvest supplies to be used by other military units or groups of officials. During the original effort to settle Luntai a certain Sang Huangyang (?-80 BCE), commandant for the collection of grain, made a report which Ban Gu quotes in the *Hanshu*, explaining how such a colony should be established. The regiments, supported by a small complement of cavalry to act as scouts and messengers, should survey the land and build irrigation-work so that fields could be farmed and a harvest obtained. Then a further supply of men should gradually construct walls and watchtowers. What couldn't be produced by these soldier-farmers should be bought with gold and silk from the neighbouring states.³²² This means that the Protector General had at least three regiments from the garrison at Luntai, two from Wuji colonels and one from the garrison at Shanhan at his disposal, and a probable access to reinforcements from the Dunhuang.

Though it seems to have been far from common the *Hanshu* also give examples of the Protector General exercising his power over the Tarim polities, as far west as the Pamir beyond which none of the polities are said to be under the supervision of the Protector General. An example clearly showing the Chinese dominance in this period occurred during the reign of emperor Xuan [74-49 BCE] when king of Suoju [Yarkand] died childless. With the blessing of Han, Wannian, the son of a Wusun Kunmo [ruler] and the Chinese princess Han, was inaugurated. His behaviour soon earned him enmity within the polity however and he, along with the Chinese official who had accompanied him, was killed by the former

³¹⁸ Hulsewé 1979: note 513 and 527 for a synopsis of these reports made by Chinese archaeologists.

³¹⁹ Though it isn't entirely clear whether there were two or one colonel but Hulsewé and Hill takes the text to mean two colonels, possibly one Wu and one Ji colonel. See Hill 2009: note 1,5 65-67

³²⁰ Ban Gu, 96A (78-79)

³²¹ Ban Gu, 96A (79) and Fan Ye, 88 (3)

³²² Ban Gu, 96B (166-167)

brother of the old king named Hutuzheng. The Chinese general Feng Fengshi (?-40 BCE), who was on his way back from escorting envoys of Tayuan, immediately gathered troops from the nearby polities to compliment his own forces, probably Shule [Kashgar] and possibly Yutian [Khotan], to attack Suoju [Yarkand], killing the usurpers and installing a new king who was now left free to rule so long as there was fear of further attacks one assumes.³²³ There are further examples but on the whole the Chinese military presence seems to have kept the majority of the Tarim polities in check and prevented any major incidents.

In addition to a heavy Chinese military presence in the Tarim Basin, especially in the eastern parts, there is literary evidence of a Chinese administration of sorts operating in the Tarim Basin from the last century BCE onwards. Already in the opening of chapter 96A of the *Hanshu*, when discussing the coming of the Chinese to the Tarim Basin, Ban Gu states that after the establishment of the Protector General and the agricultural colonies, the extent of the lands of the Western Regions, its terrain and people, became known to the Chinese, indicating that the Chinese bureaucracy obtained information from the area. It is likely that this information was provided by Chinese bureaucrats in the area or at least on behest of the Chinese administration, probably intended for taxation and aiding military endeavours.³²⁴ It seems however that Chinese control was at first quite remote and, as previously discussed, it seems that the Han Empire integrated the local bureaucracy within the imperial context already shortly after their arrival, granting “seals and ribbons” as signs of recognition to many of the polities officials. In the *Hanshu* it is claimed that during the time before the Wang Mang interregnum as many as 376 men carried these “seals and ribbons”, ranging from minor officials, such as interpreters, to the kings of the Tarim Basin.³²⁵ It seems unlikely that this is an empty boast on two counts, firstly because it is specifically stated that the polities west of the Pamirs are omitted from this count as they were not controlled by Han, a strange thing to add if you were boasting, and secondly because archaeological work has furnished actual examples of these “seals and ribbons”.

Only one example may have been found within the Tarim Basin itself dating from the third or fourth century CE, discovered by Aurel Stein in the Lop Nur region, but it is still unclear to whom this seal was intended. The first interpretation of the inscribed characters by Chavannes read it as “Shanshan chün yin”, but Loewe, Brough and Enoki disagreed. Brough read the characters as “Shanshan chün-wei” which translates to “The (Chinese) High

³²³ Ban Gu, 96A (140-141)

³²⁴ Ban Gu, 96A (79-80)

³²⁵ Ban Gu, 96B (197)

Commissioner for Shanshan”, making it a Chinese commandery.³²⁶ Loewe on the other hand reads the third character as tu, giving “Shanshan Tu-wei” with Tu-wei being a title commonly occurring in the *Hanshu*’s lists of officials in the Tarim Basin polities.³²⁷ Enoki regards the third character as uncertain and both as possible readings.³²⁸ A far less disputed “seal and ribbon” from the Han period is the one given to king of Tien in modern day Yunnan.³²⁹

This practise of granting “seals and ribbons” is seemingly reflected in the *Hanshu* where extensive lists of the officials in the Tarim Basin who possibly had received such a seal are recorded. The granting of seals and ribbons appears to have been a significant way for the Chinese to exercise control over the Tarim Basin, on one hand by making the local elites work for them, and on the other hand it appears to have had significance for the local elite by affirming their place at the top of their respective societies. Ban Gu does in fact contemplate upon the difference between the Chinese and the Xiongnu modes of control over the Tarim Basin in his commentary to chapter 96B, and although his view cannot be taken entirely objectively, it does highlight an important difference. He writes, “Although they may be subjects to the Xiongnu, they are not attached to them by ties of friendship. The Xiongnu are [merely] able to acquire their horses, stock animals, felts and woollens, but are not able to control and lead them, or act in concert with them.”³³⁰

It is clearly an important point that Chinese administration in the Tarim Basin was so effective it allowed the Han to utilize the resources of the local polities, calling upon their supplies or their armies at times, as is amply attested elsewhere in both the *Hanshu* and *Hou Hanshu*.

4.4.2 Chinese script

Having thus far described the long reach of Chinese military and bureaucratic influence in the Tarim Basin it is surprising perhaps that Chinese language and writing system did not seem to have had the same impact. The *Hanshu* informs us that the various polities of the Tarim Basin had officials in charge of translating and interpreting, these so called interpreters-in-chief, must one assumes have had knowledge of the Chinese language and script. The Chinese court in fact also employed a chief interpreter but they are not mentioned on the lists of officials sent to the Western Regions, presumably because the polities of the Tarim Basin’s interpreters

³²⁶ Brough 1965 p.590

³²⁷ Loewe 1969 p.98-99

³²⁸ Enoki 19?? p152

³²⁹ Hulsewe 1979 p.29

³³⁰ Ban Gu, Chapter 96B p.203

were capable of communicating with and translating for the Chinese.³³¹ Beyond this one has to turn to archaeological sources to say more about the extent of the Chinese language being used in the Tarim Basin. Archaeological finds are scant however on this point, with few texts found within the actual basin and most of those in connection with Chinese garrisons. The only major finds of Chinese documents in the Tarim Basin from antiquity were made at the Loulan and Niya sites, numbering over seven hundred wooden slips found.³³² While this may seem a high number the vast majority of these slips were found at Loulan while only a small number of slips were discovered at Niya, mainly by Stein and later by a Sino-Japanese expedition. Not all the documents could be accurately dated, but it is clear that many are from the third and fourth century since the earliest specimen is dated 252 CE and the latest 331 CE and these dates have also been proved to match the ranks and personnel mentioned.³³³

Of the Loulan documents almost all excavated slips seem to originate from the Chinese garrison present there, the majority containing information pertaining to matters of administration and a few examples of official and personal correspondence. It is likely that these slips were not for use by the people of the Tarim Basin, but rather documents where both the sender and receiver were Chinese. The Chinese documents from Niya, unlike many of those from Loulan, do not say much about administrative matters such as taxation or provisions for armies, but instead seems to be mainly official correspondence. Many of the slips instruct the recipient to fetch a person, to escort someone or perform similar tasks, as for example seen in slip N.xv.010 with a written instruction from the deputy to “call to the office.”³³⁴ Whether or not these documents were written by and/or from Chinese or local officials are not entirely clear, but references to the prefect/commander of Dunhuang³³⁵ and other Chinese officials might indicate it to be correspondence within the Chinese bureaucracy. There is however another commonly occurring type of document from Niya, that appears to be an official pass perhaps for use at the Chinese border fortifications. The formula seems to be fairly consistent, with name, country of origin, age and physical characteristics given as well as some details regarding inventory. Two of the best preserved examples state the following, “Hu Zhizhu, of the Yuezhi kingdom, 49 years, of a medium size, black/dark complexion/colour,”³³⁶ “Nan-cheng/young-male,”³³⁷ 25 years, two ox-carts, two oxen.”³³⁸

³³¹ Bielstein 1980: 53 and 110

³³² Wang 2004: 56

³³³ Ibid

³³⁴ Stein 1975: Appendix A, 541, N.xv.010

³³⁵ Ibid: Appendix A, 537, N.xv.326

³³⁶ Stein 1975: Appendix A, 540, N.xv.53 and Wang 2004: 58, table 16, reference 673

³³⁷ Chavennes reads this as a name, while Wang simply writes young-male.

Whether or not the holders of these passes, such as Hu Zhizhu, actually knew what was written on them is of course not known, but it is a possibility that Chinese communication was used amongst traders and others who crossed the border on a frequent basis.

There is in other words almost no evidence for the spread of the Chinese language into the Tarim Basin, it apparently made limited impact generally although the later use of Chinese on coins will be discussed in the next section, as well as the presence of translators, indicative of a small specialized group of the population being familiar with the language and its script.

4.4.3 Changing modes of trade

The Chinese influence in the Tarim Basin perhaps had its greatest impact in the economic sphere, especially with the introduction of coinage which seems to have had important consequences regarding contact with China.

When exactly the Chinese coins started circulating in the Tarim Basin is still a matter of debate. Wang explains how the oldest Chinese coin found in the Tarim Basin are *banliang* coins struck by the pre-unification Qin state and later also Western Han. The *banliang* found in the Tarim Basin are, with a single exception, identified to be of early Han dynasty make. These *banliang* coins did however remained in circulation long after production and were likely brought to the Tarim Basin at a later point in time, together with other Chinese coins, as is commonly the case with coin hoards in central China.³³⁹ The wuzhu coin, first introduced during the Western Han dynasty, remained in use for a long period of time, in fact up until 621 CE, and as such it is often difficult to determine exactly how widespread the use of Chinese coins were or in which period they were introduced. [Fig.10] The majority of Western Han coins discovered were found with coins of later periods meaning that they probably were brought from China at a later date. That is with one notable exception, the previously mentioned find in the Lop Nur region near L.J where a large group of coins as well as arrowheads were found. These coins, seemingly freshly cast coins were all from the Western Han period, suggesting that at least towards the end of the last century BCE Chinese coins were being taken into the Tarim Basin.³⁴⁰ The find of Later or Eastern Han standard issue coins and its copies are on the other hand very widely attested in the Tarim Basin and many of the major sites have examples of this coin type, both along the northern and southern

³³⁸ Stein 1975: Appendix A, 542, N.xv.61 & 62, & Wang 2004: 58, table 16, reference 675

³³⁹ Wang 2004: 24

³⁴⁰ Ibid: 26

route. The Rawak site for example, a short distance north of Khotan, furnished more than 220 wuzhu coins during Sir Aurel Stein's excavation while Pelliot, who explored along the northern route, found as many as two thousand coins in a single hoard at Subashi in the Kucha region.³⁴¹ But Wang points out that these large quantities can of course be partly explained by the long period of usage of the wuzhu coin in the Tarim Basin and doesn't necessarily mean that these coins actually arrived during the Eastern Han period, but it does indicate the importance of the wuzhu in the local economy.³⁴²

Chinese coins not only played an important role as currency in the Tarim Basin, they also served as a model for locally produced coins. The best example of this is the so called Qiuci coins of which the first examples Wang suggests to appear around the time of the Jin period (265-420 CE) and which continued to be in circulation throughout the Tang dynasty's conquest of the Tarim Basin during the seventh century CE and probably up until the eighth century. So far sites in the Tarim Basin have yielded more than ten thousand Qiuci coins.³⁴³ Though it is not certain they were contemporary with the Han dynasty the coinage seems to have been inspired by the coins of the Han period. As Cribb points out coins are abstract representations of a value they can only function in their role as long as they are "trusted" by the people using them, leading to the phenomenon of coinage traditions where coins maintain a fairly similar shape and similar design to promote trust in them.³⁴⁴ Thus the fact that the Chinese coin type was copied indicates it was "trusted" and demonstrates its importance as a form of currency in the Tarim Basin during earlier periods.

It was not only a monetary system being introduced during the period of Han control over the Tarim Basin; from the first expeditions to Dayuan [Ferghana] the Chinese reasons for involvement with the Xiyu [The Western Regions] were the hopes of obtaining resources. For example according to the *Shiji*, the initial delegation sent to Dayuan carried, 1000 pieces of gold and a golden horse in the hope that Han could exchange them for horses.³⁴⁵ This initial attempt at exchange may well have failed and the horses taken by military force, but it is the first described instance of long-distance trade through the Tarim Basin. A passage in the *Hanshu* indicates how many people were sent to trade in the following years, "envoys from the outer states of the north-west were coming and going one after the other,"³⁴⁶ and the

³⁴¹ Wang 2004: 25

³⁴² *Ibid*: 24-27

³⁴³ *Ibid*: 39

³⁴⁴ Cribb 2008: 334-335

³⁴⁵ Sima Qian, 123 (245)

³⁴⁶ Ban Gu, 61 (225)

Chinese delegations are equally described as being, “in sight of each other on the road,”³⁴⁷ As this long-distance trade intensified three distinct types of long-distance trade can be discerned from the sources, subtypes in a sense of long-distance trade.

Firstly there was gift-exchange and gift-giving between or to the various rulers, either to cement alliances or to obtain the goodwill of the local ruler in order to get permission to conduct trade. Both the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* furnish multiple examples of which perhaps the best is the Chinese marital alliance with the Wusun between 110-105 BCE. The return gifts were an initial great number of horses and a further annual supply, but more importantly of course was the Wusun’s support against the Xiongnu.³⁴⁸ Later a second princess was also sent to the new Kunmo; one of their sons becoming the short lived king of Suoju and one of their daughters marrying the king of Qiuci.³⁴⁹ The envoys of the Parthian king, with a group of Chinese envoys sent by Emperor Wu [141-87 BCE], sent back a “large bird’s egg” identified as an ostrich egg and conjurers from a place called Li-kan, both of which delighted the Emperor.³⁵⁰ According to Ban Gu the emperors assembled a true menagerie of luxuries from across the Western Regions, everything from ivory and tortoiseshells to betel-nuts, grapes and a great many animals as gifts.³⁵¹ While the frequent exchange of envoys brought many strange things to the imperial court, the main purpose was probably to enhance Chinese prestige and form political bonds. Additionally it was necessary to bring valuable gifts when wishing to deal with distant rulers, or when those rulers wanted reciprocal dealings with the Chinese, for example the *Hanshu* describe how, when dealing with the people of Dayuan, it was necessary to bring valuables or else the Chinese delegations would be denied food and horses.³⁵²

Secondly, what are best described as state sponsored trade missions were frequent, perhaps not surprisingly given the Han establishment’s intense dislike of merchants. The repeatedly mentioned Chinese expedition to buy horses in Dayuan is one good example and many similar expeditions were sent to buy various resources, but other rulers also organized trade expeditions. The *Hanshu* for examples mention that the people of Dayuan were very interested in Han items, probably silk in particular, and for this reason purchases were made.³⁵³ Denying trade was also one of the political tools Han tried to employ when tackling the large states across the Pamir, such as those in Northern India. This is repeatedly

³⁴⁷ Ban Gu, 61 (220)

³⁴⁸ Ban Gu, 96B (147)

³⁴⁹ Ban Gu, 96B (149-150)

³⁵⁰ Ban Gu, 96A (115-116)

³⁵¹ Ban Gu, 96B (198-200)

³⁵² Ban Gu, 96A (137)

³⁵³ Ban Gu, 96A (137)

mentioned in the texts, for example, when the rulers of Kangju [The Talas Basin and Sogdania] treated the representatives of the Protector General with contempt, they threatened to deny any trade missions from the ruler in return.³⁵⁴ A similar threat is carried out towards the state of Chipin [probably Kashmir] which according to the *Hanshu* only sought to benefit from Han Imperial gifts and trade.³⁵⁵ In both these instances it is referred to, not as the practise of gift-exchange, but to trade, probably at a state to state level.

Thirdly however, both literary and archaeological evidence has shown that trade also took place on a much smaller scale, this trade having the appearance of long-distance trade. I have chosen to call it independent trade, in other words trade involving at least one non-official party. Both the *Shiji* and the *Hanshu* mention episodes of dishonest, even corrupt, envoys who took the opportunity to bring goods back to China for sale in order to make a private profit, something the authors naturally frowned upon.³⁵⁶ Wooden slips found at Dunhuang, the Han “limes” Xuanquan and other former Han posts on the routes west have also furnished evidence of frequent trade. One example provided by Wang is a wooden slip from watch-station T.VI.b, found by Stein, showing a contract from 60 BCE where a non-Chinese head of troops bought a Chinese-style robe from a man from Guanghan at the price of 1,300 *Qian* [coins].³⁵⁷ In 39 BCE a wooden slip from Xuanquan, the main overnight stop between Dunhuang and Anxi (this time a Chinese town), details a dispute where four Sogdians protested to Chinese officials about the price they had received for camels they had sold.³⁵⁸ The Sogdians were, perhaps not surprisingly, not compensated; but that Sogdian merchants could protest about the price they had received through official channels at a Chinese post during the 30s BCE does indicate that by this time full-blown trade across the Tarim Basin was already common. It is undoubtedly this period which saw the rise of the Silk Road trade.

4.4.4 Carrying the seals and ribbons

The arrival of first the Xiongnu and then the Chinese during the third and second century BCE had a massive impact on the nascent polities of the Tarim Basin and, as is explored above, the Chinese in particular left deep archaeological, political and cultural marks. By this time, as described by Chinese sources, the Tarim polities had achieved a considerable level of

³⁵⁴ Ba Gu, 96A (127-128)

³⁵⁵ Ban Gu, 96A (112)

³⁵⁶ Sima Qian, 123 (242)

³⁵⁷ Wang 2004: 54

³⁵⁸ V Hansen 2012: 17

political, social and economic complexity. Walled urbanized settlements controlling an irrigated hinterland were present, ruled over by a “king” and a group that combined the roles of bureaucrat and noble. Division of labour was clearly present; both because of the intensive irrigation work needed, but also in the form of interpreters, metalworkers and the like. In other words they qualified on all the points of Sanders and Webster’s definition of a polity. The question is then what impact the arrival of the eastern empires had upon the Tarim polities?

To start with the military implications, the presence of a large powerful empire clearly curbed most outbreaks of regional warfare in the period. Indeed, almost no such warfare is recorded by Chinese sources with the exception of when the Chinese required local troops to fight for them. The surrounding nomadic groups probably still constituted a threat, and local clashes probably occurred, but the seventy or so years of Chinese domination after 59 CE seemed to have been a peaceful period. As long as the Han Empire manned their garrisons, appointed the Protector Generals and sent escorts along with the various envoys, as is amply attested³⁵⁹, the Tarim Basin was at peace, under a “pax serica” if one will. According to Chinese records the Tarim polities in this period do in fact record relatively low numbers of potential soldiers. Yutian [Khotan] for example is recorded as having a population of 19300 individuals with 2400 persons able to bear arms³⁶⁰, in other words roughly 12% of the population able to bear arms. At Shule [Kashgar] the situation is similar with nearly 11% while Yanqi [Karashar], troubled with neighbouring nomads judging by the titles of many officials, had around 18% able to bear arms.³⁶¹

The arrival of the Chinese probably also served another important function, namely providing a ready model for the polities of the Tarim Basin otherwise experiencing voids in their own civilization. The Chinese coin tradition for example, which seems to be the first such tradition introduced into the Tarim Basin, quickly became the dominant form of money, gold and silk aside. Later, as the Han dynasty collapsed, these coins were evidently copied en masse as recorded with the Qiuci [Kucha] coins. The Chinese administration also would have set an example for local practises and it seems plausible that the Chinese system of giving gifts to those they dominated did cement and stabilize the political situation in many of the Tarim polities. The true effect of Chinese administration upon the Tarim Basin is however difficult to ascertain as the source material available is only from the Chinese and can hardly

³⁵⁹ For an example see Ban Gu, 96A (141) and its reference to Feng, Guard Captain, who escorted visitors from Dayuan [Ferghana].

³⁶⁰ Ban Gu, 96A (97)

³⁶¹ See table 1 in appendix I for numbers.

be expected to give a nuanced picture. We know nothing of how rulers in this period interacted with their subjects, nor how they would have presented themselves.

But undoubtedly the strongest impact of Chinese domination over the Tarim Basin came in the form of economic changes. As we have seen the Chinese effectively introduced long-distance trade into the region on a massive scale where earlier it seemed to be restricted to regional bartering. Large numbers of more or less official trade missions from China began moving along the northern and southern route of the Tarim Basin soon followed by envoys, and later independent merchants from as far afield as Parthia and Sogdania began moving in the opposite direction. But while it was the Chinese who initially drove the trade it was made possible by the Tarim polities, safe havens and resting stops for the caravans crossing the harsh terrain between the oasis-cities. The fabled Silk Road had been born. By trading directly with the Han officialdom Tarim rulers could get access to many valuable resources but probably and more importantly, they could now demand tolls and taxes from the various envoys, delegations and merchants moving through their polities or entering their cities, dramatically increasing their revenues. These delegations probably opened the way to many enterprising locals to offer themselves as guides, or offer animals, housing, food, women, local products and a multitude of things a traveller could need. The establishment of direct contact between the Han Empire and the Tarim polities thus probably benefited the Tarim polities greatly and as all later evidence suggests the last centuries BCE showed a period of sharp economic growth, which might explain the further development of the Tarim polities in the next period.

4.5 Period four – The great kings and the great protector general

To recall chapter three, it was discussed how the larger polities started conquering the smaller ones, and according to the *Hou Hanshu* this was initiated by one of the most interesting figures in the early history of the Tarim Basin, king Xian of Suoju [Yarkand]. Contact between China and the Tarim Basin was cut early during the Wang Mang Interregnum started in 9 CE, and the following civil war left the Han Empire in need of a long period of internal consolidation.³⁶² King Xian's father was king Yan [c.50-18 CE] of Suoju [Yarkand] who had been a hostage in China, and according to *Hou Hanshu*, admired the Han Empire greatly. After the Chinese had lost control of the Tarim Basin in the first decades of the first century CE he resisted the resurgent Xiongnu and tried to retain contact with China. His son king

³⁶² Fan Ye, 88 (3)

Kang [?-22 CE] continued communication with the Chinese and escorted and protected the officials of Han, for which the Han court gave him the grand title of, “King of Chinese Suoju, Performer of Heroic Deeds Who Cherishes Virtue [and] Commandant-in-Chief of the Western Regions”, in name the Chinese administrator of the Tarim Basin. Upon king Kang’s death his younger brother, Xian [?-62 CE], ascended to the throne and immediately attacked and subjugated the nearby polities of Jumi [Keriya] and Xiye [Karghalik], placing Kang’s sons on the thrones. Following this he paid tribute to the Han court in 41 CE and asked for a “Protector General” to be appointed, a rank he was endowed with as a representative of the Han but on the suggestion of Pei Zun, the Administrator of Dunhuang, this title was revoked and the seals and ribbon forcefully taken from Xian’s emissaries.³⁶³

According to the *Hou Hanshu*, this made Xian grow resentful and he claimed the title of “Great Protector General” forcing all the surrounding polities to submit to him and they named him Shanyu, the title used by the leader of the Xiongnu. Perhaps in a bid to depose Xian, Nearer Jushi [Turfan], Shanshan [Kroraina], Yanqi [Karashar] and others all sent envoys to China to ask for aid, but none was given. Xian demanded taxes and also started aggressively annexing the various polities, attacking Shanshan in 46 CE and defeating them before withdrawing, annexing Qiuci [Kucha] in the winter of the same year, and conquering Dayuan [Ferghana] and Yutian [Khotan] later, and installing relatives as rulers. Xian in some of these expeditions not only commanded the forces of Suoju [Yarkand] but also called upon troops of other polities he controlled. The other polities reacted in various ways, some tried to submit to Han and asked for a protection that was not granted, and some sought the protection of the Xiongnu who had regained control of parts of the northern and eastern polities such as Shanshan [Kroraina] and Jushi [Turfan/Jimasa]. Xian managed to hold and control his hegemony over the Tarim Basin for approximately ten years, even extending it westwards across the Pamir. His hold on power seems to have been precarious however, as he chose to have killed or exiled the kings from the other kingdoms rather than install his own generals to maintain stability. However, in 60 CE Yutian [Khotan] rebelled and although the rebellion failed to topple Xian or take Suoju [Yarkand] Xian could not retake Yutian [Khotan]. The Xiongnu returned to the west and aided by Qiuci, who had submitted to them, attacked Xian. They too failed to defeat him and it was not before the following year, 61 CE, that the new king, Guangde of Yutian [Khotan], manage to trick Xian and take him prisoner. Guangde kept Xian in chains, possibly as a slave, before having him killed over a year later.³⁶⁴

³⁶³ Fan Ye, 88 (35)

³⁶⁴ Fan Ye, 88 (32-41)

4.5.1 The aftermath – The Empires Strike Back

Although Xian's small empire rapidly fell into decline, warfare in the Tarim Basin did not subside, indeed according to Fan Ye in the *Hou Hanshu* it was "after Xian's death" that the Tarim Polities started fighting and conquering each other in earnest. It was in this period the Yutian [Khotan], Shanshan [Kroraina], Jushi [Turfan/Jimasa] and probably others took control over many of the minor polities surrounding them. Yutian [Khotan] under Guangde stretched from Jingjue [Codata] as far as Shule [Kashgar] and as many as thirteen kingdoms submitted to him.³⁶⁵ Yutian [Khotan] later submitted to Han as one of the first of the major Tarim polities in 73 CE and presumably lost control of some of the conquered territory, at least Shule [Kashgar] which was conquered by first the king of Qiuci [Kucha] and then general Ban Chao of Han the same year.³⁶⁶ Yanqi [Karashar] during this period presumably gained hegemony over the smaller polities surrounding it, as implied in the *Hou Hanshu's* narrative, and were amongst the last polities to submit to the Chinese, not falling until 94 CE and even managing to kill the Protector General Chen Mu c. 75 CE.³⁶⁷ The Chinese population figures and estimates of persons able to bear arms in the *Hou Hanshu* also underwent a drastic change in this period. Yutian [Khotan], by now the largest recorded polity in terms of population, is recorded as controlling 83000 individuals out of whom more than 30000 are able to bear arms,³⁶⁸ a staggering 36 per cent. Yanqi [Karashar] has about the same number, roughly 38 per cent, and Jumi [Keriya] a slightly lower figure of "only" 24 per cent. These figures can of course not be taken as completely accurate, but none the less it provides a picture of a society where the majority of the male population could be called upon to fight, though it is unknown whether or not these numbers include slaves.

After an approximate 70 year period the large empires returned to the Tarim Basin, the Xiongnu first attacking the states along the northern route and the Chinese returning from 73 CE onwards. Under the leadership of General Ban Chao the process of regaining control started, completed according to the *Hou Hanshu* in 91 CE³⁶⁹, but unlike the earlier period, the emergence of new empire appears to play a role in the Tarim Basin, namely the Kushan Empire called Yuezhi by the Chinese. The biography of Ban Chao informs us that as he fought to reassert Chinese control over the Tarim Basin a Kushan king, which Hill proposes might have

³⁶⁵ Fan Ye, 88 (17)

³⁶⁶ Fan Ye, 88 (43)

³⁶⁷ Fan Ye, 88 (45)

³⁶⁸ Fan Ye, 88 (17)

³⁶⁹ Fan Ye, 88 (3)

been King Wima Taktho³⁷⁰, sent an envoy in 88 CE to ask for the hand of a Chinese princess. With him came a “tribute” including an antelope, a lion and jewels. But Ban Chao arrested the ambassador and had him sent back, something which angered the Kushan and the text goes on to say that from this point there was enmity between China and the Kushan. As a result an attack was launched in the summer of 90 CE by an army consisting of 70000 soldiers led by a Viceroy named Xie. Ban Chao did however, according to the story, not despair despite the enemy’s numbers but, knowing that the enemies supply lines could hardly cope, cleverly started a campaign of ambushes and “scorched-earth” tactics. He even managed to intercept and ambush a group sent to Qiuci [Kucha] to ask for its allegiance, thus denying the Kushan any allies within the Tarim Basin, and forcing them to withdraw, leaving Ban Chao to claim hegemony over the Tarim Basin.³⁷¹

Unlike the previous period the fighting did not subside even after the Chinese had re-established themselves as the major power in the Basin at the end of the first century CE, a position they had to struggle to keep. In 105 CE the Tarim Polities broke from Chinese control once more after the death of Emperor Xiaohou and the Protector General was repeatedly attacked before he was withdrawn around CE 107. The Xiongnu once more entered the Tarim Basin, subjugating some and allying with other states, even leading them in attacks on the Chinese borders.³⁷² In the second incident of Kushan, direct action took place in the Tarim Basin during the Yuanchu period [114-120 CE] as mentioned by Fan Ye . Upon the death of the childless King Anguo the king of Shule [Kashgar], his brother’s son Yifu was put on the throne by Anguo’s mother. Chenpan, uncle to the late Anguo, however, who had been sent in exile to the Kushan, heard of this and asked for the Kushan king’s help in gaining the throne. The Kushan king agreed and sent an escort of soldiers with Chenpan, who, being seen with the dreaded Kushan soldiers, was made king by the Shule people immediately. The same Chenpan however submitted to Han after the Chinese reasserted their power in the Tarim Basin later sending a son as a hostage to the Han Emperor in 130 CE. It appears that he was given titles by the Han and remained largely loyal to them.³⁷³ Cribb, basing on his study of the Sino-Kharoshthi coins of Yutian [Khotan], which will be treated below, suggests that the Kushan may, during this period from 107 to 120 CE, politically and militarily have dominated parts of the western Tarim Basin, especially Yutian [Khotan].³⁷⁴ I agree that this is a distinct

³⁷⁰ Hill 2009: 597

³⁷¹ Fan Ye, 47 (232-233)

³⁷² Fan Ye, 88 (7)

³⁷³ Fan Ye, 88 (43-45)

³⁷⁴ Cribb 1985: 143

possibility, but unless archaeological excavations can furnish more evidence it is very hard to say with certainty how direct and to what extent the Kushans controlled Yutian [Khotan] and neighbouring polities.

Chinese control was once more re-established by another Ban, Ban Yong son of Ban Chao, who as Chief Clerk moved into the Tarim Basin c. 123 CE, and no mention is made of any Kushan at Yutian [Khotan] submitting to Ban Yong. Yet as Fan Ye in the Hou Hanshu readily admits the Chinese dominance was not as firm as it had been and following the Yangjia period [132-136 CE] the reputation of the Chinese declined and the Tarim polities repeatedly attacked both each other and Chinese officials, as evidenced by the killing of the Senior Clerk Wang Jing in 152 CE by Yutian [Khotan].³⁷⁵

4.5.2 Great kings of Yutian – Hellenistic and Iranian traditions

In these two apparently strife ridden and turbulent centuries, one would perhaps expect long-distance trade to be greatly reduced or even to cease completely. Yet this seems to not have been the case, for Roman sources such as Pliny writing around this time, suggests that silk and other oriental products were being imported in large quantities.³⁷⁶ An even more reliable source, the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* [A voyage around the Erythraean Sea]; a description by a Egyptian merchant of the Indian Ocean trade, written during the middle of the first century CE, does not mention any disturbance in the Silk trade either but instead explains how silk is brought from a place called Thinae [China] via Bactria as well as a route near the Ganges; both thus by necessity through the Tarim Basin.³⁷⁷

Internally in the Tarim Basin there is also evidence of continued trade, namely in the appearance of bronze Kushan coins and the bronze coins produced by the king of Yutian [Khotan]. The Kushan kings struck coins in the Hellenistic tradition with portraits, often of the king, with inscriptions naming the issuer and a round shape without a hole. In fact on the first coins of Kujula Kadphises, the first king, simply imitates the coins of previous Greco-Bactrian kings as well as the coins of Scythian, Parthian and even Roman rulers. The coinage of the following kings evolved into a distinctively Kushan coinage, but retained the basic shape and style of Hellenistic coins as well as using a reduced Attic weight standard. The

³⁷⁵ Fan Ye, 88 (13)

³⁷⁶ Pliny, N.H. 12.54

³⁷⁷ *Periplus*, Sec.64

exact number of Kushan bronze coins discovered in the Tarim Basin is not known but at least fifty has been discovered to date.³⁷⁸

The earliest Kushan coin to have reached the Tarim Basin, based on the established line of kings, is a coin from the king of Khotan identified by Cribbs as being a Hermaeus imitation issued by King Kujula Kadphises used as a blank for overstriking.³⁷⁹ From both Endere and Khotan there are examples of coins from the second Kushan king Wima Takhto, featuring the bull and camel as well as inscriptions in both Greek and Prakrit written with the Kharoshthi script.[Fig.11] His successor Wima Kadphises also produced bilingual coins in Greek and Kharoshthi, one was found as far afield as Loulan but the majority of the finds were from Khotan. The last king whose coins were found in the Tarim Basin is Kanishka I whose coins had inscriptions in the Greek script although writing in a Bactrian language and whose coins are in clear majority with as many as 41 having been identified by Cribb in his study on the coins bought by Stein at Khotan.³⁸⁰ While not nearly as common as the Chinese wuzhu the finds of the Kushan coins might suggest that Kushan coinage also played a role in the economy of the Tarim Basin, to be expected perhaps as the Kushans played an important role in the east-west trade of the period. The finds are however mostly limited to the westernmost oasis polities to which the Kushan would have had the most direct access.

The Kushan coinage seems to have also left other marks, for unlike Qiuci [Kucha] which in the following centuries started producing imitations of the Chinese wuzhu, Yutian [Khotan] made coins that more closely adhered to the Hellenistic tradition.[Fig.12] The coins were made by striking instead of casting and were round without the characteristic central hole of Chinese coinage. All the coins discovered to date have a portrait on the obverse depicting a horse or a camel facing right, surrounded by an inscription in Prakrit written in Kharoshthi script which gives the names and titles of the issuing king.³⁸¹ As Wang notes this adheres very closely to the coins of the three first Kushan kings; indeed the camel on the Kothanese coin is very similar and may have been inspired by the bull and camel coins of Kujula Kadphises and Wima Takhto, where the animal is also facing right.³⁸² Unlike the Kushan coins however the reverse of the Kothan coins have inscriptions in Chinese defining the weight, for example either “copper coin, weight 24-grains” or “6-grain coin”. This unique feature has led to these coins commonly being referred to as Sino-Kharoshthi coins. In the

³⁷⁸ Wang 2004: 33-34

³⁷⁹ Cribb 1999 Section 37. Checked: 24.04.2013

³⁸⁰ Wang 2004: 33-34

³⁸¹ Cribb 1984: 131-146

³⁸² Wang 2004: 37

Stein collection alone there are 179 of these coins and in total there are close to 450 specimens, according to Wang, the majority discovered in former Yutian [Khotan] territories but a few found as far away as Qiuci [Kucha] and none found outside the Tarim Basin, indicating that it was a local currency mainly used in the western part of the Tarim Basin.³⁸³ In his detailed study of the Sino-Kharoshthi coins in the Stein collection, Cribb identified six different kings and suggests that the coins probably were issued over a relatively short period of time, from c.1 to 132 CE, at times when Yutian [Khotan] could assert its independence from the Chinese, Kushan, and Yarakandese.³⁸⁴ The kings who struck coins were in Kharoshthi and following Cribb's chronological order were, King Gurgadama, King Gurga, King Gurgamo(y)a, King Inaba [Xiumoba in Chinese], King ...doga [Guangde] and King Panadosana [Fangqian].³⁸⁵ Wang in her study "Money on the Silk Road" proposes to adjust this figure to c.30-150 CE, based on new evidence on the probable date of the Kushan kings, but emphasises that Cribb's reasoning stands.³⁸⁶ Both Lin Meicun and Zeymal argue against Cribb's dating and both suggest a date after the Chinese withdrawal from Yutian [Khotan] in 175 CE instead, however as Wang stresses, confronted with the numismatic evidence their theory seems unlikely.³⁸⁷

The Sino-Kharoshthi coins of Yutian [Khotan] show a clear Hellenistic influence and much of the design probably comes from and was inspired by the coins of the two first Kushan kings, Kujula Kadphises and Wima Takhto. Starting the production of a new form of currency would certainly not be a natural thing to do if long-distance trade, in which coins are an important medium, was dying down and it must instead be taken, as also Cribb notes³⁸⁸, as a sign of the newfound independence of Yutian [Khotan] as well as its close connection to the trade routes. The Sino-Kharoshthi coins are also the first known but not the only example from the Tarim Basin of Kharoshthi script and the Gandhari Prakrit language being used. As discussed in chapter three the Kharoshthi languages figured heavily in the written material that has been found in the Tarim Basin, the vast majority of the Kharoshthi script documents coming from the Shanshan kingdom sites at Niya, Endere and Lop Nur from the third and fourth century CE. A few have been discovered in the oases of the northern route, but as these have not been published they cannot be discussed here.³⁸⁹ The Kharoshthi script's appearance

³⁸³ Ibid: 37-38

³⁸⁴ Cribb 1985: 141-143

³⁸⁵ Ibid: 136-141

³⁸⁶ Wang 2004:37

³⁸⁷ Ibid

³⁸⁸ Cribb 1985: 144-145

³⁸⁹ Wang 2004: 65

in the Tarim Basin is thus a clear sign of contact with the regions west of the Pamir and does perhaps hint to close relations with the Kushan state, especially in such polities as Yutian [Khotan] and Shule [Kashgar] though no actual documents have been discovered from these oases.

The content of the coins and documents in Kharoshthi script is also very interesting as how the kings present themselves here in available material is quite unlike that seen in the Chinese tradition. *The kings of Yutian [Khotan] and Shanshan used epithets in their inscriptions. Epithets for emperors or others has never been common in Chinese tradition as only the title Huangdi(皇帝), translating into Emperor and used with a name like Han Wudi(漢武帝), was used with the emperor's name as well as him sometimes being referred to as tianzi (天子) meaning the Son of Heaven. A few Chinese rulers do have an epithet, but these were usually given posthumously and are mainly reserved for prehistoric "sage-kings" whose existence has yet to be proved, for example Yu the Great legendary founder of the Xia dynasty who is said to have invented irrigation. In the first centuries CE however there are multiple kings in the Tarim Basin who present themselves with epithets. The first is the king Gurgadama of Yutian [Khotan] who has the following written on his coin: "Maharajasa rajatirajasa mahatasa gugramayasa (or Gugramadasa or Gugradamasas)"³⁹⁰ meaning "Of Gurgadama, the Great King, the King of Kings, the Great."³⁹¹ The exact date for the Sino-Kharoshthi coins, as previously discussed, is still disputed but either date would make them the earliest discovered use of Kharoshthi in the Tarim Basin. A much later king of Yutian [Khotan] called Avijita Simha is referred to with a fairly similar title. Found at Endere in a contract on the sale of a camel the king is referred to as; "Khotana maharaya rayatiraya hinajhasya avijida simhasya"³⁹² meaning "Great King of Khotan, King of Kings, General, Avijita Simha"³⁹³*

From as early as the first century CE the rulers of Khotan were evidently presenting themselves with and being referred to with a number of epithets firmly rooted in Iranian and Hellenistic traditions, as was also later done by the king of Shanshan. This clearly underlines their independence during at least parts of this fourth period, as Cribb also emphasises in his

³⁹⁰ Enoki 1965: 224

³⁹¹ Translated by me based on British Museum translation of Pakores coins (see literature)

³⁹² Tablet number 661, Rapson 1920: 326 (Table of Kings and Regnal Years)

³⁹³ Enoki 1965: 256

study³⁹⁴, but one can of course wonder what role the Sino-Kharoshthi coins were intended to fill.

4.5.3 Great kings of Yutian – Facilitators of trade

The Sino-Kharoshthi coins, though they certainly served to proclaim the epithets of the king of Yutian [Khotan], were of course a form of money and were thus intended for usage.

Though commonly referred to as middlemen in the literature, the role played by the many oasis polities and nomadic groups in the area has, I believe, been very much neglected. In the period under scrutiny war seems to have been endemic, but what were the various polities competing for? Clearly land, water or similar commodities could be the source of conflicts, but this had not been especially common in previous periods. The greatest change in the last century BCE was the development of overland routes for long-distance trade straight through the territory of the Tarim polities, a trade that was clearly profitable. With the Han Empire incapable of sending the same numbers of diplomatic delegations and trade missions as had earlier been entertained some of this role might have fallen to the Tarim polities, indeed this seems to have been the case, and again the Sino-Kharoshthi coins are an excellent example.

Trade from the Kushan heartland in Bactria and Northern India to China not only had to cross vast mountains and the inhospitable Taklamakan, it also had to cross the equally formidable barriers of differing monetary traditions, languages and cultures and it is in bridging this gap that the people of the Tarim Basin played a crucial role. Kushan bronze coins were struck to a reduced Attic weight standard so that one drachm weighed 3.9 g and a tetradrachm 15.5 g³⁹⁵, thus the tetradrachm as proven by Cribb was virtually identical in weight to a Han Chinese *liang* or ounce; while the Chinese wuzhu coins were cast to a weight of roughly 2-3.g although the wuzhu finds in the Tarim Basin were often clipped or copies of poor quality which could weight as little as 0.5 g.³⁹⁶ Of course, other materials such as silk, grain or even animals could and were indeed used as payment in the Tarim Basin during the first centuries CE, but when faced with mountains and deserts the coin would probably be preferable, lighter and less perishable as it was. Yutian [Khotan] located on one of the main routes and near several important mountain crossings probably playing an important role in the trade of the region also devised a clever way to bridge the gap in monetary tradition. As discovered by Wang the Sino-Kharoshthi bronze coin is very close in design and make to the

³⁹⁴ Cribb 1985: 142-143

³⁹⁵ Wang 2004: 37

³⁹⁶ Wang 2004: 24-25

coins of the Kushan, in fact it was struck to the same 3.9 or 15.5 gram reduced Attic weight standard, meaning it could easily be accepted by people familiar with a Hellenistic coinage tradition. Yet each coin also carried an inscription in Chinese identifying it firstly as a coin, which, as it lacked a hole wouldn't necessarily be obvious, and secondly as weighing 6 *zhu* (grains) for a drachm or 24 *zhu* (grains) for a tetradrachm. As the Chinese coins were also reckoned in *zhu*, wuzhu meaning simply 5 *zhu*, this would make them compatible with the Chinese system as well.³⁹⁷ As Wang with this clearly proves in her important study *Money on the Silk Road* this would make the Sino-Kharoshthi coin a medium, mainly intended for local use, through which Kushan and Han Chinese coins could be exchanged as it married both systems into one coin³⁹⁸. Not only does this prove Yutian's [Khotan] role as an important hub along the crisscrossing trade routes of Central Asia but it also proved an important factor in making this trade possible. The Tarim Basin polities were thus by the start of the first century more than mere "middlemen", but rather important centres in their own right which made possible and stimulated long-distance traded both east-west and north-south after the Chinese disappeared from the scene.

4.5.4 War, trade and coins

For the better part of the first century CE the polities of the Tarim Basin seemed to have been left to their own devices, most free of Chinese, Xiongnu or other outside influences. As the heading suggests this period is characterized by two trends, endemic warfare and continued trade. As they grew in maturity the Tarim polities also would have gained a more active role in the trade through their region, a trade from which the Chinese officialdom largely disappeared during the Wang Mang interregnum. As seen in the table in appendix I the population seems to have increased significantly during the end of the last century CE and beginning of the first centuries CE, probably reflecting the effects of increased trade and a larger sustenance base. It was also early in this period that independent coinage, specifically tailored to work within the context of the Silk Road exchange, was produced at Yutian [Khotan] which identified not only the importance of Yutian [Khotan] as a Silk Road hub but also the importance of the Silk Road trade to Yutian [Khotan].

The vacuum left by the sudden lack of a dominant power which had been in place for nearly a century sparked a period of intense warfare. The major polities conquered their smaller neighbours and then engaged in repeated struggles for dominance after the defeat of

³⁹⁷ Ibid: 37-38

³⁹⁸ Ibid: 38

Xian [61 CE] which could not be fully curbed by the involvement of major powers such as Han or the Xiongnu. Furthermore, for much of the period the Chinese were either fighting each other in the Civil War during and after the Wang Mang Interregnum or too weak to assert themselves westwards. Later the Tarim Basin would again experience short periods of stability under repeated Chinese attempts at reasserting their dominance, but even these periods seem to have been unstable, as for example attested by the repeated attacks on the Protector General in 107 CE.³⁹⁹ If the fighting periodically was as intense as the Hou Hanshu seem to indicate, for example in 46 CE when Xian attacked Shanshan [Lop region] and Qiuci [Kucha] in rapid succession⁴⁰⁰, it seems almost unbelievable that trade continued as uninterrupted as it appears. Even more so in the early parts of the century as the primary supplier and buyer in the eastern end of the Silk Route trade was fighting a civil war. The question that must be asked is “What kind of structures or mechanisms prevented the collapse of trade after the Chinese lost contact from the first decade CE onwards?”

This question is not one that I at this point in time am prepared to give a definitive answer, partly because I came upon this problem quite late in my work on this dissertation and partly because I have not been able to come up with one solution for it. As I see it however there are a number of possible explanations which I will use the closing pages of this chapter to explore.

The immediately discernible possibility is that one of the assumptions presented in this subchapter is not correct, or is based on unreliable sources. The first I would naturally dispute, but there remains the possibility that the picture presented by the sources are inaccurate, misunderstood or incomplete. The narrative of intense warfare is in truth only presented by Fan Ye, the only historian concerned with the period who is available to us, and he might have painted an exaggerated picture in order to explain why the Chinese failed to control the Tarim Basin as easily as before. Considering the previously presented strength of Chinese historians and the likelihood that they based themselves upon governmental reports this does however seem an unlikely scenario to me. The literary evidence in the west is far more precarious, yet at the same time the archaeological evidence here seems solid, with scholars agreeing that the Kushan would have benefited from east west trade.⁴⁰¹

The second possible factor is that although the period saw the Han Empire weakened for long periods of time another Empire rose in the east that may have taken their place as the

³⁹⁹ Fan Ye, 88 (7)

⁴⁰⁰ Fan Ye, 88 (37)

⁴⁰¹ Suggested by for example Boulnois 1966, Beckwith 2009, McLaughlin 2010

dominant force in the Tarim Basin. Doubtlessly the Kushan Empire exerted significant influence over the Tarim Basin polities, especially those in the western part, but many scholars have also suggested a more direct involvement and even occupation. Both Brough and Pulleyblank find how many different sides of life in the Tarim Basin during the first and second century CE were dominated by Kushan culture, as seen in coinage, titles, script and art, and speculate that the Kushan empire must have done more than simply influence the Tarim polities.⁴⁰² Indeed as Brough puts it, “Yet it is difficult to believe that these royal titles, and the complete adoption of Prakrit and Kharosthi writing in administration, were merely the result of “influence” – unless the word was intended to carry more than its usual meaning.”⁴⁰³

In addition to the archaeological material both Brough and Pulleyblank point to later Buddhist tradition suggesting a connection between the Tarim Basin polities and the Kushan. Pulleyblank for example points to an 8th century Tibetan text entitled “Li yul lun-bstan-pa” or “Prophecy of the Li Country” which tells the story of Khotan [Yutian] and Buddhism there.⁴⁰⁴ The text tells of how King Vijaya Kirti led an army to India together with King Kanika, identified as Kanishka, and other kings and acquired many relics to put in a stupa.⁴⁰⁵ Another story which Brough points to is a story heard by Xuanzang who during his travels went west in India and recounts a tale of how Kanishka of Gandhara had subdued all his neighbours and governed a wide territory even to the west of the Congling [Pamir] Mountains. The same story continues to relate how people west of the Yellow River sent him hostages.⁴⁰⁶ Neither Pulleyblank nor Brough propose that this proves a Kushan occupation of the Tarim Basin, but both find that if held together with other material it strengthens such an assumption and proves the existence of a tradition suggesting the Kushan did indeed occupy at least parts of the Tarim Basin.

As for dating both Pulleyblank and Brough suggest a date around or after 175 CE, the Chinese withdrawal from the Tarim Basin, as the likely date for a Kushan conquest.⁴⁰⁷ Both base this date on the Chinese historians who, as previously pointed out, do not mention any Kushan conquest in the Tarim Basin. Pulleyblank furthermore points to the revolts in Gansu amongst a people called Xiao Yuezhi (Little Yuezhi) by the Chinese in 184 CE which he thinks might be explained by the presence of a Kushan invasion into the Tarim Basin.⁴⁰⁸ He

⁴⁰² Pulleyblank 2002: 254 and Brough 1965: 597

⁴⁰³ Brough 1965: 597

⁴⁰⁴ Pulleyblank 2002: 254

⁴⁰⁵ *Prophecy of the Li Country*, (47)

⁴⁰⁶ Xuanzang, I (56-57)

⁴⁰⁷ Pulleyblank 2002: 257 and Brough 1965: 589

⁴⁰⁸ Pulleyblank 2002: 257

also suggests that the conquest must have happened towards the end of the reign of Kanishka, based on Ghirshman's dating of the Kanishka era in year one, and this would match the finds of copper coins of Kanishka and his successor Huvishka.⁴⁰⁹ Brough on the other hand does not venture to say which king could have been involved, but like Pulleyblank he emphasises that Buddhist missionaries reached China around this time. Pulleyblank finds that the last possible date would be 202 CE when an embassy for Yutian [Khotan] presented a trained elephant to the Han court⁴¹⁰ while Brough places it in the early years of the third century CE but possibly into even the mid third century.⁴¹¹

Both Lin Meicun and Ma Yong heavily dispute this theory⁴¹² and new advances in our knowledge of the Kushan chronology have however made Pulleyblank and Brough's theories problematic at best. In 2001 Harrey Falk found in a Sanskrit astronomical treatise very convincing proof that the first year in the era of Kanishka had to be placed 127 CE, give or take one year.⁴¹³ This makes Pulleyblank's and also partly Brough's theories very problematic as Kanishka, based on inscriptions, are known to have ruled to around the 23 year of his era, ie 149 CE.⁴¹⁴ This means he could hardly have taken part in any conquest of the Tarim Basin towards the end of the second century and that it would have been his successor Huvishka and later Vasudeva under whose reign it took place. However Kanishka is the last Kushan king whose coin has been uncovered in the Tarim Basin, making it seem unlikely that either Huvishka or Vasudeva controlled it. After all, if they introduced an administration based on Kharoshthi script it would be astonishing that they neglected to introduce the coinage system used by the rest of their Empire. It would also seem odd to suggest a Kushan should lord over the polities in the Tarim Basin as the titles they use do not seem to suggest their status as vassals. Both prior to and after the suggested date of the Kushan conquest the kings of the Tarim Basin, as exemplified by Yutian [Khotan] and Shanshan, kept using titles mirroring the Kushan's and in no way suggesting any kind of servility towards their western neighbours. Later kings of Shanshan do take the epithet "Jitumgha" which Lin Meicun takes to mean "the servant"⁴¹⁵ and which Brough suggests is a transcribed version of shih-chung a title given to

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid: 258

⁴¹⁰ Ibid: 256

⁴¹¹ Brough 1965: 589-590

⁴¹² Wang 2004: 65

⁴¹³ Sims-Williams 2012: 76-80

⁴¹⁴ Hill 2009: 595

⁴¹⁵ Meicun 1990: 284

rulers allied with the Chinese, in this case the Jin dynasty⁴¹⁶, but it is only used after the Chinese of the Jin Dynasty managed to regain control over Shanshan in the third century.

The most telling argument against the theories of Brough and Pulleyblank I find to be the complete absence of any concrete or literary traces left by a possible Kushan occupation. Similarly it would be surprising if the full occupation of a neighbouring region, oft ruled by China, by a foreign Empire was not noticed at all by the Chinese writers. The end of the second and beginning of the third century CE was a very turbulent period in Chinese history and contact with the western regions was extremely limited. The capitol of Lo-yang was burned in CE 191 and with it many of the archives and libraries, but despite this it seems astonishing that such a fact should go entirely unnoticed by the otherwise so thorough Chinese historians. At least one would expect that rumours or reports of such an event would surface after the reestablishment of a Chinese presence in the Tarim Basin. There could quite possibly have been military forays and short-term occupations that went unnoticed by the Chinese and which left few archaeological traces, such as that of the Khotan suggested by Cribb, but with the material currently available to us a major conquest of the Tarim Basin by the Kushan seems highly unlikely.

A variety of other theories have been made to explain the influence of Kushan culture in the Tarim Basin and the debate about Kushan conquest has had some fruitful results which could help solve the question of what kept the long-distance trade flowing; many suggesting the spread of Buddhism in this period. Ma Yong and Lin Meicun suggest that Kushan /Yuezhi immigrants and merchants in the Tarim Basin brought with them their language and culture; their arguments mainly based on later texts suggest Yuezhi lived in the Shanshan kingdom during later centuries.⁴¹⁷ Salomon and Brough also suggest the spread of Buddhism as an important driving force behind the spread of the Kharoshthi script and culture from northern India.⁴¹⁸ In the first centuries CE the Gandhara region was an important centre of Buddhist learning and Buddhist teachings mention Kanishka and the other Kushan rulers as important patrons of Buddhism. Salomon points to the striking similarity in style between Kharoshthi inscriptions found in Northern India and those found in China, indeed they are nearly identical, indicating the likelihood of Gandhari speaking monks bringing Kharoshthi to China and probably also to the Tarim Basin.⁴¹⁹ This is also, at least to some degree, supported by the Kharoshthi documents discovered at Niya and in the Lop Nur region. These documents

⁴¹⁶ Brough 1965: 600-601

⁴¹⁷ Wang 2004: 65

⁴¹⁸ Salomon 1998 and Brough 1965

⁴¹⁹ Salomon 1998: 45-46 quoted in Wang 2004: 65

frequently mention Buddhist monks and societies of monks, as witnesses, as accused and as taking a host of other roles.⁴²⁰ Though rarer they also sometimes function as scribes, as for example the scribe and monk Samghamitra who wrote a contract between a divorced couple in the reign of king Sulica of Shanshan, probably in the early fourth century.⁴²¹ Later scholars mostly agree that Buddhism was introduced via the Tarim Basin, but the question is of course when Buddhism entered.

Though based on circumstantial evidence it could be proposed that Buddhism started its journey into the Tarim Basin early during the first century CE, bringing the Kharoshthi script which would decorate Yutian's [Khotan] coins a few decades later. In addition to the Sino-Kharoshthi coins there are also large numbers of scribbled pieces of texts and drawings placed upon rocks in the passes crossing the Kunlun and Karakoram ranges.⁴²² Dated to between the first and third century the majority of these were written in the Kharoshthi language, taking the form "I was here" texts, as well as occasional drawings of an unmistakable Buddhist character such as the drawing of a stupa.[Fig.13] One of the few texts to state a goal gives going to Tashkurgan, a fortification in the Pamir en-route to Kashgar as an aim, indicating the direction of at least some of the travellers.⁴²³ In Gandhara Buddhist institutions and merchants appear to have had close connections⁴²⁴, and this may have been continued over the mountains. If these early Buddhists entered the Tarim Basin they may have founded monasteries, to which later text attest, and these may have acted as commercial hubs or at least caravanserais to shelter merchants on the road in times of war.

The last possibility I will set forth is the possibility that long-distance trade had become so important and profitable for the major polities that disrupting it, even in time of war, was not possible. As Hansen points out, frequent war is a quite common state for city-state "cultures" to exist in, and didn't usually mean that the wars impeded economic or cultural interaction.⁴²⁵ The wars may have been on a smaller scale than the Chinese sources indicate and perhaps foreign merchants and others took steps to avoid the areas where the fighting was heaviest, indeed they probably did.

⁴²⁰ For examples see, Burrow's translation N.322 and N.419

⁴²¹ Meicun 1990: 285

⁴²² V Hansen 2012: 30

⁴²³ V Hansen 2012: 31

⁴²⁴ For a detailed discussion see Litvinsky 1968 and Rosenfield 1967

⁴²⁵ M Hansen 2000 p.17

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter sought to explain the polities described in chapter 3/4 and answer the questions of “How did these structures develop?” and “What if any is the connection between the rise of societies in the Tarim Basin and exchange across the Silk Routes?” The answers to these questions required that lines were drawn back into the prehistory of the Tarim Basin and from the analysis above four distinct periods of development has emerged, though it must be stressed that the borders between them are not set in stone and partly overlap. They can be summed up as follows:

Period 1: Small oasis settlements appear across the Tarim Basin. These are “egalitarian” societies with a low level of stratification, limited regional interaction and exchange only in the form of low frequency barter as well as gift-exchange.

Period 2: “True” nomadism develops in the surrounding areas and this has a large impact upon the Tarim Basin. The nomads become links bringing goods from the Tarim Basin, via multiple regional “hops”, to fill Chinese demand, ushering the rise of minor rulers who monopolize this exchange. The oasis settlements start growing into urbanized centres with stratified societies, regional interaction increases and barter exchanges were frequent enough to form a meaningful power base.

Period 3: First the Xiongnu and then the Han Empire enter to dominates the Tarim Basin. Under a “pax serica” the Tarim polities prosper and after the Han Empire initiate long-distance trade with the “western regions” bringing the rise of the Silk Road. The Tarim Basin profits greatly from the diplomatic and trade missions passing through their territory shortly followed by merchants. Under Chinese hegemony warfare is limited.

Period 4: With the Wang Mang interregnum China is plagued by civil war and withdraws from the Tarim Basin. After a short period of Xiongnu attacks, Xian of Suoju [Yarkand] attempts to unify the Tarim Basin under his rule and for a short period manages to keep control before he is toppled. Then Tarim Basin polities embroil themselves in a long period of endemic warfare were the major polities conquer their smaller neighbours. And yet long-distance trade continue as shown by the development of the Sino-Kharoshthi coins of Yutian [Khotan] intended to bridge the monetary gap between east and west.

As this clearly shows, the rise of the polities of the Tarim Basin and the development of the Silk Road trade are closely related processes each partly dependent upon the other. The trade,

first with Han and later westwards, was essential in shaping the Tarim polities but at the same time their existence was key in making the Silk Road trade possible. Without the oasis-cities travel by large groups across the Tarim Basin would have been simply impossible, as shown by the disastrous first Chinese expedition to Dayuan. Two outside forces were crucial; firstly the rise of “true” nomadism on the surrounding steppe which bridged the distance between the early settlements of the Tarim Basin and the early Chinese states and secondly the Chinese who initiated the long-distance trade across the Tarim Basin. Finally, after having thus described the rise of the Tarim polities as they appeared in chapter three I have also come upon a new question. During the first two centuries CE there is both endemic fighting and continued trade in the Tarim Basin, seemingly without one excluding the other. I do not endeavour to give a finite answer to this question, but suggest three possibilities I believe should be explored. The possibility of the Kushan empire taking the Chinese role and driving the trade, the role Buddhism and Buddhist monasteries, stupas etc could have played and finally the possibility that the Tarim polities were dependent upon trade in order to engage in wars.

5.0 Conclusion – The rise of the Silk Road

This dissertation started out by looking at Marco Polo’s empty spaces and the verdant oases encountered by Xuanzang on their journeys through the Tarim Basin and as discussed in chapter two they were both in a sense correct. The Tarim Basin was and is an area of extremely varied terrain, containing both oases large enough to feed cities and harsh wastelands through which only well supplied and equipped groups could travel with any hope of survival. It is an area rich in a variety of valuable resources, from metals and jade to horses and woollen rugs, and through which nearly all the major routes between the east and the west ran in antiquity. To conclude this dissertation I want to return to the three questions with which I started and they were as follows:

- “What kind of societies and political structures could be found within the Tarim Basin during first three centuries CE?”
- “How did these structures develop?”
- “Is there any connection between the raise of societies in the Tarim Basin and exchanges across the Silk Routes?”

Di Cosmo, in his article *Ancient City-States of the Tarim Basin* from 2000, found that despite archaeological advances in the past decades sufficient material to gain a fuller

understanding of the Tarim Basin city-state culture was not yet in place.⁴²⁶ I disagree with this assessment and believe to have shown why in this dissertation. Firstly this dissertation has found that there were clearly two types of polities and societies active within the Tarim Basin in the first three centuries CE. As shown in chapter three the “walled cities”, to use Ban Gu’s term, within the Tarim Basin during the period in question had almost all the essential characteristics of city-states as defined by Mogens Hansen. They were highly organized urban communities based on the cultivation of an irrigated hinterland, with a fortified urban centre and a clear division of labour between various groups in society. Crucially they were not entirely self-sufficient, as is clear from their reliance on exchange across the region, and this meant that various types of interaction were inevitable. As is shown later in chapter four the city-polities of the Tarim Basin also exhibit many of the other criteria listed by Mogens Hansen as characteristics of not just city-states but a city-state culture with multiple city-states in one region. They develop in a period of intense economic upsurge much as described by Hansen’s fourth point⁴²⁷ and once free of the Chinese hegemony, a period of intense internal competition and attempts at establishing hegemony also ensued as Hansen suggests would be the case in his points 5-9.⁴²⁸ Only on the criteria pertaining to the identity of the citizens of the Tarim polities can there, at this point in time, be no definitive answer. It may seem as if they identify themselves with their city, but of this we cannot be entirely certain as later periods show the appearance of distinctly different languages in the north and south of the Tarim Basin. What is certain however is that Hansen’s identification of the Tarim polities as a city-state culture is justified and that the Tarim Basin must be viewed as such.

However, at the same time the Tarim Basin was also home to another group, the nomadic and semi-nomadic polities who lived on the fringes where extensive agriculture could not support city-polities. These nomadic polities were very different from their settled counterparts, but they shared a lack of self-sufficiency. The nomads supplemented their sustenance basis through exchange with their settled counterparts who also relied upon this exchange. This interdependence between the settled and nomadic groups in the Tarim Basin, especially in the early periods, provided much of the dynamism in the region and was essential in shaping both groups.

This leads to question two, of how these structures developed. Major changes were seen in the Tarim Basin between period 1 (c.2000-1000 BCE) and period 2 (c.1000-200 BCE),

⁴²⁶ di Cosmo 2000: 405

⁴²⁷ M Hansen 2000: 17

⁴²⁸ *Ibid*

changes which I sought to explain. Quite unlike many Bronze Age civilizations this period in the Tarim Basin did not see the development of long-distance trade relations, a fact that can for a large part be explained by the presence of both tin and copper in and around the Tarim Basin. But grave goods from these periods clearly show that exchange in the form of barter increased drastically from period one to period two. This change took the early agrarian settlements of the Tarim Basin from a society with a low level of complexity and stratification to the complex city-polities discussed above. This change was also shown to have been closely linked to the rise of “true” nomadism on the steppe around the end of the second and start of the first millennium BCE. As Yong and Binghua⁴²⁹ point out, the access to Chinese items played a role in transforming the Tarim settlements, allowing stratification of the society to occur through the monopolization of trade and of resources for distribution. But the essential change allowing access to these items was when nomads bridged the gap between the Tarim Basin and the Chinese states along the Huang He. The Chinese did however play an important role in the next step of development in the Tarim Basin, as first the Xiongnu and then the Han Empire established its hegemony over the region. The period of Chinese hegemony saw the Chinese attempting to integrate the local rulers into their own imperial system, in this way cementing their positions, while the threat of Chinese military action probably kept warfare to a minimum thus allowing new forms of exchange to bloom.

This leads on to question three, regarding the connection between the rise of the Silk Road and the Tarim polities, and I believe it is immediately evident that a connection existed. Exchange, both in the form of barter and trade, were prerequisites for the developments of the Tarim polities. Yet without the polities of the Tarim Basin there could most likely have been no Silk Road trade, at least not on the scale of which it happened, as the crossing of the Tarim region would be impossible without the aid of locals and the possibility of stops along the way. This is clearly illustrated by the Chinese expedition to Dayuan that relying upon the support of the polities en-route. The Chinese presence did however created nearly hundred years of a “pax serica” of a sort and during this the earliest Chinese trade missions travelled to many of the polities in the Tarim Basin and beyond, and this sparked the development of long-distance trade connections between the east and the west. The Tarim polities benefited greatly both from this and the side effect of increased traffic through their territory. Some of the population of the Tarim polities might have participated actively in this long-distance trade, such as the previously mentioned non-Chinese head of troops who bought silk at the

⁴²⁹ Yong and Binghua 1996: 218

“limes”, but their two main roles were: The existence of the Tarim polities facilitated the large scale crossing of the Tarim Basin, and barter exchange between the various polities and their neighbours preceded the Silk Road, creating the pattern which it followed. Later, during the beginning of the first century CE, when civil war raged in China the role of the now mostly independent Tarim polities became even clearer as silk and other goods were still carried westwards. Perhaps the most remarkable innovation, making long-distance trading through the region easier, was the striking of Sino-Kharoshthi coins of Yutian [Khotan] that married the coinage of the Hellenistic and Chinese systems, thus showing how important trade had become.

Literature on the rise of the Silk Road and its role in antiquity has had a tendency to focus upon the role of either the great empires of the Romans, Parthians, Kushans and the Chinese, or on the nomadic people of the northern steppe. But while it is clear from our sources that actual long-distance trade did cross Central Asia in antiquity, not just on horseback but also on the camels of merchants, it is equally clear that the great distance between the four great empires of the time must have made direct contact very difficult. The Silk Road, through the whole period, was characterized not by one driving force but by the interaction of empires, nomads and city-states. It was by stopping in the various polities of the Tarim Basin that the journey of both Xuanzang and Marco Polo was made possible. Just as the role played by Palmyra and the Indian city-states has been emphasised of late by many authors, such as Raoul McLaughlin⁴³⁰, I believe that the role of the Tarim polities should be given a more central place in further research of the Silk Road trade in antiquity.

As the attempt to answer the three questions above has progressed in this dissertation another question has arisen. The first and second century CE is a period characterized by, if our sources are to be believed, endemic warfare across the Tarim Basin yet at the same time there is nothing to indicate that the Silk Road trade suffered particularly from this. “What kind of structures or mechanisms prevented the collapse of trade after the Chinese lost contact from the first decade CE onwards?” I have not been able to answer that question within the scope of this dissertation but I have, toward its end, suggested three possible solutions which I think might be worth of pursuance. Firstly the role of the Kushan Empire in the Tarim Basin is not fully understood, and though I find it unlikely that they occupied the entire region they clearly had a strong influence, particularly on the westernmost polities. Possibly trade and traders could have fallen under their protection or otherwise benefited from their influence. A

⁴³⁰ McLaughlin 2010

second possibility is that trade was simply so important in the Tarim Basin that disrupting it was not possible for the polities or that the stronger polities would fight to protect trade routes. A third factor could be the introduction of Buddhism probably during the first or second century CE, its institutions potentially providing safe havens and stable institutions for traders in times of war.

This question does however demand a detailed study of its own and to answer it, further research into the early transmission of Buddhism into the Tarim polities and the role of the Kushan dynasty in the region is required. The date of Buddhism's appearance in the Tarim Basin is still unknown and much remains to be done on its role in the Tarim Basin societies of antiquity. Also more work is necessary on the Kushan, although much interesting and important research is already being done. Furthermore a comparative analysis of the role of the Tarim Basin with similar areas in the Middle East may be a very interesting approach for further work. The case of Palmyra for example appears to have many similarities with the Tarim polities, a city-state between empires for which trade played an important role. Another interesting direction to pursue would be to explore the true extent of the warfare which appears to have raged in the Tarim Basin in the latter part of the first century CE and especially the short lived hegemony of king Xian. The way the peoples of the Tarim Basin, rulers and commoners alike, understood and presented themselves, their identity in fact, is little understood. Both these aspects would benefit greatly from further archaeological fieldwork in the Tarim Basin and especially on its settlements and cities. I see one of the most rewarding aspects of studying the Tarim Basin in antiquity, especially the context of the early Silk Road, to be the discovery of the unknown, for who knows what might yet be discovered in the sand of Taklamakan.

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Appendix I: The Tarim Basin according to Chinese sources

Name of “state”	Modern Equivalent ⁴³¹	Distance given in Hanshu (Compiled: 110-121 CE ⁴³² Source: c. 59 BCE-16 CE ⁴³³)	Distance given in Hou Hanshu (Compiled: Early 5 th century CE. Source: Early 120s ⁴³⁴)	Dependency or Major state according to Weiliu (Compiled 3 rd century CE)	Population given in Hanshu	Population given in Hou Hanshu	Resources and other notes.
Shanshan/Loulouan	Ruoqiang county?	6100 li [ca. 2536 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	More than 300 li [125 km] from the Yumen frontier pass.	Major state	1570 households 14100 individuals	Claims it has a Chinese garrison	Major polity in the east, land is salty, semi-nomadic.
<i>Qiemo</i>	<i>Cherchen</i>	6820 li [ca. 2835 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	Dependency of Shanshan	230 households 1610 individuals	None given	There are grapes and various types of fruits.
Xiao Yuan	3 marches south of Qiezhi, Tura?	7210 li [ca. 2997 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	Dependency of Shanshan	150 households 1050 individuals	None given	Lies secluded to the south and not on the route.
Jingjue	Niya site	8820 li [ca. 3667 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	Dependency of Shanshan	480 households 3360 individuals	None given	The land is enclosed.
Ronglu	Modern city of Minfeng/Niya	8300 li [ca. 3451 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	Dependency of Yutian	240 households 1610 individuals	None given	Lies secluded to the south and not on the route.

⁴³¹ Identification based on Hill 2009.

⁴³² Hulsewe p.8

⁴³³ Hulsewe p.10

⁴³⁴ Fan Ye Section 1 p.13

Jumi	Keriya	9820 li [ca. 4083 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	12800 li [5325 km] from Luoyang via Shanshan, Qiemo and Jingjue.	Dependency of Yutian	3340 households 20040 individuals	2173 households 7251 individuals	Major oasis. Repeatedly attacked by Yutian.
Qule	South of Keriya.	9950 li [ca. 4137 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	Dependency of Yutian	310 households 2170 individuals	None given	Commentators mention it as occupied by Yutian. Disappears into the desert.
Yutian	Khotan	9670 li [ca. 4020 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	11700 li [4865 km] from Luoyang	Major State	3300 households 19300 individuals	32000 households 83000 individuals	Major oasis on the southern route, near the Karakoram passes, an abundance of jadestone.
Pishan/Pikang	Pishan/Guma	10050 li [ca. 4178 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	Dependency of Yutian	500 households 3500 individuals	None given	-
Wucha	Sarikol?	9950 li [ca. 4137 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	-	490 households 2733 individuals	None given	Live in the mountains. White grass and short-pacing horses.
Xiye	Karghalik (Yularik by Chavannes)	10250li [ca. 4261 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	14400 li [5988 km] from Luoyang	Dependency of Shule	350 households 4000 individuals	2500 households and more than 10000 individuals	Land of nomads, produces jadestone and white grass.

Manli	Modern Karasul	9550 li [ca. 3970 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	Dependency of Shule	650 households 5000 individuals	None given	Land of nomads
Yinai	Tashkurgan area (Chavannes)	10150 li [ca. 4220 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	Dependency of Shule	125 households 670 individuals	None given	Land of nomads; hope to obtain cereals from neighbouring states.
Wulei	Pamir valleys	9950 li [ca. 4137 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	-	1000 households 7000 individuals	None given	Land of nomads
Xiuxiu	Karakavak area	10210 li [ca. 4245 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	Dependency of Shule	358 households 1030 individuals	None given	Land of nomads, way of life and clothing similar to the Wusun.
Chuan-tu	Karategin area	9860 li [ca. 4100 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	Dependency of Shule	380 households 1100 individuals	None given	Land of nomads, way of life and clothing similar to the Wusun.
Suojū	Yarkand	9950 li [ca. 4137 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	10950 li [4553 km] from Luoyang	Dependency of Shule	2339 households 16373 individuals	None given	Major oasis in the west, there are iron mines and blue-green jade. Near the Karakoram and Parim crossings.
Shule	Kashgar	9350 li [ca. 3887 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	10300 li [4283 km] from Luoyang	Major state	1510 households 18647 individuals	21000 households	Major oasis in the west, there are market stalls. Near the Pamir crossings.

Weitou	Modern Karaqi	8650 li [ca. 3596 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	Dependency of Qiuci	300 households 2300 individuals	None given	Semi nomadic, the people work the fields and keep stock animals. Clothing is the same type as Wusun.
Gumo	Aksu area	8150 li [ca. 3388 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	Dependency of Qiuci	3500 households 24500 individuals	None given	Major oasis in the north. Produces copper, iron and orpiment. Adjoins the nomads to the north.
Wensu,	Uchturpan	8350 li [ca. 3471 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	Dependency of Qiuci	2200 households 8400 individuals	None given	The land and its products similar to Shanshan. Annexed by Gumo
Qiuci	Kucha	7480 li [ca. 3110 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	Major State	6970 households 81317 individuals	None given	Major oasis in the north, the people there casts iron and there is lead. Adjoins the nomads to the north.
Ch'ü-li (Wade-Giles)	Kucha area	580 li [ca. 241 km] from <i>Qiuci</i>	None given	-	130 households 1480 individuals	None given	-
Weili or Yuli	Korla near lake Baghrash Kul	6750 li [ca. 2806 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	Dependency of Yanqi	1200 households 9600 individuals	None given	-

Weixu	Hoxud near lake Baghrash Kul	7290 li [ca. 3338 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	Dependency of Yanqi	700 households 4900 individuals	None given	-
Yanqi	Karashar	7300 li [ca. 3035 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	8200 li [3410 km] from Luoyang	Major State	4000 households 32100 individuals	15000 households 52000 individuals	Major oasis in the north, is close to the “waters of the sea”, meaning Baghrash Kul, and is surrounded by mountains on four sides. There is an abundance of fish. Adjoins the nomads to the north.
Wutanzili/Wutan	Uncertain, near Menass and Ebi-nur.	10330 li [ca. 4295 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	Dependency of Further Jushi	41 households 231 individuals	None given	Seat of king in a valley, nomadic.
Beilu	Uncertain	8680 li [ca. 3609 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	Dependency of Further Jushi	227 households 1387 individuals	None given	Seat of king in a valley, nomadic.
Further Beilu	Uncertain	8710 li [ca. 3621 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	-	462 households 1137 individuals	None given	Seat of king in a valley, nomadic.
Yü-li-shih (Wade-Giles)	North-Northeast of Turfan	8830 li [ca. 3671 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	-	190 households 1445 individuals	None given	Seat of king in a valley, nomadic.

Danhuan	Ürümqi area	8870 li [ca. 3688 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	Dependency of Further Jushi	27 households 194 individuals	None given	Seat of king in a town.
Pulei/Pulu	Lake Barkul area	8360 li [ca. 3476 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	10490 li [4362 km] from Luoyang	Dependency of Further Jushi	325 households 2032 individuals	More than 800 households and more than 2000 individuals	Seat of king in a valley, people live in tents and follow their animals in search of pasture. They produce very good horses. Nomadic way of life.
Further Pulei	Lake Barkul area?	8630 li [ca. 3588 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	-	100 households 1070 individuals	None given	Seat of king in a valley, nomadic.
Western Jumi	Mulei	8670 li [ca. 3604 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	Dependency of Further Jushi	332 households 1926 individuals	None given	Seat of king in a valley, nomadic.
Eastern Jumi	Dashitou	8250 li [ca. 3430 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	9250 li [3846 km] from Luoyang	Dependency of Further Jushi	191 households 1948 individuals	More than 3000 households and more than 5000 individuals	Live in tents, follow their animals in search of pasture but also farm a bit. Produce good horses. Nomads.
Chieh (Wade-Giles)	Near Ürümqi	8570 li [ca. 3563 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	-	99 households 500 individuals	None given	Seat of king in a valley, nomadic.

Ku-hu (Wade-Giles)	Near Lukchun, later seat of the senior clerk	8200 li [ca. 3409 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	-	55 households 264 individuals	None given	Seat of king in a valley, nomadic.
[Mo]-shan (Wade-Giles)	Turfan area	7170 li [ca. 2981 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	None given	-	450 households 5000 individuals	None given	The people live in the hills and rely on others for cereals. Produce iron.
Nearer Jushi	Turfan	8150 li [ca. 3388 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	9120 li [3792 km] from Luoyang	Major State	700 households 6050 individuals	More than 1500 households and more than 4000 individuals	Major oasis in the east. The king's town is surrounded by a river.
Further/ Posterior Jushi, Called Jinman in HHS	Jimsa?	8950 li [ca. 3721 km] from <i>Cháng'ān</i>	9620 li [4000 km] from Luoyang and 500 li [208 km] north of Gaochang	Major State	595 households 4774 individuals	More than 4000 households and more than 15000 individuals. It had a Chinese garrison.	Major oasis in the east. Communicate with the Wusun and Xiongnu nomads to the north and west.
State of the further town of Chū-shih	Qitai county	None given		-	154 households 960 individuals	None given	-
Yiwu	Hami	None given	More than 1000 li [416 km] from <i>Dunhuang</i>	-	None given	Claims it has a Chinese garrison	Chinese agricultural colony and garrison.

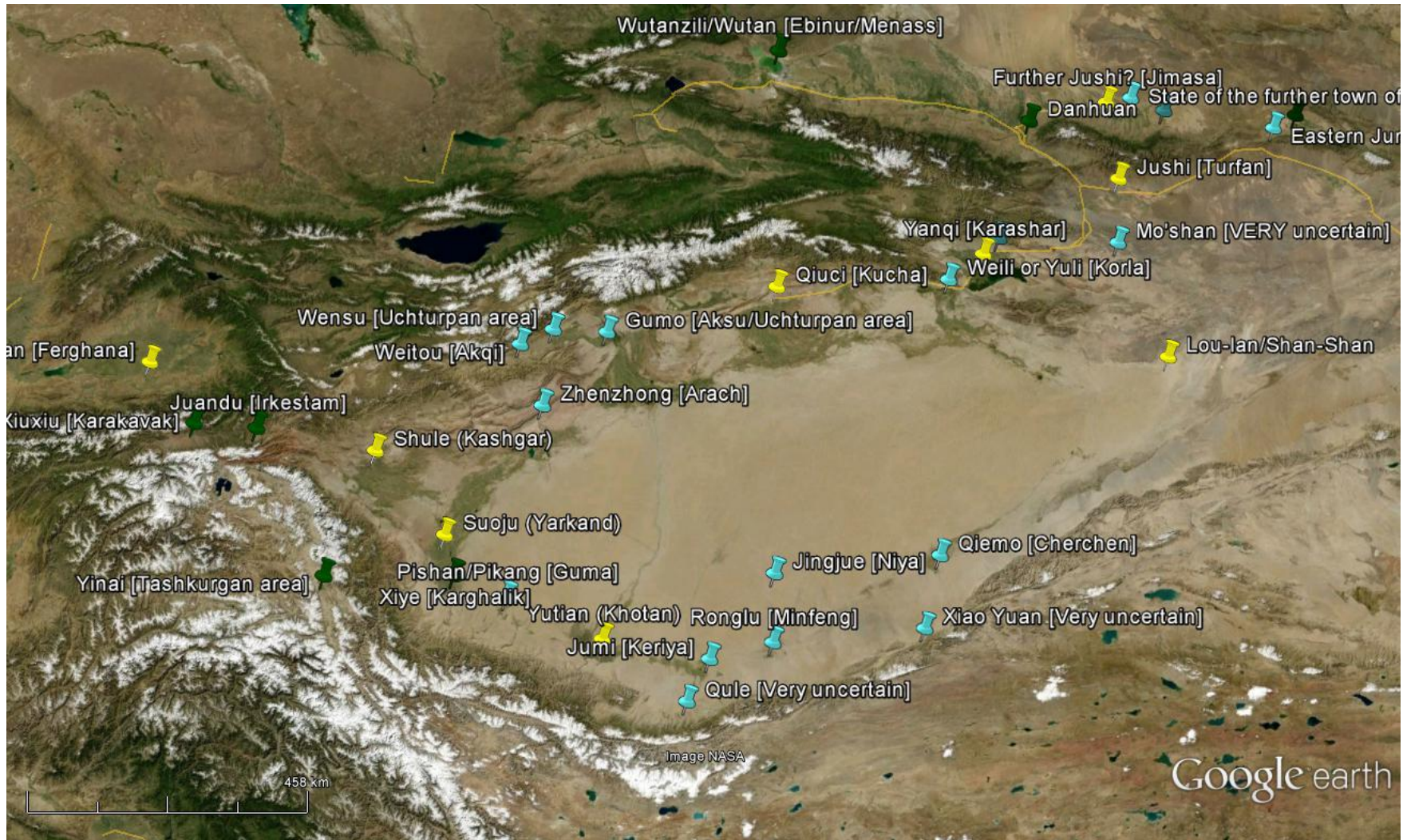
Appendix II: Overview of the Tarim Basin's periods

Period	Internal	Regional	China	Northern India and Bactria	The Steppe
<p>Period 1 Bronze age c. 2000-1000 BCE</p> <p>Egalitarian society Gift exchange and small scale barter</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small oasis settlements? - Graves lack sign of stratification - Bone, stone and some bronze - Both collective and single graves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Different pottery zones - Few signs of regional contact or of interstate warfare. - Some contact across the mountains west and north (Andronovo culture and Jaxartes) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shang dynasty (c.1600-1046 BCE) - Jade from the Tarim Basin appear in late Shang graves (for example Fu Hao) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Various Oasis and City polities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Semi-nomadic people common across Eurasia - “True” nomadism not developed
<p>Period 2 Early development c. 1000-200</p> <p>Stratified societies, the first polities appear towards the end of this period Intensive barter with neighbouring regions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small oasis settlements presumably start growing. - Graves develop signs of stratification. - Bone and stone but more bronze and iron objects. - Decorative pieces more abundant - From collective to single or pair graves. - Silk, lacquerware etc - No signs of monetary or writing systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pottery zones grows larger (Yanbulake and Aidinghu merge into Sidaogou for example) - Diverse decorative items move across the region suggesting regional trade. - Contact east and west, properly also north - New groups appear (Possibly Wusun) - Few signs of interstate warfare. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Zhou dynasty (Officially c. 1046-256 BCE) - Spring and Autumn period (c. 771-403 BCE) - Warring states period (c. 403-221 BCE) - Jade is priced and imported from the west. As is Lapis. - Horses from the Yuezhi. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Various smaller polities. - Possibly Medes - The Achaemenid Empire (550-330 BCE) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of equestrian skills led to the rise of “True” nomadism. - The first nomadic confederations appear towards the end of the millennium, for example Xiongnu and Scythians. - Conflicts and trade along the nomad/agrarian lines.

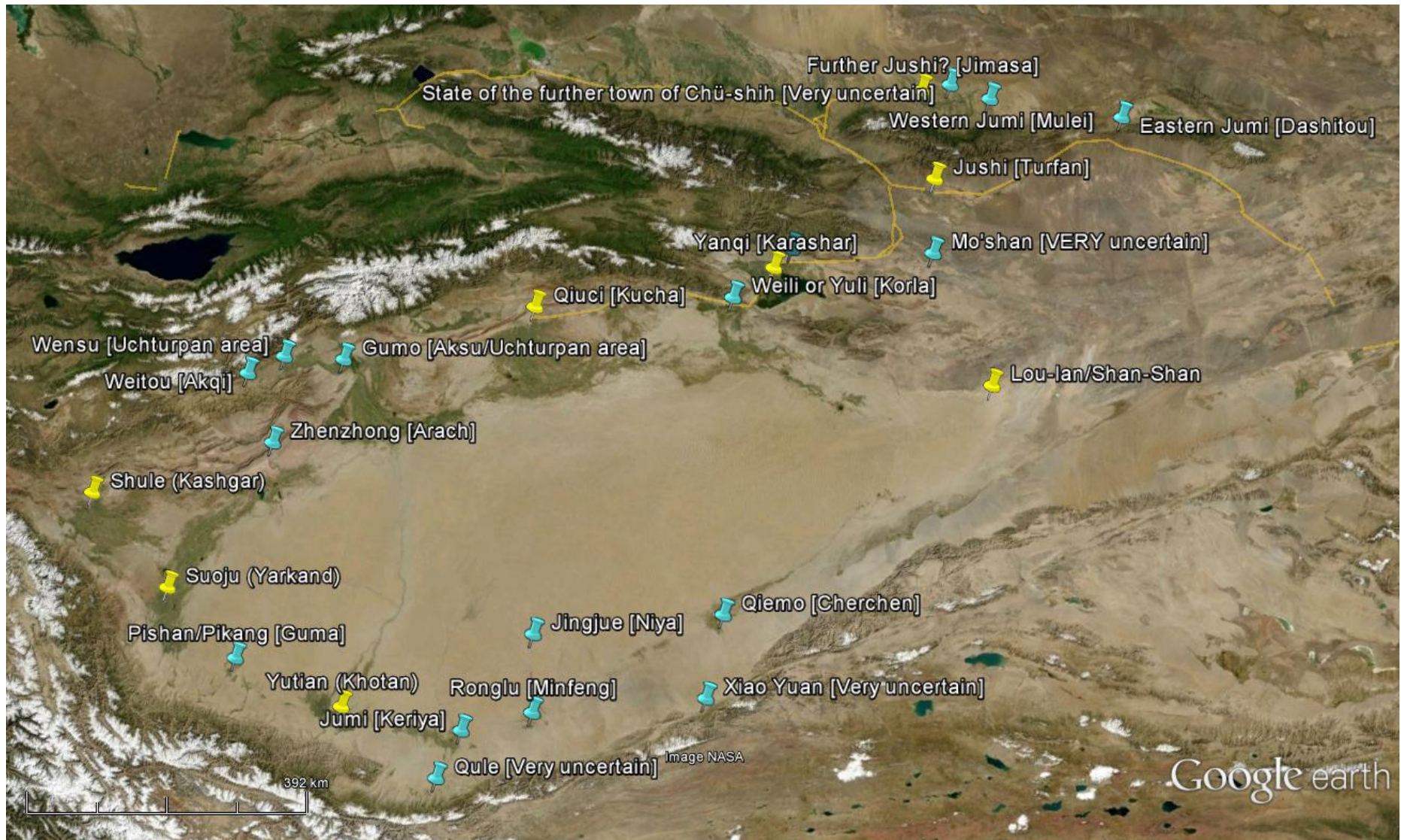
<p>Period 3 Xiongnu and Han c. 300 or 200BC-first decade CE</p> <p>Polities Long-distance trade across the region and beyond commence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Large fairly complex city-states with walls. - Bureaucracy headed by “king”. - Chinese monetary systems likely adopted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Region unified under Xiongnu and Han rule. They demand tribute and military support. - Few instances of interstate warfare. - Chinese garrisons and limes, script and art. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Qin dynasty (221-206 BCE), drive the Xiongnu out of Ordos. - Western Han dynasty (206 BCE-9 CE) conquers the Tarim Basin. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alexander fights in Sogdia, through Bactria and reaches the Indus. (Stops at the Indus in c. 325 BCE.) - Mauryan Empire (322-185 BCE) Buddhism is patronized. - Greco-Bactrian, Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian kingdoms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Xiongnu slowly pushed back by Han and “subdued”. - Yuezhi driven westwards by the Xiongnu. Chinese believe they settle somewhere north of the Oxus.
<p>Period 41 An independent Basin? c. 9-91 CE</p> <p>Polities Endemic Warfare from ca 60 CE. Long-distance trade</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The King of Yutian [Khotan] uses epithets and strikes his own bilingual coins (Sino-Kharoshthi). - Signs of a significant increase in population. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - During Wang Mang interregnum, Cheng king of Gumo killed the king of Wensu and annexed it. - King Xian of Suoju conquers the Tarim Basin around the middle of the century. - Following his defeat [61CE] warfare is rife. - Larger polities form as neighbours are absorbed. - Long distance trade east, west and north firmly established. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wang Mang Interregnum (9-25 CE) and civil war. - Eastern Han (25-220 CE) - First Chinese expedition to re-enter the Basin in 73 CE. - Control re-established in 91 CE after Ban Chao’s campaigns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Kushan dynasty (Early first century to third century? CE) - Army attack into the Tarim Basin in 90 CE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Kushan conquer the remnants of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom and later the Indus valley and Northern India. - The Xiongnu return for a period as a significant opponent of the Chinese but are defeated.

<p>Period 4B The Empire Strikes back c. 91-220 CE</p> <p>Polities The Warfare continues Long-distance trade</p>	<p>- Possible spread of Buddhism (if not earlier).</p>	<p>- Chinese overlordship re-established but precarious. -Multiple cases of regional warfare and rebellion.</p>	<p>- Eastern Han (25-220 CE) - Chinese control the Tarim Basin but not as firmly as Western Han. - Contact with the “Western Regions” cut in 175 CE. - 220 CE, Emperor Xian abdicates and the Han dynasty come to an end.</p>	<p>- The Kushan dynasty (Early first century to third century? CE) - The Kushan puts a king on the throne of Shule [Kashgar] between 114-120 CE.</p>	<p>- Xianbei tribes defeat the Northern Xiongnu and drive them westwards.</p>
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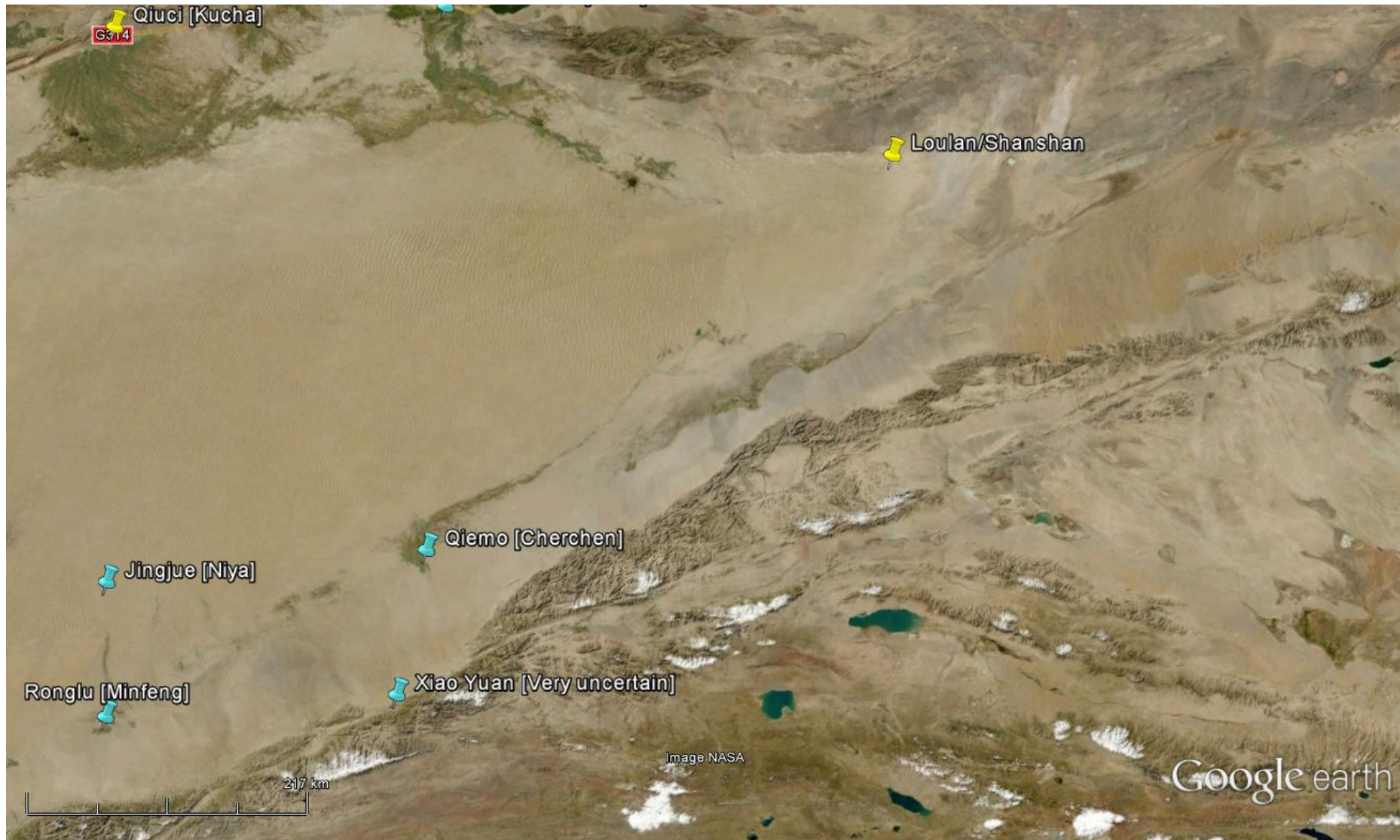
Appendix III: Maps



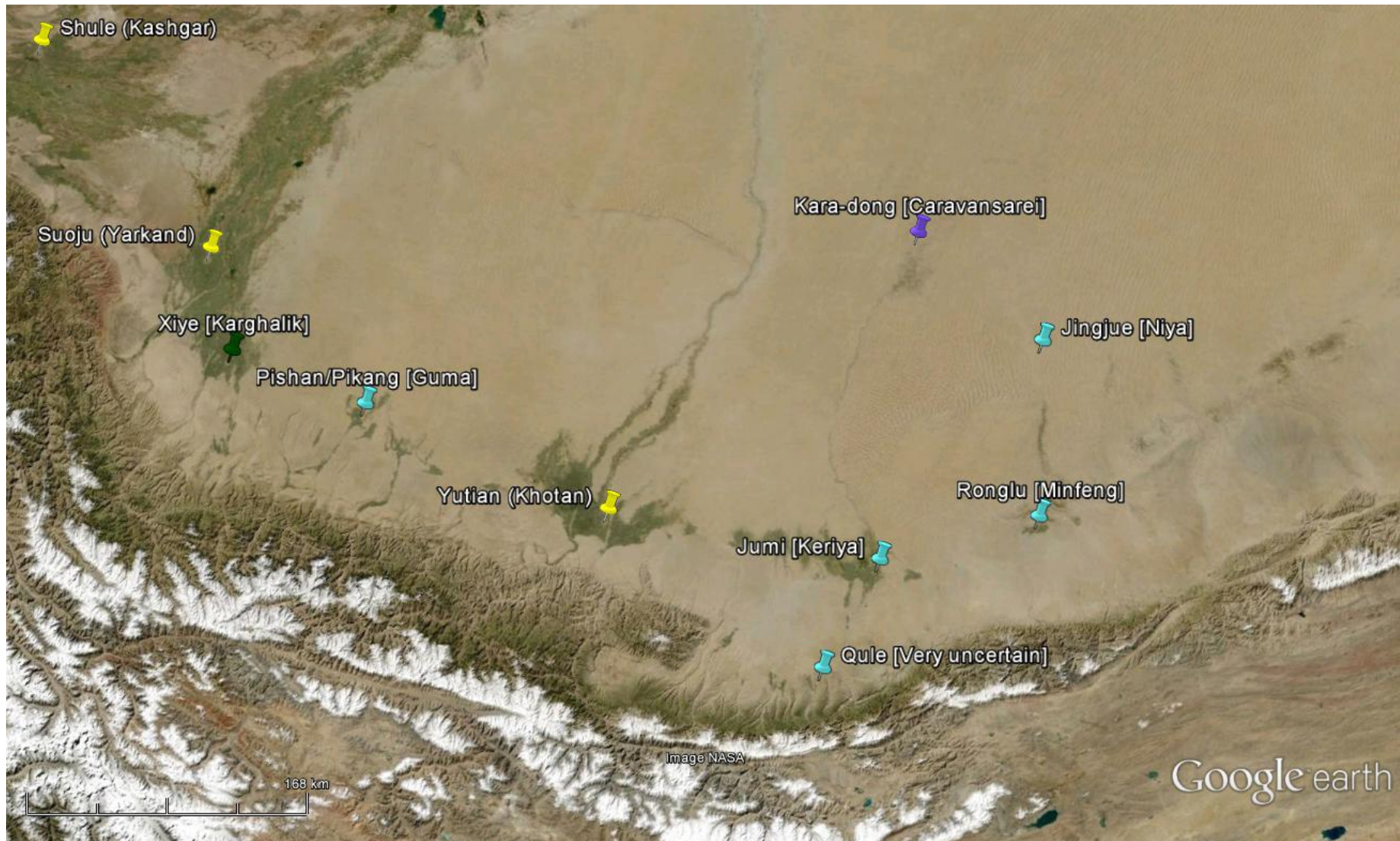
[Map.1] The Polities known in and around the Tarim Basin as described by Chinese Historians. Yellow denotes major polities, green nomadic polities.



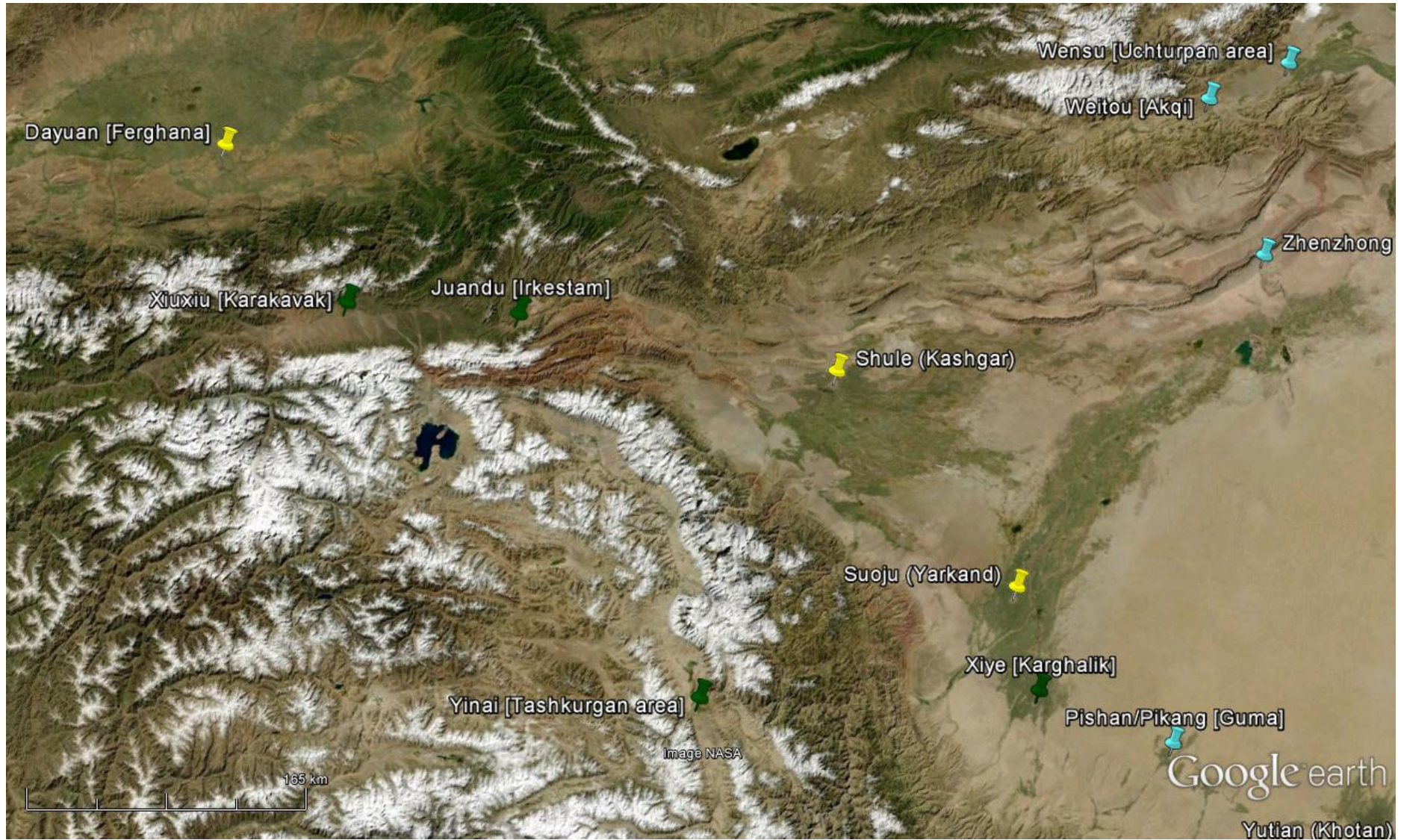
[Map.2] City-polities of the Tarim Basin as described by Chinese Historians. Yellow denotes major polities.



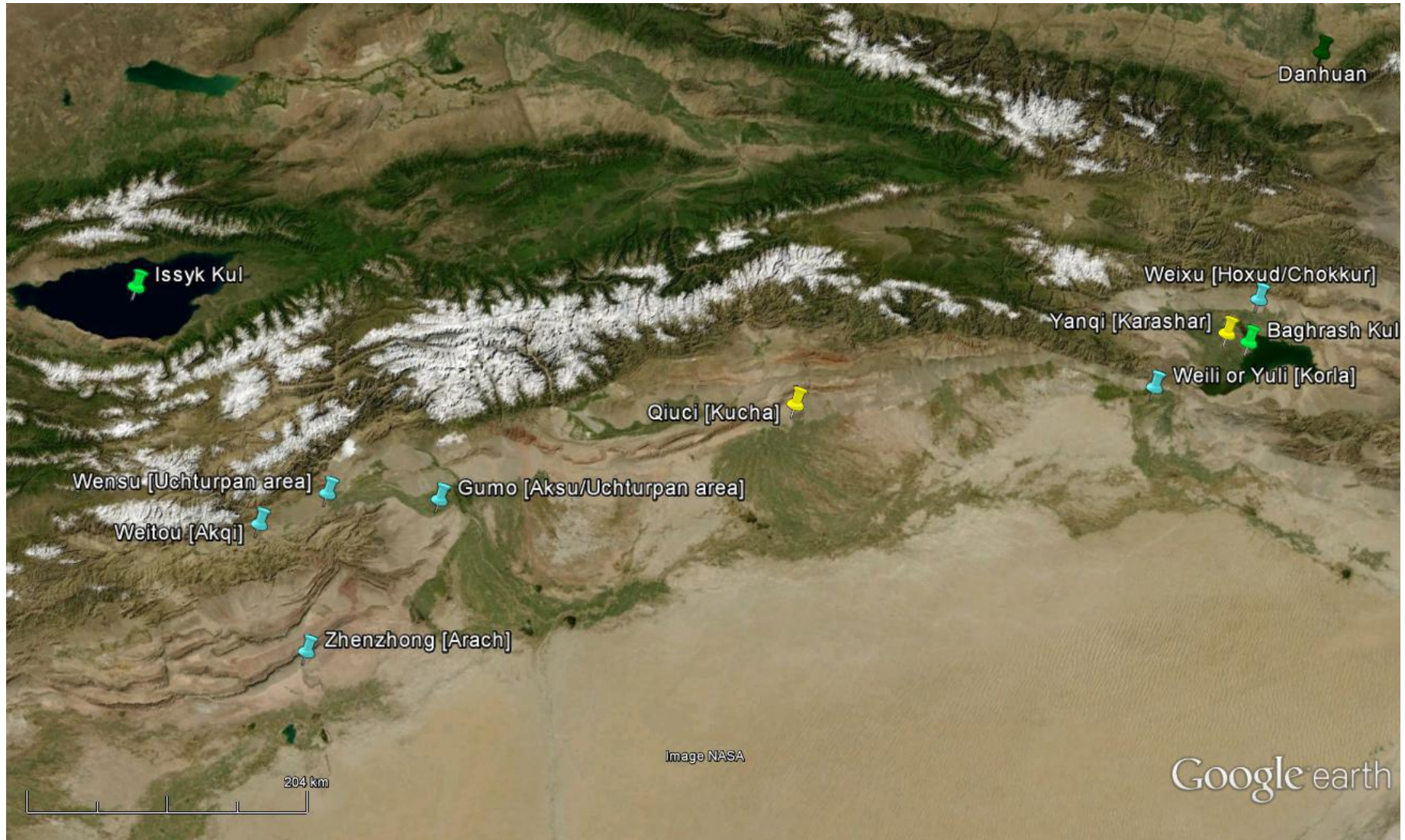
[Map.3] South-eastern Tarim Basin. The area that later came to be dominated by the Shanshan kingdom [Lop Region]. Yellow denotes major polities.



[Map.4] South-western Tarim Basin. Yutian [Khotan] and the surrounding area. Yellow denotes major polities, green nomadic polities and purple archaeological sites.



[Map.5] Western Tarim Basin. Shule [Kashgar] and the western polities as far as Dayuan [Ferghana]. Yellow denotes major polities, green nomadic polities.



[Map.6] Northern Tarim Basin. Qiuci [Kucha], Yanqi [Karashar] and the surrounding polities. Lake Issyk Kul and the Ili River valley in the northwest and Lake Baghrash Kul in the east. Yellow denotes major polities, green nomadic polities.



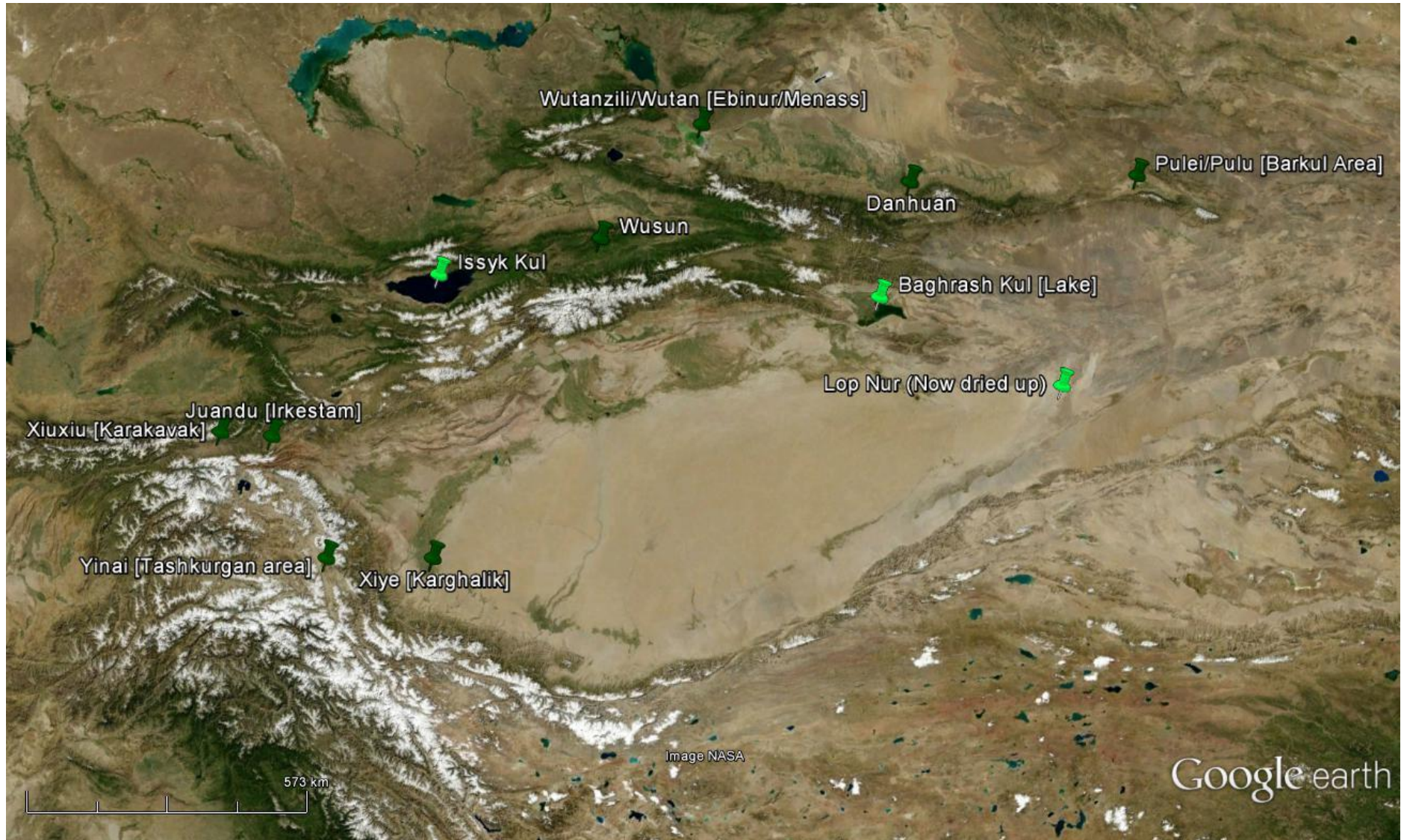
[Map.7] Northeastern Tarim Basin. The Gushi kingdoms [The two Jushi and surrounding polities] with Yanqi [Karashar] in the southwest and the Chinese holdings at Yiwu [Hami] (Established 73 CE)



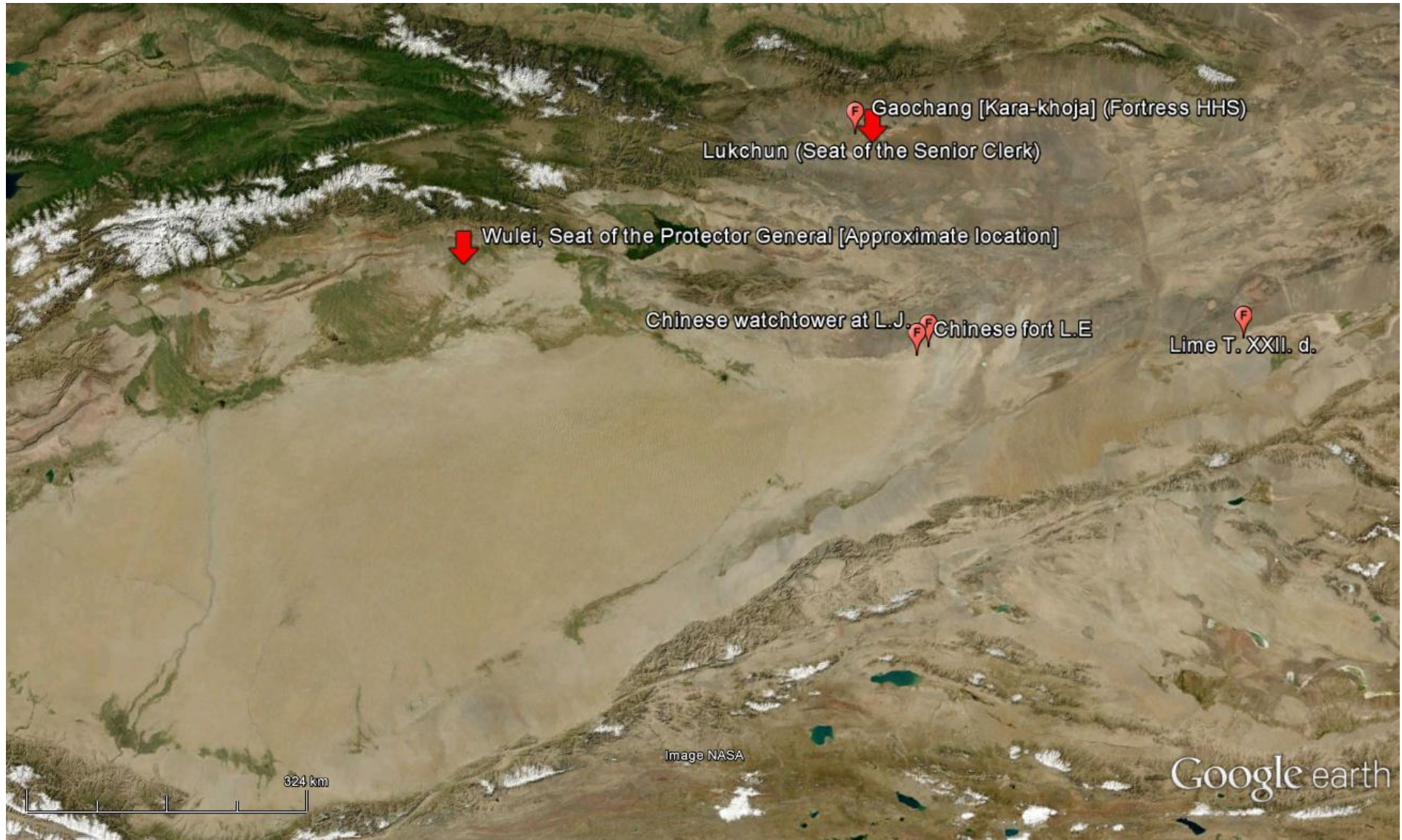
[Map.8] Archaeological sites visited by Stein in the Yutian [Khotan] area. Forts in red, other ruins in purple.



[Map.9] Resources of the Tarim Basin according to Ban Gu with the exception of tin. Tin as described by Penhellurick. Green: Jade. Blue: Iron. Light Blue: Tin. Yellow with dot: Copper. Orange: Orpiment. White: White Grass. Yellow: Gold.



[Map.10] Nomadic polities in and around the Tarim Basin as described by Ban Gu. Light green denote major takes.



[Map.11] Chinese military posts and installations in the Tarim Basin. Red arrow indicate the seat of the Protector General and Senior Clerk respectively.

Appendix III: Photographical material and examples



[Fig.1] Ancient dumplings fresh from the Taklamakan (*Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Museum*.
<http://www.xjmuseum.com.cn/bencandy.php?fid=174&id=96>)



[Fig.2] Vividly coloured rug from the Loulan site (*British Museum Collections*.
http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_image.aspx?objectId=228725&partId=1&searchText=xinjiang&fromDate=100&fromADBC=bc&toDate=300&toADBC=ad&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx&numPages=10¤tPage=4&asset_id=8251)



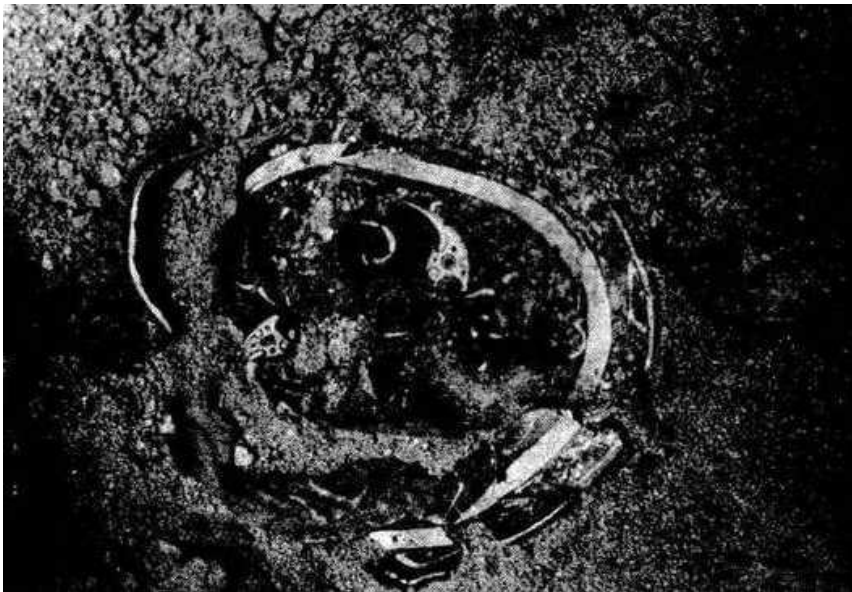
[Fig.3] Capitol in carved wood from Loulan (*British Museum Collections*.
http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_image.aspx?objectId=228719&partId=1&searchText=loulan&fromADBC=ad&toADBC=ad&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx&numPages=10¤tPage=5&asset_id=1144177



[Fig.4] The spectacular foldable gold crown from Tillya Tepe. (Hiebert, Fredrik and Cambon, Pierre (Ed.) 2011:
Afghanistan, Crossroad of the Ancient World. London: British Museum Press.)



[Fig.5] The so called “Cherchen Man” illustrating how astonishingly well bodies are kept in the Tarim Basin (Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Museum. <http://www.xjmuseum.com.cn/bencandy.php?fid=88&id=77>)



[Fig.6] Lacquerware tray with Chinese design. Alagou, Turfan County (Page 220. Harmatta, Jonas (red) 1996, *History of civilizations of Central Asia*, Vol 2. Paris: UNESCO publishing)



[Fig.7] Gold plaque with animal motif (lion?) from Alagou Wooden Chamber Tombs (*Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Museum*. <http://www.xjmuseum.com.cn/bencandy.php?fid=171&id=91>)



[Fig.8] One of the Han "limes" as seen by Stein in 1914 (Watchtower, *The Limes Watchtowers*, Sir Marc Aurel Stein, 1914. Photo 392/28(479), © The British Library Board <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/t/the-silk-road-finds-map-2/>)



[Fig.9] A ruined dwelling in Niya/Cadota with the framework still visible (Provided by International Dunhuang Project https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Niya_BLP175_PHOTO392_27_87.jpg)



[Fig.10] Bronze Wuzhu from the Eastern Han dynasty. (Primal Trek, Chinese coins http://primaltrek.com/charmcoins.html#wu_zhu_dots)



[Fig.11] Bronze drachm of Vima Takto, the “bull and camel” type with Kharoshthi inscription (Coin India, Virtual Museum of Indian Coins <http://coinindia.com/galleries-vima-takha.html>)



[Fig.12] Bronze Sino-Kharoshthi coin, Obverse carries horse and Kharoshthi inscription with a Chinese inscription on the reverse (British Musuem collection. Wang, Helen 2004: *Money on the Silk Road: the evidence from Eastern Central Asia to c. AD 800*. London: BMP)



[Fig.13] Buddhist rock carvings from the Karakoram pass showing a stupa. (Photo courtesy of Harald Hauptmann / Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Germany. <http://dawn.com/2011/05/18/basha-dam-threatens-thousands-of-ancient-rock-carvings/>)

[Front page photo: Photo by Zhangliang. Blog of tzmike. <http://tzblog.com/user1/tzmike/archives/2008/142583.html>]

Samandrag

Målet med denne masteroppgåva var å sjå nærare på Tarimbekkenet i antikken og rolla dei statane som fanst der hadde i tilblivinga av Silkevegen. Mykje er skrivi om den tidlege historia til Silkevegen, og mange forskarar har føreslått forklaringar på korleis denne handelsruta fungerte og kva som dreiv handelen langs den. Men særst få har sett nærare på det sentrale området på Silkevegen, Tarimbekkenet, og på kva som fanst der. Spørsmåla eg sette meg føre å svare på var såleis kva statar ein finn i Tarimbekkenet i dei første hundreåra etter vår tidsrekning, korleis desse statane blei til, og kva effekt Silkevegen hadde på dei. Det ville også vere interessant å sjå om desse statane hadde noko funksjon i oppkomsten av Silkevegen. For å svare på desse spørsmåla tok eg for meg ei rekkje kjelder. Eg gjorde stor bruk av dei tidlege kinesiske historikarane Sima Qian, Ban Gu og Fan Ye. Dei gir særst detaljerte skildringar av Tarimbekkenet og var såleis viktige kjelder. Like viktig var arkeologiske kjelder, noko Tarimbekkenet har mykje av.

Ut frå dette materialet diskuterte eg først dei forskjellige bystatane i Tarimbekkenet og kom fram til at dei kan kallast bystatar slik omgrepet er definert av Mogens Hansen. Dei hadde urbane senter med festningsverk der mesteparten av befolkninga budde. Dei hadde også eit utvikla byråkrati og gjorde bruk av det indiske skriftspråket kharoshthi. Side om side med desse bystatane fanst det fleire nomadiske samfunn. Etersom verken jordbrukarar eller nomadar var sjølvforsynte var kontakten stor, både gjennom krig og særleg gjennom byttehandel. Etter å ha stadfesta dette såg eg på korleis desse statane hadde utvikla seg, og delte utviklinga i fire periodar. I den første, bronsealderen, var det lite byttehandel, berre regional, og samfunna var utan særleg grad av stratifisering. I den andre perioden forandra dette seg ved at nomadisme oppstod på steppene i nord. Nomadane blei bindeleddet som kunne intensivere byttehandel med Kina, noko som i sin tur let nokre få monopolisere handelen og skape stratifiserte samfunn. Ved byrjinga av den tredje perioden var desse samfunna allereie det ein kan kalla statar. Med inntoget til kinesarane i bekkenet blei det for alvor fart på handelen, ettersom kinesarane tvang fram fred, og samspelet mellom Han Kina og Tarimstatane førte til at Silkevegen blei skapt, noko som er eksemplifisert i bruken av sino-kharoshthimyntane. Overraskande nok førte ikkje den fjerde perioden med Kinas borgarkrig og den aukande krigføringa i bekkenet til eit fall i handelsaktiviteten, og eg slutta derfor oppgåva med eit nytt spørsmål: Kva strukturar held handelen ved like? Som moglege løysingar viste eg i avsluttinga til debatten om Kushanaran si rolle i Tarimbekkenet, om buddhismens inntog og om kor viktig handel var for Tarimstatane.