

ON
THE KNOWLEDGE
POSSESSED BY THE
ANCIENT CHINESE
OF THE
ARABS AND ARABIAN COLONIES,
AND OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES,

Mentioned in Chinese Books.

E. BRETSCHNEIDER, M.D.

Physician of the Russian Legation at Peking.

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ON THE KNOWLEDGE POSSESSED BY THE ANCIENT CHINESE OF THE ARABS.

AMONG the numerous statements about foreign countries found in ancient Chinese works, those regarding the Arabs are the most satisfactory. This opinion, however, is not to be taken absolutely but only relatively, in regard to the time when these accounts were written down; for, in general, Chinese writings contain much that is illogical, contradictory, and absurd, which our sinologues are accustomed to pass over with indulgence. At the end of each of the histories of the various Chinese dynasties, handed down successively since the second century B.C., are to be found accounts of foreign countries known by the Chinese at those particular times. But the descriptions of them are often so vague and inaccurate that for the most part no deductions can be drawn from them. The Chinese, in their description of countries, natural objects, etc., are very inexact. Their views about what is and is not important are quite different from ours, and very often we find that the principal matter is not mentioned at all. Nevertheless, we are much indebted to them for our knowledge of Asiatic history, and especially regarding Central and Eastern Asia, the history of these parts being almost unknown to us except from Chinese sources. It is only in a few cases that we are enabled to compare the Chinese accounts of ancient Asiatic geography with the statements of contemporary Indian or Mohammedan writers concerning the same countries. We can do so as regards the Chinese notices about the ancient Persians and Arabs, which are not in contradiction with the Mohammedan annals. In a paper on Chinese ancient geographical names, published in the 4th vol. of Notes and Queries on China and Japan, I attempted to bring together all the statements of the Chinese about ancient *Persia*, which since the sixth century was known to them under the name of 波斯 *Po ssū*. In the same paper I treated also of ancient 條支 *T'iao chi*, mentioned by the Chinese historians about the time of our era. But their accounts about *T'iao chi* are so vague and contradictory, that several hypotheses have been advanced by European scholars regarding the position of ancient *T'iao chi*. Generally *T'iao chi* was identified with the Tadjiks (*Persia*). I ventured to remark that some accounts given by the