

WAS ARMENIAN KING PARTHAMASIRIS AN SHIGAO? (IDENTIFYING SUTRA TRANSLATOR AN SHIGAO OF CHINA)*

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In 63 CE, after a fruitless battle for Armenia, the Roman and Parthian empires concluded the *Treaty of Rhandaia*, which finalized the Roman-Parthian War of 58–63. The peace treaty stipulated that the future prince of the Arsacid line would sit on the Armenian throne, but the nomination, or right of investiture, was given to the emperor of Rome. In 113, the Parthian Empire violated the agreement and then the Roman emperor Trajan launched the campaign against Parthian Empire and expelled the Armenian king Parthamasiris (安世高) out of Armenia. In 148, Parthamasiris came to Luoyang of China by the name An Shigao and began a series of translations of Sutra. The translation of Buddhist scriptures led by An Shigao was one of the earliest translation movements in the history of Chinese literature, which has made great important contributions to the development of Chinese Buddhist culture.

Key words: An Shigao; Roman-Parthian War; Armenia; Buddhist

According to early Chinese Buddhist literature, in 148, the arrival of the Parthian missionary An Shigao in Luoyang (the Han dynasty capital), marked the beginning of the intensive Buddhist activity in China. However, many scholars have been being controversial about the true identity of An Shigao, and there is no final conclusion until now. It is a pity that there are only a few words about his life in early Chinese Buddhist literature, and the ancient secular historical materials even didn't notice his existence, which brings various difficulties to verify his identity as “king” and “Parthian Marquis (安侯)” recorded in early Chinese Buddhist literature.¹ According to my research, it found that Parthamasiris is the Chinese famous An Shigao, who is the first translator of Buddhist scriptures in China.

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¹ Chinese Scholar Li Tiejiang (李铁匠) believed that An Shigao was an ordinary civilian from Merv city in Central Asia, see Li Tiejiang, “Analysis of An Shigao's Identity”, *Journal of Jiang Xi University*, No. 1, 1998, pp. 63-66. Antonino Forte said that An Shigao came to China as an Hostage, see Antonino Forte, *The Hostage An Shigao and His Offspring: An Iranian Family in China*, Kyoto: Istituto Italiano du Cultura, Scuola di Studi sull' Asia Orientale, 1955. Feng Chengjun (冯承钧) thought that the Parthian prince An Shigao is Parthamasiris, see Feng Chengjun, *A Record of Previous Dynasties Searching the Translation of Buddhist Scriptures (历代求法翻经录)*, Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1931, p. 4. Kong Huiyi (孔慧怡) analyzed several possibilities of An Shigao's Identity, but no conclusion is made, see Kong Huiyi, “An Shigao and Early Sutra Translation (从安世高的背景看早期佛经汉译)”, *Chinese Translators Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 2001(May), pp. 52-57.

The Forming of Rhandaia Compromise

In the history of the Near East, Armenia highland is geographically important: from here, it can look down on the Near East and Asia Minor; it can overlook the higher highland and the lower plains. Because of this, Armenia liked a gateway to enter the Easter and Wester in the middle age. The empires that controlled Armenia would hold the key into the rival side, and may well take over the entire Near East. As a result, both Rome and Parthian Empire never stopped to take Armenia, and there was a standoff that lasted for more than 200 years (53 BC-217 CE).

In the course of the struggles between Rome and Parthian, Armenian king Tigranes the Great (r. 95 BC-55 BC) chose to submit to the greater Roman Empire and signed the *Treaty of Artashat* with Pompey in 66 BC. According to the treaty, Rome recognized Armenia with its king as an ally but the latter should make the following reparations as Appian said: “gave to Pompey for himself 6000 talents, and for the army fifty drachmas to each soldier, 1000 to each centurion, and 10000 to each tribune.”² However, Rome’s interference in Armenia affairs seriously threatened the interests of the Parthian Empire. After the Mithridatic Wars (88 BC–63 BC), the Kingdom of Armenia also began to regard the Roman Empire as a threat rather than an ally, developing a close relationship with the Parthian Empire. Therefore, Armenia did not give any support in the Marcus Licinius Crassus’ conquest of Parthia, instead strengthened the relationship with the Parthia after the Battle of Carrhae. But soon after, Mark Antony conquered Armenia and made it a province of the Roman Empire. However, the Parthia did not give up its intention to control Armenia. In 12 CE, Caesar Augustus, by political realities, appointed Arsacid prince Vonones I (r. 12–18) as King of Armenia. The dynasty which Vonones I established was called Arshakuni (12–428), a branch of the Arsacid dynasty of Parthia.

Nevertheless, Both Rome and Parthia never lost a moment in putting their proxies on the Armenian throne. In the context of imperial rivalry, the Armenian Kings either came from Rome or Parthia during this period. In 36 CE, when the Armenian throne was vacant, the war broke out between Rome and Parthia. However, neither side was able to achieve a decisive victory over the other. In the end, the two sides reached an agreement that Parthia would renounce interferences in Armenian affairs.³ Tacitus said: “the Parthians departed from Armenia, but only as though they were deferring war.”⁴ In 58 CE, another war over Armenia question broke out when the Parthia declared Armenia a vas-

² Appian, *Appian’s Roman History*, Vol. 2, with an English translation by Horace White, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, first printed 1912, reprinted 1932, 1955, 1962, p. 439.

³ Martin Sicker, “The Struggle over the Euphrates Frontier,” in Martin Sicker, ed., *The Pre-Islamic Middle East*, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2000, pp. 162-163.

⁴ Tacitus, *The Annals*, trans. with introduction and notes by A. J. Woodman, Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2004, p. 248.

sal state. Tacitus gave a remark of the Armenians that “in the situation of their country and the similarity of their habits they were closer to the Parthians, and, having merged with them through intermarriage and being ignorant of freedom, they inclined rather in their direction, toward servitude”.⁵ In 62 CE, at Rhandia a joint Armenia-Parthia army won a victory against the Roman army. A conversation on the subject of Armenia is represented by Tacitus in the following terms: “the legions should be freed from the blockade and all the soldiery withdraw from the Armenians’ territory and the strongholds and supplies be handed to the Parthians.”⁶ But the war continued under the *maius imperium* or supreme command Corbulo. In 63, as a consequence of fruitless war, the *Treaty of Rhandia* was drawn up. According to the treaty, the future Armenian kings should come from Arsacids’ princes on the conditions of Rome permission and having the right to crown Armenian kings, and thus both powers would rule equally over Armenia with the king as their representative.⁷

Treaty of Rhandia was a compromise between Rome and Parthia. Therefore, the arrangement between the two sides on the Armenian issue can also be called the “Rhandia Compromise”. Under these circumstances, Armenia became in effect a semi-autonomous country: it was neither a province of the Roman Empire nor a vassal of the Parthian Empire.

In 66 CE, the Armenian king Trdat I, the brother of Vologases I, travelled to the great city of Rome to receive his crown from the emperor Nero in one of the most extravagant public spectacles. Then, in the context of the balance of powers between the East and the West, Rome, and Parthia generally followed the principles of the Rhandia Compromise for more than half a century. However, it resulted in an unclear political status for Armenia, which in effect became an autonomous feudal kingdom that belonged to neither the Roman Empire nor the Parthia empire, but whose fate depended on both. Nevertheless, the Rhandia Compromise recognized Armenia's international status. After that, Rome focused its efforts on suppressing the Jewish rebellion, and the Parthia turned its attention to the Eastern frontier against nomadic invasions.

Since the Armenian Kings of this period came from Iran, they developed a closer relationship with the Persian culture. Under such circumstances, it was easy to provoke hostilities among the Armenians and Parthians when the Romans interfered too much in Armenian affairs and vice versa. If there was a real movement for Parthia to control Armenia, the Roman empire continued to fight in the East. For example, the Armenian King Parthamasiris, whose name was An Shigao in ancient Chinese books, was forced to leave for China after the

⁵ Tacitus, *The Annals*, p. 262.

⁶ Tacitus, *The Annals*, p. 313.

⁷ Rouben Paul Adalian, *Historical Dictionary of Armenia*, Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010, p. 173 ; Tacitus, *The Annals*, p. 317; Alexander Mikaberidze, *Historical Dictionary of Georgia*, New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015, pp. 9, 144; Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, Vol. 8, trans.by Earnest Cary, Harvard University Press, 1955, p. 125.

principle of the Rhandia Compromise was destroyed, resulting in rivalry and disputes between Parthia and Rome.

Trajan's Conquest and Parthamasiris' Leaving

The Rhandia Compromise was, after all, the result of a balance of Roman and Parthian power, so the peace it brought was extremely fragile. Beginning in the 2nd century CE, the Parthia Empire gradually declined due to internal and external troubles, and the balance of superiority between the East and West shifted to the Roman Empire. In this case, Rome and Parthia began a new series of conflicts that were still sparked by the Armenian issues. In 110, King Osroes I installed his nephew Axidares (Ashkhadar) on the Armenian throne without the consent of the Roman emperor.⁸ Axidares was one of the sons of Pacorus II (Osroes I's brother), the former King of Kings of Parthian Empire.⁹ In doing so, Osroes I clearly violated the Rhandia Compromise and provided the justification for the Roman emperor Trajan to launch a military campaign to conquer Parthia in order to completely solve the "Armenian Events". This is just as Sergei Ivanovich Kovalev said that Armenia had long been a sticking point in disputes between Rome and Parthia.¹⁰

In the fall of 113 CE, Trajan departed Rome by ship for the East, sailing first to Athens. The Roman historian Cassius Dio said: "he made a campaign against the Armenians and Parthians on the pretext that the Armenian king had obtained his diadem, not at his hands, but from the Parthian king, though his real reason was a desire to win renown."¹¹ Fearful of the mighty Roman threat, Osroes I, was forced to appease Trajan by deposing Axidares and making another nephew Parthamasiris King of Armenia. Parthamasiris was also the son of Pacorus II, so his princes' identity would meet the Rhandia Compromise if Trajan crowned Parthamasiris. Osroes I thought his arrangement would prevent the war with Rome.

In Athens, Trajan met with the envoys from Osroes I, asking for peace and that "Armenia be given to Parthamasiris, who was likewise a son of Pacorus".¹² However, Trajan rejected the Parthian request, according to Cassius Dio: "the emperor neither accepted the gifts nor returned any answer, either oral or written, save the statement that friendship is determined by deeds and not by words."¹³ It was clear that Trajan had no intention to compromise with Parthia.

⁸ M. Bunson, *A Dictionary of the Roman Empire*, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 303.

⁹ Pacorus II have four sons: Vologases III (r. 110–147), Axidares (king of Armenia from 110–113), Parthamasiris and Meredates (King of Characene from 131–150), see Marek Jan Olbrycht, "Parthian King's Triara-Numismatic Evidence and Some Aspects of Arsacid Political Ideology," *Notae Numismaticae*, Tom 2, 1997, pp. 27-65.

¹⁰ Sergei Ivanovich Kovalev, *The Roman History*, trans. by Wang Yizhu (王以铸), Shanghai: Shanghai Century Publishing House, 2011, p. 103.

¹¹ Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, Vol. 8, p. 393.

¹² Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, Vol. 8, p. 113.

¹³ Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, Vol. 8, p. 113.

His true aim was not only to annex Armenia but to conquer Parthia as well. As for the Armenian king Parthamasiris, He certainly desired emperor Trajan to recognize his kingship. To achieve this desire, he wrote two letters to Trajan. Cassius Dio said: “In his first letter he had signed himself ‘king’, but when no answer came, he wrote again, omitting this title.”¹⁴

In 114 CE, Parthamasiris came to meet Trajan at the Roman camp of Elegeia in Armenia. Cassius Dio said: “The prince saluted him, took his diadem from off his head and laid it at his feet, then stood there in silence, expecting to receive it back.”¹⁵ Since the “Rhandia Compromise” had stipulated that Parthia would choose future Armenian kings from the princes of Arsacids and the Roman emperor would officially crown them, Parthamasiris would believe that the emperor should crown him as Nero had done to Trdat I. According to Cassius Dio, Roman emperor Trajan saw the Armenian king’s actions as a sign of surrender to him. “At this, the soldiers shouted aloud and hailed Trajan imperator, as if because of some victory,” Cassius Dio added, “they termed it a crownless and bloodless victory, to see the king, a descendant of Arsaces, a son of Pacorus, and a nephew of Osrose, standing before Trajan without a diadem, like a captive.”¹⁶

In the Roman camp, Parthamasiris had a private conversation with Trajan, the details of which are unknown. However, Parthamasiris got nothing, so out he rushed in angry, but Trajan sent for him, ascending the bade him say in the hearing of all everything that he desired. Cassius Dio said: “This was in order to prevent anybody, ignorant of what had been said in private conference, from making up a different report.”¹⁷ Parthamasiris was forced to declare that he was not defeated and captured, but had come voluntarily, and claimed that he should receive back Armenia as Trdat I got the kingdom as Nero did. But Trajan declared that Armenia became a Roman province. Obviously, Trajan’s action violated the so-called *Randea Peace Treaty* concluded in 62 CE.

About the fate of Parthamasiris, Cassius Dio had a clear description. He said that: “He would, however, allow Parthamasiris to depart to any place he pleased. So, he sent the prince away together with his Parthian companions and gave them an escort of cavalry to make sure that they should be associated with no one and should begin no rebellion; but he commanded all the Armenians who had come with the prince to remain where they were, on the ground that they were already his subjects.”¹⁸ So much for Cassius Dio’s description of Parthamasiris. He did not mention that Parthamasiris was killed by Trajan. Marcus Cornelius Fronto in his *Correspondence* supported Trajan’s incriminating Parthamasiris, but he said: “yet it would have been better for the good name of

¹⁴ Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, Vol. 8, p. 397.

¹⁵ Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, Vol. 8, p. 397.

¹⁶ Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, Vol. 8, pp. 399-401.

¹⁷ Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, Vol. 8, p. 399.

¹⁸ Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, Vol. 8, p. 399.

the Romans had a suppliant departed unharmed than been punished even justly”.¹⁹ So Fronto aimed to exalt Verus above Trajan, thus R. P. Longden believed that how far Trajan was responsible for Parthamasiris’ death is not absolutely certain and the charge must be regarded as not proven.²⁰

In a word, in Parthamasiris’ way home to Parthia, he disappeared mysteriously. Many scholars have been unable to find out where he went, thus presuming Parthamasiris was killed on Trajan’s orders,²¹ but which lack a specific historical basis.

When Trajan died in 117, his successor, Hadrian, reversed his predecessor’s policy and restored the Rhandia Compromise by enthroning Arsacid king Vagharsh I (r. 117-140 CE) after four years under direct Roman rule. Despite all this, a few decades after Parthamasiris left Armenia, a royal prince called An Shigao appeared in early Chinese Buddhist literature. So, was An Shigao the Armenian king Parthamasiris who was escorted away by Trajan?

Some Views on the Identity of An Shigao

According to the above, it is certain that Parthamasiris had the dual status of the prince with “royal blood” and “King”, which is consistent with the records of An Shigao in ancient Chinese Buddhist literature, who is probably the first translator in Chinese Buddhism history, and who organized the first translation group in China. His arrival at Luoyang (洛阳) marked the beginning of a new form of literary activity in Chinese cultural history. However, many Chinese scholars are yet not sure of or doubt his identity as a Parthian royal prince or king.

The *Preface to Anban Shouyi Jing* (安般守意经序), which was written by An Kang Senghui (康僧会), a Sogdian merchant in the early third century in China, is the earliest Buddhist scripture that recorded the life of An Shigao. However, most of the existing versions about An Shigao are based on the *Chu San Zang Ji Ji* (出三藏记集) and *Gaoseng Zhuan* (高僧传).²² According to the records of *Chu San Zang Ji Ji*, An Shigao, a son of the legal wife of the Parthian king, did not want to be king, and left the country after abandoning his right to the throne to his uncle, settled at Luoyang in 148 CE.²³ On this point, the biographies of *Gaoseng Zhuan* and other early Buddhist sources are similar to the descriptions

¹⁹ Marcus Cornelius Fronto, *The Correspondence of Marcus Cornelius Fronto with Marcus Aurelius Antoninus*, Vol. 2, London: W. Heinemann, 1919, p. 215.

²⁰ R. P. Longden, “Notes on the Parthian Campaigns of Trajan”, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 21, 1931, pp. 9-10.

²¹ M. Bunson, *A Dictionary of the Roman Empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 313; E. Yarshater, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 3, Cambridge: Cambridge University Sources, 1993, p. 88.

²² Kong Huiyi, “An Shigao and Early Sutra Translation”, p. 52. *Chu San Zang Ji Ji*, a collection of notes concerning the translations of the *Tripitaka*, compiled by Seng You (僧祐, 445-518), first published in 515. *Gao Seng Zhuan*, compiled probably around 530 AD by Hui Jiao (慧皎, 497-554), contains 257 major and 243 subordinate biographies of eminent monks from 67-519 CE.

²³ Seng You, *Chu San Zang Ji Ji*, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1995, p. 508.

given in the *Chu San Zang Ji Ji*. Henjō Kongō (遍照金刚, 774-835), a Japanese Buddhist monk, also claimed that An Shigao came to China during the reign of Emperor Huan of Han dynasty.²⁴ According to some Chinese secular literature, it is proved that An Shigao came from Parthia who was born in a Parthian royal family, and who enjoyed the title of prince and the right to crown Parthian King. For example, The *Book of Wei* (魏书)²⁵ and *History of the Northern Dynasties* (北史)²⁶ recorded that the ancestor of An Tong (?-429), one of the founders of the Northern Wei Dynasty, was An Shigao' coming at Luoyang "as a Parthian hostage (侍子)". The description about An Shigao in Later historical records, such as the *New Book of Tang's History* (新唐书), had similar descriptions to such records.

It is worth noting that in early Chinese Buddhist literature An Shigao had the status of *An Hou* (安侯).²⁷ Such as *Yin Chi Ru Jing Xu* (阴持入经序), published in the late Han dynasty and early Wei dynasty, left the record of "An Hou Shi Gao...renounced his claim to the royal throne."²⁸

Seng You (僧祐) and Hui Jiao (慧皎) also claimed: "Because Shigao with royal blood, was superior than the other foreigners, the Western guests especially called him An Hou."²⁹

According to *Gao Seng Zhuan*, Lokakshema (支娄迦讫) said that people regard An Shigao as *An Hou*.³⁰ Obviously, the status of An Shigao' *Hou* was not a traditional Chinese expression for *marquis* in China, but a title for foreign leaders. At that time, although, there were other monks, who translated the Sutra coming from royal descent such as Po-Śrimitra (帛尸梨蜜多罗), Gunavarman (求那跋摩) and Kumarajiva (鸠摩罗什), none of them had the status of *Hou*. The Parthian An Xuan, who worked together with An Shigao, did not have the Status of *Hou* too. Therefore, the *Hou*' status of An Shigao undoubtedly refers to the king of Parthian vassal states, which is consistent with the historical background mentioned above: Parthamasiris was both a king of the Parthian Empire and a prince of Arsacids with royal blood. Besides, the difference between the time Parthamasiris left Armenia and the time of An Shigao arrived in Luoyang was only 34 years, so the possibility of Parthamasiris being identified with An Shigao is not an issue of time inconsistency. Moreover, most literature

²⁴ Henjō Kongō, "Wenjing Mifu Lun (文镜秘府论)," in Lu Shengjiang (卢盛江), *Examination of Wenjing Mifu Lun (文镜秘府论) [校]考*, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2006, p. 310.

²⁵ Wei Shou (魏收), *Book of Wei*, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1971, p. 712.

²⁶ Li Dashi (李大师) and Li Yanshou (李延寿), *History of the Northern Dynasties*, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1975, pp. 3445-3446.

²⁷ In the history of Chinese book, Parthian Empire was called *Anxi* (安息), and the name of those people who came from Parthia was called *An*. Therefore, An Shigao's name is an abbreviation of *Anxi*. *Hou* means the kings of the vassal states. So, *An Hou* signify that An Shigao was once the king of Parthian vassal state.

²⁸ *Taisho Tripitaka*, Vol. 30, cited in Tang Yongtong (汤用彤), *History of Buddhism in Han, Wei, Jin and Northern and Southern Dynasties*, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1983, p. 45.

²⁹ Seng You, *Chu San Zang Ji Ji*, p. 510; *Gao Seng Zhuan*, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1992, p. 6.

³⁰ Seng You, *Chu San Zang Ji Ji*, p.284.

recorded that An Shigao wandered a long time before arriving in Luoyang. So, we can conclude that Parthamasiris visited many places in the eastern of Iran after he was expelled by Trajan.

Many Chinese scholars attempted to identify An Shigao, but they have never been successful. For example, Li Tiejiang, according to the Parthian system of royal heredity, argued that An Shigao was a common person from the ancient city Merv (木鹿). In fact, the king's status of An Shigao cannot be explained by the Parthian heredity system, because Parthia contained several subordinate semi-autonomous kingdoms, rather than a strictly centralized empire. Therefore, it is impossible to explain the identity of An Shigao in terms of the Parthian royal succession system. Otherwise, Li did not note the special arrangements for the Armenian kings made by the *Rhandia Treaty*.

Obviously, the king title of An Shigao, mentioned in Ancient Chinese books, was not the title of King of Kings, but the vassal king under the King of Kings, namely, *An Hou*. Maybe, this unclear political mode makes some scholars misunderstand the Parthian heredity.

Antonino Forte (1940-2006) is one of the greatest scholars of Chinese and Japanese Buddhist history. His book of *The Hostage An Shigao and His Offspring: An Iranian Family in China* is the most detailed work on the study of An Shigao's life. Forte concluded that An Shigao was a Parthian prince who was sent to the court at Luoyang as a diplomatic hostage.³¹ As it is well known, diplomatic hostage in the ancient world was generally a diplomatic act taken by a great power to consolidate its rule over vassal states. Indeed, there was such a political relationship between the Han Empire and the Western Regions. For example, more than 50 these states were recorded in the *Book of the Later Han Dynasty* (后汉书).³² However, there is no such recorded relationship between Parthia and Han Empire. Although the two countries had exchanged envoys, there was no evidence of a subservient relationship, nor of a diplomatic Parthian hostage entering China. As a matter of fact, the Roman, Parthian, and Han Empires were contemporaries of great powers with equal strength. Therefore, Forte's statement that the Han government accepted the Prince of Parthia as a hostage is contrary to common sense and has no such evidence.

Feng Chengjun (1887-1946) had studied the life of An Shigao. He said: "Parthamasiris was named Shigao. He was a prince of Parthian king Pacorus II. In 97 CE, the king died. His brother, Osroes I, succeeded to the throne, and Parthamasiris gave way as Armenian king. After Roman Trajan annexed Armenia, Parthamasiris was appointed to succeed the Parthian king, but the people disliked him. Then, Parthamasiris became a monk. In 148 CE, He came into

³¹ Antonino Forte, *The Hostage An Shigao and His Offspring: An Iranian Family in China*, Kyoto: Italian School of East Asian Studies, "Introduction".

³² Fan Ye (范晔), *Book of the Later Han Dynasty*, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1965, p. 179.

China through India. He was proficient in the Chinese language shortly after his arrival. He translated many Sanskrit sutras into Chinese.”³³

Feng Chengjun’s view may have borrowed from Léon Wieger (1856-1933), a French Jesuit who entered China during the Qing dynasty. Léon Wieger also believed that An Shigao was Parthamasiris.³⁴ Léon Wieger also speculated that Trajan, to save Parthamasiris from persecution by Osroes I, send the Armenian king to leave Parthia for India, and then he finally arrived in China.³⁵

Léon Wieger’s analysis was reasonable because Parthamasiris’ presence must have posed a threat to Parthaspates’ inheritance to Parthian throne. Parthaspates was the son of Osroes I who was the royal uncle of Parthamasiris. When talking about this, Léon Wieger incited Cassius Dio’s records.

Obviously, Feng Chengjun and Léon Wieger’s view has been very close to historical facts. Nevertheless, Feng Chengjun’s statement still has several points worth discussing. First of all, the time of the death of Pacorus II was 110 CE, not 97 CE (Léon Wieger also dated it in 97 CE). Secondly, there is no evidence to support the claim that An Shigao be the King of Parthia. Third, it is still controversial whether An Shigao entered China through India. Leaving aside the first and the third points, this article will examine the second point and the Buddhist sources of “An Shigao abdicating his crown to his uncle and escaping from Parthia.” But before doing so, it is necessary to clarify the genealogy of Arsacids and their struggles for the throne in the first half of the second century CE.

Pacorus II had four sons: Vologases III, Axidares, Parthamasiris, and Meredates who served as king of Characene. Osroes I and Mithridates V (r. 129-140) were their uncles. During the reign of Pacorus II, he met some revolts by his brothers Vologases II and Artabanus III. In 109, a third Parthian contender named Osroes I appeared, and the latter eventually conquered the western part of the Empire, while Vologases III, the successor of Pacorus II, got the eastern part of the Empire (Chinese history book recorded it as Xiao Anxi 小安息). It’s worth noting that Pacorus II strengthened relations with Han China.³⁶ In 97, the Chinese general Ban Chao (班超) sent his emissary Gan Ying (甘英) on a diplomatic mission to Roman Empire. Gan Ying visited the court of Pacorus II at Hecatompylos before departing towards Rome.³⁷ The close rela-

³³ Feng Chengjun, *A Record of Previous Dynasties Searching the Translation of Buddhist Scriptures*, p. 4.

³⁴ Léon Wieger, *Histoire des Croyances religieuses et des Opinions philosophiques en Chine* (中国宗教信仰及哲学观点通史), Sien-hsien (献县): Ho-kien-fu (河间府), 1922, pp. 351-353.

³⁵ Léon Wieger, *Histoire des Croyances religieuses et des Opinions philosophiques en Chine*, p. 353.

³⁶ Leonardo Gregoratti, “The Arsacid Empire,” in Touraj Daryaee, ed., *King of the Seven Climes: A History of the Ancient Iranian World (3000 BCE - 651 CE)*, Jordan Center for Persian Studies at the University of California, pp. 131-132.

³⁷ William Watson, “Iran and China”, in Ehsan Yarshater, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol 3(1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 543-544.

tionship between Parthia and China must have made a great influence on Parthamasiris. Therefore, Chinese culture was not unfamiliar for Persians, especially the royal princes.

During the rule of Osroes I and the rival king Vologases III, the Parthian empire was divided by civil strife and warfare, and Trajan's invasion took place during this period. In 116 CE, Trajan crowned Parthaspates the king of Parthia as a Roman client, while Vologases III in the east sought to fight against the Kushan Empire.³⁸ In the west, the Parthians removed Parthaspates from the throne and reinstated Osroes I after Trajan's death in 117. Trajan's successor, Hadrian (r. 117-138) acknowledged the *Treaty of Rhandaia*, while the Parthian prince Vologases I becoming the new king of Armenia. In 129, Vologases III managed to remove Osroes I from power, but soon he had to face another contender Mithridates V (Vologases III's uncle). In 140, Vologases III defeated Mithridates V. In 147, Vologases III was succeeded by Mithridates V's son Vologases IV (r. 147-191).

However, Parthamasiris was absent during this fierce struggle for the King of Kings of Parthia. Therefore, there was no empirical evidence like what Feng Chengjun or other early Chinese Buddhist literature recorded as "An Shigao abdicating his crown to his uncle", but it did reflect the reality of civil strife and changes of royal power in the Arsacids family during that period.

Osroes I was a usurper, so his power was illegitimate. For example, he did not have a crown on his coinage until Trajan's death in 117, when some decorations appeared on his head.³⁹ At the same time, it also shows that the Parthian crown is not used casually and that its existence or absence depends on specific political circumstances. As for Parthamasiris, there was very likely a party which supported his claim to the King of Kings as Pacorus' eldest son, and finally Osroes I tried to compensate him with the throne of Armenia.⁴⁰ It seemed logical, therefore, that An Shigao gave the right of the crown to his uncle Osroes I, which were consistent with the descriptions in early Chinese Buddhist literature mentioned above.

In conclusion, there was no other prince among the Arsacids that was consistent with the records in the Chinese Buddhist literature.⁴¹ Thus, Parthamasiris

³⁸ A. D. H. Bivar, "The Political History of Iran under the Arsacids," in Ehsan Yarshater, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3(1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 91.

³⁹ Marek Jan Olbrycht, "Parthian King's Triara-Numismatic Evidence and Some Aspects of Arsacid Political Ideology," p. 50.

⁴⁰ R. P. Longden, "Notes on the Parthian Campaigns of Trajan," p. 13.

⁴¹ Arthur Lloyd (1852-1911) argued that An Shigao was Parthamasiris' brother Axidares, see Arthur Lloyd, *The Creed of Half Japan: Historical Sketches of Japanese Buddhism*, London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1911, p. 118. However, few scholars agree with Arthur Lloyd's view. According to Dio's description, because Axidares had proved unsatisfactory both to the Romans and to the Parthians, he was deposed by Osroes I instead of Parthamasiris. However, the information about Axidares is limited, even nothing about him after 113. Therefore, it is safe to say that An Shigao is either Axidares or Parthamasiris, but as far as the author is concerned with all the historical sources and logical inferences, it is more accurate and logical to confirm that An Shigao is

and An Shigao should be the same person, judging from the historical context, Parthamasiris' identity, and the time of his departure from Armenia. Then, why there appeared the records of "An Shigao's unwillingness to abdicate the crown to his uncle" in early Chinese Buddhist literature? This may have to do with the fact that when he relayed his story to others, his listeners or recorders had a different understanding of the complex relationships within the Parthian royal family, or that he himself deliberately withheld some details in order to enhance his own status in China.

According to analyses above, we may draw a conclusion: when Parthamasiris was expelled out of Armenia, he may come to the east part of Parthia controlled by his brother Vologases III, where it was adjacent to Kushan Empire with Buddhism prevailed at that time. An Shigao, so frustrated by political strife, is likely to be affected by the local Buddhist culture, and finally arrived Luoyang from Kushan Empire, which was consistent with some Central Asian scholars' inference that An Shigao came to China from Central Asia.⁴² It is also consistent with Li Tiejiang' view that An Shigao came from Merv.

It is well known that Kushan had a vast territory encompassing much of modern Afghanistan, Pakistan and northern India. It was also one of equal great powers with Roman, Parthian and the Han Empire in the middle of second century. The Kushans inherited the Greco-Buddhist traditions of the Indo-Greek Kingdom they replaced. At that time, Buddhism patronized by the Kushans extended to China through the Silk Road. With the frequent exchanges between China and the outside world, the rulers of the Han Empire seemed to have developed a great interest in Buddhism. For example, Emperor Mingdi of the Han Dynasty sent a delegation to the Western Regions to seek Buddhist scriptures. It was in this context that Parthamasiris may be immersed himself in the study of Chinese and Buddhism, and came to Luoyang in 148 in the name of An Shigao, then translating Buddhist scriptures, although the exact details of his visiting are unclear. In interpreting *Wang Ocheonchukguk Jeon* (往五天竺国传), Zhang Yi(张毅) said: "Among the early eminent monks who came to China to translate sutras, there were several of Parthians such as An Shigao, who came to China during the reign of Emperor Huan of the Han Dynasty. It is said that he was the crown prince of Parthian emperor. He was a brilliant man of wide learning, and was enjoying a great reputation in the Western Regions. He mastered the Chinese language and successively translated more than thirty scriptures into Chinese after coming to China. His translation is 'clear in meaning, correct in writing, discerning but not flowery, quality but not wild'".⁴³

Parthamasiris. As for other princes with royal blood, they are no consistent with the records in the Chinese Buddhist literature.

⁴² William Montgomery McGovern, *The Early Empires of Central Asia: A Study of the Scythians and the Huns and the Part They Played in World History*, Chapel Hill: University of California Press, 1939, p. 67.

⁴³ Hui Chao, *Wang Ocheonchukguk Jeon*, interpreted by Zhan Yi, Bei Jing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2000, p. 102.

An Shigao' name is also deserved noteworthy. He is usually called An Qing(安清) in later biographies. According to the customary method of addressing foreigners in Chinese classical books, authors often used the abbreviation of the country name before his own name. For example, people from Parthia were called "An××", people from Tianzhu (India) are called "Zhu××", people from the Greater Yuezhi are called "Zhi××", and people from Sogdiana are called "Kang××". Therefore, the first syllable *An* of An Shigao means Parthia, but scholars are not very clear about the specific meaning of An Shigao's original name Qing. E. Zürcher, a famous Dutch Sinologist, thought that it looks like a translation rather than a transcription and it cannot be taken to mean a "style" of the Chinese type.⁴⁴ However, in the book of *An Ban Shou Yi Jing* translated by An Shigao, there are such a sentence: "安为清 般为净 守为无 意名为 是清净无为也。"⁴⁵ (An is Qing, Ban is Jing, Shou is Wu and Yi is Wei, which means quietism).

Obviously, the *Qing* here seems to find some proof for the name of Anqing, for the word quietism (清静无为) originated from *Lao Tzu*, which was an important philosophical concept of Taoism in China during the Han Dynasty. Ma Zuyi believed that the word *Qing* (清) is the result of An Shigao's analogies from Taoist philosophical concepts.⁴⁶

Perhaps, the meaning of Qing can be confirmed by the name of An Xuan (安玄). An Xuan was another Parthian who worked with his famous countryman An Shigao in Luoyang.⁴⁷ It is well known that *Xuan* (玄) also comes from Taoism that is also known as the *Xuan Men* (玄门).⁴⁸ Thus it can be seen that Ma Zuyi's analysis is not unreasonable, so there is reason to confirm that the *Qing* and *Xuan* all comes from the concept of Taoist philosophy. This shows that the early Chinese translators were familiar with Chinese culture and philosophical concepts, and liked to use them as a frame of reference in their translations, so as to make Buddhism more understandable and acceptable by Chinese people at that time. As for the final whereabouts of An Shigao, it is also a mystery, just like his life information before arriving in China. It is said that he was killed in the city of Kuai Ji(会稽), modern city Shaoguang in Zhejiang province of China.⁴⁹

To sum up, An Shigao was only identified with Parthian prince Parthamasiris, thus can accord with the historical context and early Chinese Buddhist

⁴⁴ E. Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, pp. 32-33.

⁴⁵ An Shigao, trans., "Fo Shuo Da An Ban Shou Yi Jing(佛说安般守意经)", in *Taishō Tripiṭaka* (大正藏), book 15, Bei Jing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1997, p. 164.

⁴⁶ Ma Zuyi (马祖毅), *Chinese Translation History*, Vol. I, Han Kou: Hubei Education Press, 2000, p. 112.

⁴⁷ E. Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, p. 23.

⁴⁸ In Chinese philosophy, Xuan Men (玄门) is known as Taoism, indicating a realm of inciseness and mystery.

⁴⁹ Feng Chengjun, *A Record of Previous Dynasties Searching the Translation of Buddhist Scriptures*, p. 4.

literature. Although no definitive historical records have been found so far, the problem will be solved with further research and the discovery of new historical data.

Conclusion

Since An Shigao played a pivotal role in the Buddhist history of the Chinese, it is undoubtedly of great significance to reveal his true identity. However, the early Buddhist and secular literature only gave us limited information about his life, so it is difficult to confirm his true identity. Nevertheless, we can still confirm that Armenian king Parthamasiris, who was Parthia prince with royal blood, is An Shigao, which most fits the original accounts of Buddhist literature and historical facts. In addition, the An Shigao' translation activity reflects the relationship between China and Western Asia had reached an unprecedented level during the first to second century CE. For example, Gan Ying visited the court of Pacorus II at Hecatompylos. Benefiting from the huge economic benefits of the Silk Road, Pacorus II deliberately strengthened diplomatic relations with the Han Empire, and in November 101, he presented some gifts such as a lion and ostrich to the Han Court of China.⁵⁰ It can be seen that before Parthamasiris came to China, he already had some understanding of China and Chinese language, even interested in it. In particular, the translation group organized by An Shigao after he entered the Han dynasty marked the beginning of new literary activity in China. In addition, in the second half of the 2nd century, those Buddhist translators from the Parthia, India and Yue Zhi (月氏) gathered in Luoyang at the same time to work on the translation of Buddhist scriptures, which may be that the eagerness of the Han rulers to learn the true meaning of Buddhism attracted scholars from all over the world, or it may be that the Parthian Empire, the Kushan Empire, India and China took a concerted action against the Huns. Therefore, the introduction of Buddhism into China was likely relevant to political negotiations.

Չի ՓեՅՉԵՆԳ – Արդյո՞ք Ան Շիգաոն հայոց արքա Պարթամասիրիսն էր (Չինաստանում բուդդայական սուրբ գրերի թարգմանիչ Ան Շիգաոյի նույնականության հաստատումը Պարթամասիրիսի հետ) – 63 թ. Հայաստանի համար ապարդյուն կովից հետո Հռոմեական և Պարթևական կայսրությունները կնքեցին Հռոմեայի պայմանագիրը, որը վերջ դրեց հռոմեա-պարթևական պատերազմին (58-63 թթ.): Խաղաղության պայմանագիրը նախատեսում էր, որ Արշակունյաց տոհմի ապագա արքայազնը նստի հայկական գահին, բայց նրա նշանակումը կամ լիազորության իրավունքը տրվեց Հռոմի կայսրին: 113 թ. պարթևական կայսրությունը խախտեց համաձայնագիրը, և հռոմեական կայսր Տրայանուսը դեմ դուրս եկավ Հռոմեական կայսրությանը և վտարեց հայոց Պարթամասիրիս թագավորին: Հռովանձում հեղինակը համադրելով տարբեր տվյալներ՝ եզրակացնում է, որ 148 թ. Պարթամասիրիսը հեռացավ Լոյան՝ Չինաստան, փո-

⁵⁰ Fan Ye (范曄), *Book of the Later Han Dynasty*, p. 189.

իւեց իր անունը Ան Շիգաոյի և սկսեց Սուտրայի բազմաթիվ հատորների թարգմանությունը: Բուդդայական սուտր գրերի թարգմանությունը Ան Շիգաոյի կողմից վաղ չինական գրականության պատմության համար մեծ առաջընթաց էր և չափազանց կարևոր ներդրում չինական բուդդայական մշակույթի զարգացման գործում:

Բանալի բառեր – *Ան Շիգաո, Պարթամասիրիս, հռոմեա-պարթևական պատերազմ, Հայաստան, բուդդայական մշակույթ*

КИ ПЕЙЧЕНГ – *Был ли Ань Шигао армянским царем Парфамасирисом? (Идентификация переводчика Сутры в Китае Ань Шигао с Парфамасирисом).* – В 63 г. н.э., после безрезультатной битвы за Армению, Римская и Парфянская империи заключили Рандейский мирный договор, завершивший римско-парфянскую войну 58–63 гг. Мирный договор предусматривал, что будущий принц из рода Аршакидов будет сидеть на армянском троне, но его назначение, или правомочность, предоставлялись императору Рима. В 113 году Парфянская империя нарушила договор, римский император Траян начал кампанию против Парфянской империи и изгнал армянского царя Парфамасириса из Армении. В 148 году Парфамасирис прибыл в Лоян в Китае под именем Ань Шигао и предпринял серию переводов Сутры, что явилось одной из первых переводческих инициатив в истории китайской литературы, важным вкладом в развитие китайской буддийской культуры.

Ключевые слова: *Ань Шигао, Парфамасирис, римско-парфянская война, Армения, буддийская культура*