



Silk and the Roman Empire

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Abstract. From the second century BC to around the second century AD, two unified and powerful countries appeared on the east and west ends of the Eurasian continent: the Roman Empire and the Han Dynasty. There are some disputes in the academic circles about whether the two empires had certain exchanges through the Silk Road, what specific economic exchange issues, and how to further understand the relationship between the Roman Empire and the Han Dynasty. Therefore, the full text takes the second century BC to the second century AD as the time clue, and takes the ancient communication artery of the Silk Road as the spatial clue to explore the silk issue of economic exchanges between Rome and Han at that time.

Keywords: Silk road · Silk · Han Dynasty · Roman Empire

1 Introduction

Written in the fifth century BC, The Old Testament In the Book of Ezekiel had a passage that mentioned Chinese silk: “I can also put you in embroidered clothes, put your feet on fur seal shoes, gird your waist with fine linen, and drape your body with silk... Decorated with gold and silver, linen, silk, and embroidered clothes... [1]” The general meaning of this section from the book is that the Lord will clothe the holy city of Jerusalem with the most beautiful and precious clothes in his heart, and the material of this clothes It is the “silk” mentioned twice in the text. According to this description, at least three pieces of information can be known: first, people thought that the most beautiful fabric in the world at that time was silk fabric; second, under the rule of the Achaemenid dynasty, Chinese silk has appeared in the Persian Empire, and it has also been recorded in handed down documents; thirdly, the Persians recognized and admired silk very much. Around the fifth century BC, Herodotus and Xenophon in Greece also had related records. It is mentioned in their own writings that the Persians in the East were very fond of the Median-style blouse. After research by Western scholars, it is believed that the material of this so-called Median-style blouse is Chinese silk, which was later called “Seris” by Westerners. [2] Therefore, it can be verified that the “silk” mentioned in the Bible is not groundless, and it can also be seen that the ancient Romans, like the Persians, also had a unique favor for Chinese silk. Then, how did the ancient Romans gradually turn this relatively simple admiration into a specific understanding of Chinese silk became a subject that could be discussed. From further investigation, it can be deduced that silk road had made Europeans know about silk and China as a whole.

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2 Preliminary Understanding of Silk

“It wasn’t until we had walked nearly half the length of the northeast-facing coast where the area was inhabited, and the first human inhabitants we encountered were the Chinese known as Seris, who were swept away by the wool they got from the forests of the Famous.” [3] During the Roman Empire, silk undoubtedly became the main object of understanding China in the Western world. The famous Roman poet Vigile mentioned silk in his “Pastoral Poems”. It could be seen in the poem that Vigile believed that silk was “picked from the trees” [4] by the distant Seris (Chinese) (3) The material of these clothes is very similar to wool. Picture. After Virgil, Pliny the Elder (Gaius Plinius Secundus, 2379 AD)’s “Natural History” (written in AD 77) also recorded the Romans’ understanding of silk at that time: “The first human inhabitants were called Seris. The Chinese are world-famous for the wool they obtained from the forests of the 1900s. The Seris combed the white matter from the leaves of the trees and then soaked the cloth in water, thus offering women a double silk reeling and weaving task.” [5] Virgil described silk as wool growing on a tree, while Pliny the Elder compared silk to the fluff growing on a tree. This can be the misunderstanding that the European had. However, after careful consideration, it can be indicated that this actually implies an important message—the dissemination of tussah.

3 The History of Silk and Tussah in China

According to the existing data, it is clear that the silkworm raising and weaving industry in China has a long history of at least 5,000 years. It is no exaggeration to say that silk constituted an important part of social life in ancient China. According to “Erya”: “The crickets lead, the silkworms... Moths, Luo” [6], It can be known that the varieties of silkworms in our country include mulberry, tussah, Xiao silkworm, and mugwort silkworm. In the article “China’s Domestication of Silkworms and the Development of Silk Fabric Processing Technology”, Mr. Shen Congwen believes that the silkworm “has a strong character and can withstand different climate changes...” (1) It can be seen that the tussah silkworm is used in the domestication of silkworms in my country. Also have an important position. However, due to the archaeological discoveries and the fact that we have more contact with the silkworm in our daily life, and the tussah seldom appeared in the literature and archaeological materials before the Han Dynasty, people often preconceived that the silk or silkworm seeds introduced from China should be Silkworms, but the records of Virgil and Pliny the Elder just give us a new way of understanding silk in the material and cultural exchanges between China and the West: at that time, the Romans knew and recognized earlier that the tussah may have followed Pliny the Elder.

4 Developing Understanding of Silk

Pausanias (2nd century AD) also recorded the further understanding of silk in the Western world in his masterpiece “Greek Chronicles” [7] At that time, people no longer said that silk was the wool plucked from trees, they knew Silk “is not extracted from tree

Table 1. Statistic about Chinese content in “Texts of Greek and Latin Authors on the far east”

Content related to China	Silk	Silkworm
Number of Entries	41	7

bark”.[8] It is also known that silk should be produced by an animal they have not seen before, and this animal is called differently in Greeks and Chinese. For example, in the second century AD, the Greek geographers generally believe that “Ser” [9] is a silk-producing animal, similar to a beetle, about twice the size of a beetle, and its silk-spinning action is very similar to that of a web-making spider. Strabo records a similar realization in Geography: “Aristobulus speaks of trees with wool, in which there is a core in the pod, which is taken out, and the rest is like a comb Fine wool is as delicate. [10] Compared with the understanding of ancient Rome and the Roman Empire, the well-known French orientalist Goddess compiled a collection of documents in 1910, “The Ancient Documents of the Greek and Latin Writers of the Far East”, which describes more. About the content of silk, silkworm chrysalis and silk reeling in the Han Dynasty. In the book, Goddess basically included all records about the Far East in Greek and Latin documents from the fourth to the fourteenth centuries BC. In addition, it is related to the poetry of the Latin world. Compared with other literatures such as, Geography, etc., its content is much richer and more comprehensive. This is a classic work that cannot be ignored in the study of the economic exchanges between the Roman Empire and the Han Dynasty. In addition, although Goddess said in the preface that this book is not about A monograph on the history of silk, but in this book, we can clearly see that Westerners’ understanding of ancient China almost all started with silk (Table 1). At this time, the Western scholars, including Pausanias, said that silk no longer “grew” from trees, indicating that the Western world’s understanding of silk at this time has been Silkworms have expanded to mulberry, and even mulberry has completely replaced the impression of tussah in the West.

5 The Spread of Tussah

In ancient China, we know that tussah belongs to the most economically valuable category of wild silkworms. Its breeding history is as long as that of mulberry silkworms. According to the historical records of the Han, Wei and Jin Dynasties, China’s silkworm breeding has a history of at least 1,800 years. Among the many tussah breeding, the breeding in Shandong is particularly famous. “Wild silkworms” are tussah silkworms. For example, in order to compare with the social conditions of Wang Mang’s period in “The Book of the Later Han Dynasty? Emperor Guangwu”, when Emperor Guangwu of the Han Dynasty was built in the second year of his reign, he praised the harvest of grains near the capital. [10] Afterwards, the tussah silkworm was also called “mountain silkworm”, etc., and the breeding requirements were much lower than that of the mulberry silkworm. Then, living in the Guanzhong area, Shaanxi, which was the first to introduce the tussah silkworm for stocking, was it possible that the tussah silkworm might have spread outside the Han Dynasty.? The team from the Sericulture and Silk

Research Institute of Northwest Agriculture and Forestry University once conducted technical experiments on tussah in Zhouzhi County, Shaanxi Province, and found that the local climate and cultured leaves are indeed suitable for the growth of tussah. Now, the tussah industry in Shaanxi Province has also received attention from the local government and the country. Is it a coincidence that the Guanzhong Mountains can also be stocked with tussah silkworms and form a new industry in the mountainous areas of southern Shaanxi. And there also happens to be a county named “Zhushui” in the southern part of Shaanxi. This might indicate a relationship between the two. The textual research of ancient silk and silk thinks that before Chinese silkworms were spread, “India, Daqin, Greece...had long had silk” [11] From the Greek and Roman historical materials, Pausanias has already told the world that “Saiyan” Only when you spun silk can there be silk, which shows that the “silk on the tree” that Virgil and Pliny the Elder knew was not just their reverie, but they recorded it when they came into contact with the tussah in the Mediterranean Sea or India.

It is more preferable to agree with Mr. Luo Shaowen’s conclusion, and believes that the first known Romans should be the tussah. First, according to Aristotle According to German records, the earliest silk spinning in the Western world was a woman named Pampile [12] on the island of Kos. The silk woven by this woman has been confirmed by the Western academic circles to originate from wild silkworms. Moreover, Pliny the Elder’s “Natural History” also has a description of “Coss silk”. Second, according to the comparison of Chinese and Western historical materials, scholars such as Gong Yingyan from the Department of History of Zhejiang University believed that the silk in the eyes of Pliny the Elder should be “Coss silk” [5], not from China (5). According to the archaeological discoveries of Chinese tussah and research on tussah, it is found that although Shandong tussah appeared early, Shaanxi tussah was only introduced from Shandong in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, so there is no possibility that tussah from Guanzhong area has spread to the West. Thirdly, according to the records of Virgil, Pliny, Bausanias and Goddess cited above, it can be outlined that the Romans’ understanding of silk experienced “curiosity (knowing nothing)-ambiguity (something right)” - Wrong) - clear (more correct)” process. Therefore, the author believes that the understanding of silk production in Rome, especially the understanding of silkworms, should be influenced by the Indian wild silkworm or the Mediterranean wild silkworm. The silk production process described by scholars such as Virgil and Pliny the Elder is not completely wrong. It should be the process of tussah silk production. Around the time of Pausanias, the silk production process described by scholars was replaced by that of the silkworm.

6 Role of Silk Road in Roman Empire

In the Chinese literature, although there are relatively few documents specifically recording the extravagance of silk, the extravagance of Chinese material products is an indisputable fact. Looking back at the historical records of Zhang Qian’s mission to the Western Regions in classical works, we can find that since the establishment of the Han Dynasty, merchants and ethnic minorities who were enthusiastic about trade in the Western Regions carried out rich economic and cultural exchanges with Central Asian countries through the Silk Road. According to ancient Chinese documents and modern

historical research, it can be seen that during Zhang Qian's two missions in 139 and 119 BC, the Han Dynasty exported pears, peaches and other items, and also brought back carrots, courgettes and other Western crops. It is worth noting that in the British archaeology in 1900, the archaeological team represented by Estanin discovered a woodblock print that the Western countries banned the spread of silk technology. In the woodblock prints, the story of King Khotan's concubine from the Han Dynasty and Baqi's protection of sericulture and prevention of the spread of silk technology is also recorded in Xuanzang's "Records of the Western Regions of the Tang Dynasty". [13].

From this, it can be seen that in ancient China, especially during the Han Dynasty, the export of Chinese silk was closely related to the countries in the Western Regions. For example, the silk exchange between the Han Dynasty and the Roman Empire should be more based on the Huns and Guishuang between the two countries. Empire, and the power of the Parthian Empire. In addition, according to Malinus' account, Macedonian commercial agents traveled through Central Asia to China, and then traded with Chinese merchants. After the business was over, the agent crossed the Tarim Basin again, bringing Chinese silk to the hot-selling West. The Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder also recorded in "Natural History": "Although the Seris are mild-mannered, they avoid other human races like wild animals, and only wait for trade merchants to come to them." [5] This record once again verifies the fact that the silk of the Han Dynasty finally reached the Roman Empire after several turnovers. In Roman texts, the earliest description of Chinese silk is a foreign war led by Crassus. This war took place in 53 BC, and its main purpose was to conquer the Parthian Empire, so that Crassus himself gained more support from Roman citizens. However, at the Battle of Carre, the Roman army saw the flag of the Parthian army made of silk. The brightly colored flag dazzled the entire Roman legionnaire, thus losing the warplane and Crassus' army unfortunately defeated. More than a decade later, the Romans once again saw silk at the celebration feast of Caesar, one of the first three giants, and the audience was dumbfounded. That is, after this time, the Romans gradually realized that silk was produced by an eastern country called "Seris", which was also the first batch of China to reach the Roman Empire through the land Silk Road after Daxia and Anxi. Silk. Soon, Julius Caesar appeared in the Roman theater wearing silk clothes, causing a public outcry. The Roman Senate believed that wearing Chinese silk fabrics would make women's bodies more incisive and indecent, and called for prohibiting Roman citizens from buying Chinese silk. However, many aristocrats in Rome did not agree. Both men and women competed to wear silk clothes, which led to the increasing number of silk fabrics imported into Rome and the high prices. Suetonius, who wrote *The Twelve Emperors of Rome*, also records: "Caligula was indifferent to tradition and current trends in his dress... He often appeared in public dressed in embroidery and gemstones. Cloaks, long-sleeved shirts, and handkerchiefs; and the robes that Roman women were forbidden to wear, and the silks that were permitted." [14].

Modern Western scholars also believe that the silk in the Roman market at that time was almost equivalent to gold, the so-called "one gram of silk and one gram of gold". Therefore, the purchase of oriental luxury goods such as silk caused the serious outflow of Roman precious metals. The record of the Pliny the Elder in "History of Nature" was about 55 million Romance. Although these Roman dollars are not all Chinese silk, it still makes it difficult for Roman Senate to accept. Therefore, the Embius Emperor Roman

even issued an order to prohibit Roman male ministers from wearing silk clothes and restricting women's use of silk. Unfortunately, people's enthusiasm for silk, wearing silk and using silk was still the social style at the time, and even the Roman Empire had a place to buy and sell silk. In the second century AD, the western territory of the Roman Empire with the respected silk of the Roman Empire was described as the Western murals.

7 Conclusion

In conclusion, silk road had provoked the rise of popularity of silk in Roman Empire. This could be seen as a begin to the trade between Han dynasty and Roman Empire. Through the comparative exploration of the economic exchanges between the Roman Empire and the Han Dynasty, the economic exchanges between the Roman Empire and the Han Dynasty The analysis of the similarities and differences shows that the economic exchanges between the two satisfies the curiosity and yearning for each other, injects fresh blood into each other's civilization, and lays a solid foundation for further understanding and communication between the two. It also promotes each other's economic, cultural and social progress, and also has certain reference significance for the current "Silk Road Economic Belt" construction.

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