

ARABIC AND CHINESE TRADE IN WALRUS AND NARWHAL IVORY

BY

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EILHARD WIEDEMANN, the well-known physicist and Arabist at the University of Erlangen, published two years ago a paper on the value of precious stones among the Moslems¹⁾ which contains a great deal of material interesting to a student engaged in Chinese research. The bulk of these notes is based on a mineralogical work written by al-Bērūnī (973—1048), the eighth section of which contains the following on a product called *al-chutrow*²⁾: “It originates from an animal; it is much in demand, and preserved in the treasuries among the Chinese who assert that it is a desirable article because the approach of poison causes it to exsude. It is said to be the bone from the forehead of a bull. Its best quality is the one passing from yellow into green; next comes one like camphor, then the white one, then one colored like the sun, then one passing into dark-gray. If it is curved, its value is a hundred dīnār at a weight of one hundred drams; then it sinks as low as one dīnār, regardless of weight”. At the end of another treatise dealing with the volumes of metals

1) Über den Wert von Edelsteinen bei den Muslimen. *Der Islam*, Vol. II, 1911 pp. 345—358.

2) *L. c.*, p. 353.

T'ao Tsung-i 陶宗儀, the author of the interesting work *Cho keng lu* 輟耕錄, published in 1366, has devoted a brief notice to this subject. The edition referred to is that printed in 1469 (Ch'êng-hua period) which is liable to afford a guarantee for

production. Nevertheless it may be that in the editions of the work consulted by Bretschneider the word *Si-fan* does not occur. He states (p. 110) that many typographical blunders have crept into the different editions, which render it difficult for the reader to understand who has access only to one edition, and that he has compared the texts of four different editions so as to be enabled to reconstruct the complete original. This variant, at all events, should have been noted, for a traditional opinion seems to exist among the Chinese that *ku-tu-si* is also a product of Tibet. This view is expressed in the *Wei Ts'ang t'u chi* 衛藏圖識 (Ch. 下, p. 22 b, in the original edition of 1792, where *ku-tu-si* 骨篤犀 is enumerated in a list of the strange products 異產 of Tibet and described as "pale blue-green, and when struck, emitting a clear sound like jade; it is scented and can overcome all poisons". This passage inclusive of the other *mirabilia* mentioned is quoted from a work *Yi shi* 譯史 (not to be confounded with the *Yi shi* 釋史 by Ma Su of 1670 in 48 vols.), a curious small book written in four chapters by Lu Ts'e-yün 陸次雲 (T. Yün-shi 雲士) full of marvelous notes regarding real and imaginary countries. WYLIE (Notes, p. 64) mentions the work under the fuller title *Pa hung yi shi*, and adequately describes its contents (a copy of it is in my library). According to WYLIE (Notes, p. 60), the author who wrote also a miscellany concerning the antiquities on West Lake near Hang-chou lived in the middle of the seventeenth century. It hence follows that the two officials Ma Shao-yün and Shêng Mei-k'i, the authors of the *Wei Ts'ang t'u chi* (see WYLIE, Notes, p. 64, and ROCKHILL, *J. R. A. S.*, N. S., Vol. XXIII, pp. 23—26), do not speak of the subject on the ground of a personal experience but of mere bookish knowledge, nor do they assert that they actually encountered the product in Tibet. The *Yi chi* on which they depend is a pure story-book of the wondrous kind, devoid of historical value. Moreover it will be noticed from the text of the *Ko ku yao lun* of the Ming period, given farther on, that the statement of the *Yi shi* is a literal extract modeled after the latter work, and therefore forfeits any claim to consideration as an independent observation; the *Ko ku yao lun*, in its notice on *ku-tu-si*, makes no allusion to Tibet. The author of the *Yi shi*, consequently, links two literary reminiscences into one by combining the text of the *Ko ku yao lun* with the supposed reading *Si-fan* in one of the editions of the *Pen ts'ao kang mu*. His makeshift, not sustained by any palpable evidence, cannot therefore be considered as a contribution to the eventual question as to whether *ku-tu-si* may have existed in Tibet, and which to all appearances will shrink into the clerical error of a copyist. The fancy of the *Yi shi* is copied again in a recent work on Tibet, *Si-ts'ang t'u k'ao* 西藏圖考, by Huang P'ei-k'iao 黃沛翹 of Hu-nan (first published in 1886, reprinted in the geographical collection *Huang ch'ao fan shu yü ts'ung shu*, 1903, vols. 1—2; Ch. 6, p. 27 b). Here again it is merely a case of reproduction without the evidence of a personal experience.

representing the text of the original issue. The passage (Ch. 29, p. 7 b) runs as follows: "*Ku-tu-si* is the horn of a large snake, and as it is poisonous by nature, it can counteract all poisons, for poison is treated with poison. For this reason it is called *ku-tu-si* ("*ku-poison horn*")¹). In the Annals of the T'ang dynasty it is the question of the country of *Ku-tu* 古都, so that it seems that this place is responsible for this product. It is therefore erroneously that the people of the present time write the word *ku-tu* 骨咄"²).

1) The conception that *ku-tu-si* cures *ku-tu* rests on a notion of sympathetic magic elicited by a pun upon the words. The substitution of the word *ku*, it seems to me, has been suggested by the passage regarding rhinoceros-horn in the *Shên-nung pén ts'ao king* (Ch. 2, p. 31 a; edition of *Chou-shi hui k'o I hio ts'ung shu*, 1891) where it is said: "The taste of rhinoceros-horn is bitter and cold; it cures all poisons and the *ku* poison"

犀角味苦寒主百毒蠱. The nature of the *ku* poison is discussed at some length by S. WILLIAMS (Witchcraft in the Chinese Penal Code, *J. China Branch R. A. S.*, Vol. 38, 1907, pp. 71—74); it has been made the subject of a monograph on the part of A. PFIZMAIER under the somewhat startling title *Das Ereignis des Warmfrasses der Beschwörer (Sitzungsberichte der Wiener Akademie, 1862, pp. 50—104)*, which despite the questionable correctness of the translations makes interesting reading. In my opinion the numerous intestinal parasitic worms causing many diseases in China (now fully discussed in the remarkable work by Dr. JAMES L. MAXWELL, *The Diseases of China*, p. 137, London, 1910) form the basic foundation of the *ku* poison, with a later development into an alleged practice of witchcraft; but it seems very doubtful if *ku* has ever the meaning of insanity attributed to it by Giles. Cases of insanity are rare in China, as may be seen from MAXWELL, p. 256. The flesh of the fox which was eaten by the ancient Chinese was formerly considered as a preventive remedy against *ku* poison (SCHLEGEL, *Uranographie chinoise*, p. 167).

2) 骨咄犀大蛇之角也、其性至毒解諸毒、蓋以毒攻毒也、故曰蠱毒犀、唐書有古都國必其地所產、今人訛爲骨咄耳。 *I'ei wén yün fu* (Ch. 8, p. 89 b) gives only the first clause with the variant 解蠱毒如犀角 "it counteracts the *ku* poison like rhinoceros-horn", which is evidently derived from a different edition of the *Cho kong lu*. This phrase occurs also in the quotation from this work as given in *Pén ts'ao kang mu* (Ch. 43, p. 13 b) under the heading "snake-horn". The last clause is cited there in a different way: 唐書有古都國亦產此則骨咄又似古都之訛也。 This seems to mean: "The T'ang *shu* mentions the country of *Ku-tu* as producing this (horn), so that the word *ku-tu* 骨咄

T'ao Tsung-i, evidently, does not speak from any personal experience with the object which he is discussing, but reflects and philosophizes on it. The definition of the *ku-tu-si* as a snake-horn, is derived, apparently, from Ch'ang Tê, while in the writing of the name with the character *tu* 咄¹⁾ the tradition of the Kin period inaugurated by Hung Hao is retained. The opinion that the object in question is poisonous and therefore cures poison is peculiar to the author; it is by no means, however, his original idea, but one transferred from the ancient beliefs in the properties of rhinoceros-horn to the *ku-tu-si*. The Taoist adept and writer Ko Hung who lived in the first part of the fourth century A.D. is the father of the theory that the rhinoceros feeding on brambles devours all sorts of vegetable poisons affecting the horn which, according to the principle that poison cures poison, becomes an efficient antidote²⁾.

A country *Ku-tu* 古都 is not known to me; but *T'ang shu*, Ch. 221, contains a notice of the country *Ku-tu* 骨咄 identified

seems to be erroneous for *ku-tu* 古都". — Another way of writing is introduced into a work entitled *Liang ch'ao chai yü* 兩鈔摘腴 (quoted in *P'ei wên yün fu*, Ch. 92, p. 18 b) where it is said: "What is now called *ku-tu-si* 骨拙犀 is the horn of a snake; being poisonous by nature, it is capable of neutralizing poisons, and is therefore called *ku tu si* 蠱毒犀". The date of this work is not known to me; but the definition being identical with that of the *Cho keng lu*, it may be concluded that it is posterior to the latter book.

1) The *P'ei wên yün fu* regards this as the standard mode of writing. The transcription 篤 occurs again in the *Ko ku yao lun* (see farther on).

2) *Pên ts'ao kang mv*, Ch. 51 L, p. 6. I do not enter here into a discussion of the rhinoceros and its horn, as I have just completed a lengthy investigation of this subject which it is hoped will be embodied in a publication to come out in the near future. The contention of Prof. GILES (*Adversaria Sinica*, p. 394) that the words *se* 兕 and *si* 犀 originally refer to a bovine animal is not at all justified, and none of the arguments advanced by him in favor of this point of view can be defended. All available evidence philological, historical, archaeological, zoological and palaeontological leads me to the result that the words *se* and *si* very well apply to the rhinoceros, and to this animal exclusively, and that from earliest times two distinct species are understood, the word *se* referring to the single-horned rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), and the word *si* to the two-horned rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sumatrensis*).