

Huns and Xiōngnú: New Thoughts on an Old Problem

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In a recent article, Étienne de la Vaissière has marshaled a strong case that the people identified in Sogdian as *Xwn* and in Sanskrit as *Hūṇa* are indeed exactly the same people as the Chinese Xiōngnú.¹ Given that *Xwn* and *Hūṇa* are usually identified with the Greek *Ounnoi* or Latin *Hunni*, this would lead us to agree with de la Vaissière that the old theory that *Xiōngnú*=*Hun* has defeated its antagonists and is worth of consideration once again.

There is one serious problem with this equivalence, though, one that de la Vaissière does not address very concretely. This is the very poor phonological match between Chinese *Xiōngnú*, Sogdian *Xwn*, Sanskrit *Hūṇa*, Greek *Ounnoi*, and Latin *Hunni*.² As Otto Maenchen-Helfen put it long ago: “the equation *Hun* = *Hiung-nu* is phonetically unsound.”³ While de la Vaissière criticizes H. W. Bailey for just assuming that the Avestan *Āyaona* and *Hun* must be phonological matches, he too offers no explanation for the rather large gap between Chinese *Xiōngnú* and, for example, Greek *Ounnoi*, except to invoke vaguely different dialects and unnamed potential intermediaries.⁴

It is a pleasure to present this scholarly contribution to Donald Ostrowski on the occasion of his 65th birthday. I also would like to thank my colleagues Richard Nance (e-mails, 17 and 30 January and 2 February 2011) and Jamsheed Choksy (e-mails, 21 January and 1 February 2011) for their valuable discussions of questions of Sanskrit and Iranian philology with me. Dr. Mark Dickens of Cambridge likewise gave me invaluable assistance with Syriac sources (emails of 18 February, and Mark Dickens, “References to Chionites in Syriac Literature,” unpublished ms. prepared for Christopher P. Atwood). Needless to say, I am of course solely responsible for all the remaining errors. In order to highlight the peculiar problems associated with using Chinese transcriptions for non-Chinese words, I have added tone markers to all the cases where Chinese words are used to transcribe foreign names and terms.

¹ Étienne de la Vaissière, “Huns et Xiongnu,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 49 (2005): 3–26.

² The list of Greek and (in less exhaustive detail) Latin, Sanskrit, Armenian, and Iranian variants is found in Gyula Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica, 2: Sprachreste der Türkvölker in den byzantinischen Quellen*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1958).

³ Otto Maenchen-Helfen, “Archaistic Names of the Hiung-nu,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 6 (1961): 249–61, here 249.

⁴ De la Vaissière, “Huns et Xiongnu,” 7–8.

Taking the western Eurasian transcriptions together, they differ from *Xiōngnú* in up to four significant ways:

1. *Xiōngnú*⁵ is a two-syllable word, but Sogdian *xwn~ ywn*, Syriac *Hun*, Armenian *Hon*,⁶ and Pahlavi *Xyōn* have no second syllable, while the second syllable in Greek *Ounnoi*, and Latin *Hunni* seems to be simply a case ending;
2. *Xiōngnú* begins with a velar spirant [x], but Sanskrit *Hūṇa*, Syriac *Hūn*, and Armenian *Hon* have a glottal spirant [h], and Greek *Ounnoi* has no initial spirant at all;⁷
3. *Xiōngnú* has a velar nasal [ŋ]; Sanskrit *Hūṇa* has a retroflex *ṇ*, while the other forms have a dental nasal [n];
4. *Xiōngnú* has some form of glide or semi-vowel [j] or [i] preceding the main vowel; except for Avestan *Āyaona* and Pahlavi *Xyōn*, the other western Eurasian variants do not.

I will not belabor here the additional fact that the rounded vowel seems to vary between *u* and *o* both within and between the various transcriptions.

Of course, *Xiōngnú* is only the modern Mandarin pronunciation of the characters 匈奴. Perhaps some or all of these features might be the result of developments in Chinese phonology postdating the time when those characters were first applied to the *Xiōngnú*. In fact, only with the last of the four discrepancies mentioned is this possible. *Xiōngnú* 匈奴 was pronounced in Early Mandarin (of the Yuan dynasty) as [xjuŋ-nu],⁸ in Tang-era Middle Chinese (Northwest dialect) as [xiuŋ-n̄du].⁹ Older reconstructed pronunciations include Wei-era Middle Chinese of Luoyang as [xuawŋ-nɔ]¹⁰ and **huoŋ-no* in

⁵ It should be noted that the X in *Xiōngnú* is a conventional marker used in the modern Pinyin transcription system to mark the Chinese phoneme [ɕ]. It has nothing to do with the velar spirant [x], although in this case it does develop historically from [x] in Early Mandarin and earlier.

⁶ I omit here the Syriac and Armenian gentilics *-āyē*, and *-k'*.

⁷ The rough breathing mark found in some cases seems to be everywhere insertions of later editors, influenced by the Latin.

⁸ W. South Coblin, *A Handbook of 'Phagspa Chinese* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), §§36, 244.

⁹ Tokio Takata, *Tonkō shiryō ni yoru Chūgokugo shi no kenkyū: Kyū jisseiki no Kasei hōgen* (Tokyo: Sobunsha, 1988), §§1199, 0088a.

¹⁰ Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *Lexicon of Reconstructed Pronunciation in Early Middle Chinese, Late Middle Chinese, and Early Mandarin* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1991), s.v. *xiōng* 匈 and *nú* 奴.

Old Northwest Chinese, c. A.D. 400.¹¹ Finally, for the Han era, when the transcription would have been actually coined, Old Chinese (Han or Zhou dynasty) reconstructions include:

*x(r)joŋ-na,¹²
 *hioŋ-na < *hoŋ-nâ,¹³
 *xoŋ-NA.¹⁴

As one may see, the speculations of Pulleyblank¹⁵ about an initial consonant cluster in *xiōng* 匈, have mostly not been confirmed by subsequent researchers, although Baxter does posit a possible initial consonant cluster. Three of the four features that differentiate *Xiongnu* from *Ounnoi*—the second syllable, the velar spirant [x], the velar nasal [ŋ]—can be found as far back as one can go. Only the glide, whether [j], [u], or [i], might be a feature of later Chinese phonetic evolution.

It is sometimes thought that the second syllable in the Chinese transcription, *nú* 奴, must have been added simply in its meaning as “slave” and hence may be removed from consideration in analyzing the phonetic elements. But this is purely arbitrary; no case of *xiōng* 匈 alone is ever attested for this ethnonym in Chinese. Nor is *nú* a semantically significant classifier attached to a purely phonetic core transcription; *xiōng* 匈 and *nú* 奴 form a whole phrase, “savage slaves,” and are both simultaneously phonetic and semantic in content.

We thus have a serious problem: while the Sogdians used the word *xwn* and the Indians the word *Hūna* to designate quite specifically the people called *Xiōngnú* in Chinese, the names appear to be quite different. So far there

¹¹ W. South Coblin, *A Compendium of Phonetics in Northwest Chinese*, Journal of Chinese Linguistics Monograph Series, no. 7 (Berkeley, CA: Journal of Chinese Linguistics, 1994), §§1199, 0088.

¹² William H. Baxter, *A Handbook of Old Chinese Phonology* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1992), 798, 779.

¹³ Axel Schuessler, *ABC Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 541, 404.

¹⁴ Paul R. Goldin, “Steppe Nomads as a Philosophical Problem in Classical China,” in *Mapping Mongolia: Situating Mongolia in the World from Geologic Times to the Present*, ed. Paula Sabloff (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 220–46, here 226; cf. Laurent Sagart, *The Roots of Old Chinese* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1999). The initial *h- in the Coblin and Schuessler reconstructions is a conventional representation, common in Chinese philology, of the velar spirant [x]. Chinese has, in fact, never had a genuine glottal spirant, although the velar spirant phoneme is often realized in a similar way.

¹⁵ Edwin G. Pulleyblank, “The Consonantal System of Old Chinese,” *Asia Major*, n.s., 9 (1962): 58–144, 206–65.

have been three broad schools addressing this problem (my analysis follows that of de la Vaissière in “Huns et Xiongnu”).¹⁶ The first, represented by Otto Maenchen-Helfen insists that the philological difficulties cannot be overcome and the whole issue has been a tissue of coincidences and misunderstandings. As I have stated, I believe the data marshaled by de la Vaissière makes this position untenable. Sogdian *Xwn* and Sanskrit *Hūṇa* were used to designate the historical *Xiongnu*—that is a plain fact which must be explained, not just ignored. A second position is what de la Vaissière calls the “pan-Iranian” position, espoused by Harold Bailey, S. Parlato, and recently by Jamsheed Choksy.¹⁷ In this position, all or most of the terms—Sogdian *xwn-γwn*, Khorazmian *Hūn*, Khotanese Saka *Huna*, Syriac *Hun-*, Armenian *Hon*, Pahlavi *Xyōn*, and Sanskrit *Hūṇa*—are to be derived from the same Iranian word, attested in Avestan as *Āyaona*, which has the generic sense of “hostiles, opponents.” Greek *Ounnoi*, *Khounoi*, *Khiōnes*, etc. are all derivatives of these Iranian forms, in various stages of phonetic evolution. Thirdly, de la Vaissière’s own explanation may be called the “steppe transmission” position. In this position, *Xiongnu* and *Ounnoi* are connected as autonyms of steppe peoples of uncertain language. The philological difficulties involved in their connection are outgrowths of our ignorance of the particular languages involved. Such a position has the benefit of not offering any hypotheses which can be disproven, but it can hardly be considered satisfactory. Nor does it offer any way to distinguish real cognates from fake.

How these terms could be versions of one another is a major philological puzzle involving the very first case in which a people originating in Mongolia impinged on the history of Europe. I believe that I can shed significant new light, particularly by highlighting the key role of India in the process of sound change. Its resolution will be a fitting tribute to Donald Ostrowski, whose research has so illuminated a later phase in this history of East-West interaction in Central Eurasia.

The Greek Terms and Their Eastern Correspondences

The place to begin this discussion is with the range of Greek forms that have been linked to the Huns, considering for each their possible origins in Central Asian or Eurasian steppe languages

Ounnoi

The general Greek term for the Huns, and the only one used for those in the Pontic and Hungarian steppes and in Roman service, is *Ounnoi* or *Ounoi*. This

¹⁶ De la Vaissière, “Huns et Xiongnu,” 3–10.

¹⁷ Jamsheed Choksy, “Āyaona- or Hun Reconsidered,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hung.* 65, no. 1 (2012): 93–98.

is a masculine plural, implying the unattested singular *Ounnos~Ounos*, with the *-os* being the nominative ending and presumably not part of the root. Greek had already lost the glottal spirant by the second century A.D.,¹⁸ so it is not surprising that the original form lacked the “rough breathing” that in Ancient Greek had marked the glottal spirant [h]. The geminate consonant *-nn-* is presumably not significant, since it varies with a non-geminate spelling in *-n-* and in any case Greek geminate consonants had become simple consonants long before this time.¹⁹ This *Ounnoi*, without the initial *h-*, is probably the origin of the Latin *Hunni* of Ammianus Marcellinus, Marcellinus Comes, and Jordanes. Given the Greek form, it is likely that the Latin *h-* in *Hunni* was in fact not pronounced, any more than Ammianus Marcellinus’s *h-* in *Halani* “Alans” or Jordanes’s *h-* in *Hunuguri* “On-Oghur” (Greek *Onongouroi*) was intended to be pronounced. Later Latin variants in *ch-* should be the result of confusion with either the name *War-Khunni* that designated the Avars and/or Ptolemy’s *Khounoi*.

In John Malalas’s *Chronography*, however, there is one attested example of a different form: *Ounna~Ouna* (a feminine singular). Given the expectation that ethnonyms would be masculine plurals, the less expected feminine form is more likely to be the original, which was then conformed to the expected masculine plural. This also then demonstrates that the second syllable in Greek is not simply a case ending, but was originally part of the word, and was only later reinterpreted as a case ending.

What non-Greek form can be linked with *Ounna~Ouna*? Only forms with an initial glottal spirant [h] could possibly be considered, since any form with a velar spirant [x] would become *kh-* in Greek. Similarly, if the original form is a disyllabic *Oun(n)a*, then any form with only one syllable may be excluded. Finally, any form with the glide *-y-* may be excluded, since that too would be represented in Greek (see *Khyōn* below). These considerations eliminate Ptolemy’s earlier *Khounoi*, Armenian *Hon-*, Syriac *Hun-*, Khorazmian *Hūn*, Sogdian *xwn~γwn*,²⁰ Avestan *Āyaona*, and Pahlavi *Xyōn* from consideration. The only extant Asian variant which could conceivably be the origin of the Greek *Oun(n)a* is Sanskrit *Hūṇa* and Khotanese Saka *Huna-*. But Saka *Huna-* is attested only in the ninth century and in an obviously “generic” context.²¹ By

¹⁸ E. B. Petrounias, “Development in Pronunciation during the Hellenistic Period,” in *A History of Ancient Greek from the Beginning to Late Antiquity*, ed. A.-F. Christides (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 599–609, here 607.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 607–08.

²⁰ B. Gharib, *Sogdian Dictionary: Sogdian-Persian-English* (Tehran: Farhangian Publications, 1995), §4377, 10732.

²¹ W. B. Henning, “The Date of the Sogdian Ancient Letters,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 12, no. 3–4 (1948): 601–15, here 615; Otto Maenchen-Helfen, “Pseudo-Huns,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 1 (1955): 101–06, here 101; Harold W. Bailey, *Culture of the Sakas in Ancient Iranian Khotan* (1981; repr., Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1982), 91.

contrast, Sanskrit *Hūṇa* is attested from at least the third century A.D., and probably from the first century B.C., and in an ethnically specific context (see below). Thus the Sanskrit version would seem to be the only possible origin of Greek *Oun(n)a*.

But historically, deriving a Greek name for a people of the Pontic steppe directly from a Sanskrit name seems quite problematic. Could there be a basis for *Ounna* in an Iranian language, one that would be more historically and geographically plausible? Since Henning's seminal article (1948)²² it has been proposed that the *xwn* found in the Ancient Sogdian Letter II of c. 312 is the origin of Greek *Ounna*, etc. Since then, the term has been found as *γwn* and *xwn* in the eighth-century documents of Mug.²³ As mentioned, a Greek origin in Sogdian would presuppose that *γwn~xwn* must represent a form in initial *h-*. Sogdian itself has only a velar spirant [x], although a glottal spirant [h] has been recently proposed as an allophone.²⁴ But in foreign words *x* (Semitic *hēth*) may represent "any kind of foreign *h*-sound," and hence *Xwn* could represent *Xun*, *Xūn*, *Hun*, or *Hūn*.²⁵ The variant in *γ* is particularly significant here, since *γ* (Semitic *gimel*) is the usual representation of Sanskrit *h* in Sogdian (Table 1 at the end of this article). That this word is a glottal spirant is confirmed by the form in Arabic-script Khorazmian, where it is *hūn*, with a glottal spirant [h] (the Arabic script has both a glottal and a velar spirant). Syriac *Hunāyē* and Armenian *Honk'* would suggest the same reading in [h].²⁶

Even so, however, Sogdian-Khorazmian *Hun-Hūn* cannot be the origin of the Greek *Ounna*, because it does not have the second syllable. Fortunately, however, Chinese records preserve a word used in Sogdiana with a second syllable ending in the vowel *-a*. In a well-known passage from the *Wèi shū* 魏書, deriving from the record of a tribute mission sent from Sogdiana to North China in 457, a new dynasty in Sogdiana is described as of Xiōngnú origin:

The country of Sogd 粟特 is situated to the west of the Congling [Pamir mountains].... It is also called Wēnnà Shā 溫那沙....²⁷

²² Henning, "The Date of the Sogdian Ancient Letters."

²³ Gharib, *Sogdian Dictionary*, §4377, 10732; de la Vaissière, "Huns et Xiongnu," 10.

²⁴ Gharib, *Sogdian Dictionary*, xxxii–xxxiii.

²⁵ Henning, "The Date of the Sogdian Ancient Letters," 615.

²⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁷ I have omitted the phrases "It is what was Yancai in ancient times" and "It lies on a great salt sea and to the northwest of Kangju. It is 16,000 *li* distant from Dai." As Kazuo Enoki already realized, all of these comments are taken from the *Hanshu* account of Yancai, and are relevant to Sogd only on the condition that Sogd is in fact "Yancai"; Enoki, "Sogdiana and the Hsiung-nu," *Central Asiatic Journal* 1 (1955): 43–62, here 47–50. This identification is, however, certainly incorrect. See also A. F. P. Hulswé, *China and Central Asia: The Early Stage. 125 B.C.–A.D. 23* (Leiden: Brill, 1979),

Formerly, the Xiöngnú killed its king and took over the country. King Hūní 忽倪 was the third ruler of the line.

粟特國，在葱嶺之西。一名溫那沙。先是，匈奴殺其王而有其國，至王忽倪已三世矣。²⁸

This passage has a long history in Western writings about the Xiöngnú and Huns. Enoki and de la Vaissière have clarified its historical situation, purging it of previous speculations about Alans and Crimea and so forth. Even so, the passage still clearly links the history of the Xiöngnú with the *Ounna~Ounnoi*. As Kazuo Enoki recognized, Wēnnà 溫那, to be read in Middle Chinese as 'Onna, can be identified with Greek *Ounnoi*, and even more exactly with John Malalas's original *Ounna*.²⁹ With *shā* 沙 being the well-known Iranian royal title *shāh*, *Wēnnàshā* 溫那沙 is "Shāh/King of the 'Onna." Later, *Wēn* 溫 (approximate Middle Chinese: 'On), in an abbreviated form minus *nà* 那, became the family name of the kings of Samarqand.³⁰

But a closer look at the Chinese transcription and its historical context shows, I believe, that this form found in Sogdiana must be derived from a Baktrian Greek reading of Sanskrit *Hūna*.

The phoneme in Middle Chinese marked in the transcription above by ' represents the glottal stop [ʔ], the presence or absence of which remained a phonemic distinction in Chinese up through the Ming dynasty, depending on the dialect.³¹ Within the Chinese transcription of Sanskrit (which should also

129–30; Edouard Chavannes, trans., "Les pays d'Occident d'après le *Wei Lio*," *T'oung Pao*, ser. 2, vol. 6 (1905): 519–71, here 558–59; Chavannes, "Les pays d'Occident d'après le *Heou Han chou*," *T'oung Pao*, ser. 2, vol. 8 (1907): 149–234, here 195–96.

²⁸ Wei Shou, *Wei shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 102/2285; cf. Li Yanshou, *Beishi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 97/3221; cf. Du You, *Tongdian* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 193/5258.

²⁹ Enoki, "Sogdiana and the Hsiung-nu," 59, 62 n. 60. For the Tang Middle Chinese pronunciation, see Takata, *Tonkō shiryō ni yoru Chūgokugo shi no kenkyū*, §§0781, 0005, 0054: ^ʔwən, ^ʔdâs, ^ʔsa¹. Actual Tibetan spellings are 'on-ḥda-sha. The denasalization of the *na* is a special dialect feature of Northwest Chinese probably not found in the dialect being used here. Coblin reconstructs the Old Northwest Mandarin reading of c. 400 as *^ʔon, *^ʔna, *^ʔsa (Compendium of Phonetics in Northwest Chinese, §§0781, 0005, 0054).

³⁰ Although the form in *o-*, rather than *u-* may seem to be a block to associating this with Greek *Ou-* and Sanskrit *-u-*, Chinese at this time did not have a final in *-un*, only *-on*, and syllables with this final transcribed Tibetan *-on* and Sanskrit *-un* indifferently; W. South Coblin, *Studies in Old Northwest Chinese*, Journal of Chinese Linguistics Monograph Series, no. 4 (Berkeley: Project on Linguistic Analysis, University of California, 1991): 94–95. Thus its use as transcription is not significant for our purposes.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 23; Coblin, *A Handbook of Phagspa Chinese*, 45.

apply to South Central Asian³² languages generally), the glottal stop corresponds to a “plain vocalic onset,” while Sanskrit *h-* (which may be voiced as [f], at least in some contexts) is always represented by Chinese syllables with reconstructed initials as [x] or [ɣ].³³ *Wēnnàshā* 溫那沙 and *Wēn* 溫 thus must represent a variant that has already lost any initial spirant and has a plain vocalic onset. In short, something more or less identical to Greek *Ounna* can be found as far east as Sogdiana in the fifth century, if not before.

The word *shāh*, in this variant *ʿOnnashāh*,³⁴ offers an important clue to its historical origin, linking it to Bactria after the Sassanids. Sogdian has a variety of forms for “king” — *ʿγšʿwnʿk*,³⁵ *ʿγšʿywnʿk*,³⁶ *xšwny*,³⁷ and *xšywny*,³⁸ to be read as *khshēwanē* or variations thereof—which all represent a much more conservative form of this common Iranian word than the Pahlavi *shāh*. The term *shāh* is attested in Sogdian only in a borrowed compound form, “shah of shahs”: *šnšʿy* (read as *shanshāy*), cf. Saka *shahenishāhi*.³⁹ But in Bactria, after the fall of the Kushans, the term *shāh* was used under Sassanid influence widely in coins and documents as a compound in terms such as *Košanoša(h)o* “Kushānshāh” and *Šahanošao* “Shāhanshāh.”⁴⁰ The term *ʿOnnashāh* closely parallels this form in having an ethnonym followed by the word *shāh*, in its Pahlavi form; it thus indicates influence from the post-Kushan rulers of Bactria.

This derivation of the *ʿOnnashāh* from Bactrian fits perfectly with the history of Sogdiana at this time. The *ʿOnnashāh* dynasty came to Sogdiana not by a fresh invasion from the northern steppes, but by a conquest of Sogdiana from the south. The conquest is associated with the Bactrian king Kidāra

³² Inspired by the use of “East Central Asia” to refer to Xinjiang in Mallory and Mair’s *The Tarim Mummies*, I use the term “South Central Asia” to refer to roughly modern day Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and the neighboring areas of northeast Iran and northwest Pakistan. See J. P. Mallory and Victor H. Mair, *The Tarim Mummies: Ancient China and the Mystery of the Earliest Peoples from the West* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002).

³³ Coblin, *Studies in Old Northwest Chinese*, 23.

³⁴ I will write this variant hereafter with the geminate consonant, given that it is found as such in both Greek and Chinese reflex. But Greek had already lost geminate consonants and the gemination of consonants is a common feature of Chinese transcriptions and does not necessarily represent a geminate *-n-* in the original.

³⁵ Gharib, *Sogdian Dictionary*, §719.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, §727.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, §10666.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, §10676.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, §9157.

⁴⁰ Nicholas Sims-Williams, “Ancient Afghanistan and Its Invaders: Linguistic Evidence from the Bactrian Documents and Inscriptions,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 116 (2002): 225–42, here 232.

whose people appear in Sanskrit sources as *Hūṇa* and in Greek as *Ounnoi*.⁴¹ According to de la Vaissière's reconstruction, Kidāra began to expand from his Baktrian base area both north into Sogdiana and south into India around 420.⁴² The southern origin of the 'Onnashāh title and the 'On family is confirmed by the Chinese statement in the later *Súi shū* 隋書 that Samarqand's Wēn/On dynasty was of Yuèzhī 月氏 origin.⁴³ By this time, in Chinese, Yuèzhī 月氏 designated Baktriana, where the Yuèzhī had settled, and all its resident people.

For the same reasons as Greek *Ounna*, the 'Onna in this title 'Onnashāh can only be derived from Sanskrit *Hūṇa*, out of all known ethnonyms in the region. The only differences are the alteration of the retroflex *ṇ* to a coronal *n* and the elimination of the initial glottal spirant. (The gemination of the *-n-* is probably an artefact of the Greek and Chinese transcriptions and has no significance.) Both of these changes would normally be expected in any Greek transcription of a Sanskrit word. To be sure, the Baktrian language did have a glottal spirant (represented in the Greek script as the upsilon *υ*) and did not necessarily eliminate that sound in its transcriptions of Sanskrit.⁴⁴ But we do find examples of eliminated [h], as seen for example, in the name *Heracles* (*Erakilo*) and the *Hepthalites* (*Eoadhalo*).⁴⁵ Given the profound influence of Greek in Baktria, and the attested Greek inscriptions, some written by ethnic Indians,⁴⁶ it is an irresistible conclusion that the transition from Sanskrit *Hūṇa* to Greek *Ounna* happened not in the East Roman Empire, but directly in Baktria. This is also suggested by the attestation of the form *Ounnia* in the Christian geographer Cosmas Indicopleustes, writing around A.D. 550. In this work, he alternates *Ounnoi* and *Ounnia* (each used twice) and links them consistently to Baktria and northern India.⁴⁷ If that is the case, and given the rapid decline in Baktrian Hellenism after the first century B.C.,⁴⁸ the first use of *Ounna* in Greek should long predate the "great invasions."

⁴¹ Richard N. Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1984), 345–46, 349, 355; Moravcsik, *Sprachreste der Türkvölker*, 159, citing Priscus.

⁴² Étienne de la Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders*, trans. James Ward (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 97–117.

⁴³ Wei Zheng et al., *Suishu*, ed. Linghu Defen (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 83/1848; cf. Enoki, "Sogdiana and the Hsiung-nu," 158–59.

⁴⁴ Sims-Williams, "Ancient Afghanistan and Its Invaders," 230–31.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 228, 233.

⁴⁶ Nicholas Sims-Williams, "News from Ancient Afghanistan," *The Silk Road* 4, no. 2 (2006–07): 5–10, here 5.

⁴⁷ E. O. Winstedt, ed., *The Christian Topography of Cosmas Indicopleustes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909), 69, 119, 325, 324 [text], 335, 345, 356 [notes].

⁴⁸ Sims-Williams, "News from Ancient Afghanistan," 5.

But where did Sanskrit *Hūṇa* come from? I believe the clue to this lies in two terms, Greek *Khōnai* and Chinese *Hūní* 忽倪, which have not yet been linked.

Khōnai(oi)

This name, as the “nation of the Khōnai(-ōn),” appears in an East Roman itinerary to the Garden of Eden, dating to the sixth century. Such an itinerary may seem unpromising as a source of geographical data. Indeed Otto Maenchen-Helfen has arbitrarily rejected its value, claiming these Khōnai are to be sought “somewhere around the Red Sea.”⁴⁹ But the itinerary, especially when read alongside Cosmas Indicopleustes,⁵⁰ clearly links this “nation of the Khōnai” to India.⁵¹ Moravcsik associated the name with the Pahlavi term *Xyōn*, and thus with Greco-Roman *Khiōn(itai)* and with the *War-Khōn(itai)*.⁵² In fact it looks quite different from either *Khiōn(itai)* or *War-Khōn(itai)*, themselves quite distinct from each as well in origin and form. From *Khiōn* it differs in the absence of the glide *-i-*, while from both it differs in the presence of a second syllable with a diphthong *-ai*. This diphthong, as well as velar spirant [x], makes it likewise different from Sanskrit *Hūṇa*.

There is, however, a name with which this term may be matched quite closely, and that is found in the passage from the *Wèi shū* I have already cited. In addition to the title *’Onnashāh* 溫那沙 already examined, there also appears the name of the current king, *Hūní* 忽倪. In Tang-era Mandarin *Hūní* is attested as *xwər-ŋgiäi*,⁵³ while Coblin reconstructs the Old Northwest Mandarin as **hot-ŋiei* and Pulleyblank reconstructs the Wei-era Luoyang Mandarin as

⁴⁹ Maenchen-Helfen, “Pseudo-Huns,” 103–04. Maenchen-Helfen claimed that since the “neighbors of the Chonai to the West were the Diaba (Diva in Latin, Davad in Georgian) [who] lived east of India maior (Ethiopia), Axioma (Aksum), and India minor (Southern Arabia), the Chonai must be sought somewhere around the Red Sea” (104). What he hides from his readers is that between this Diaba~Diva and the African and Arabian places mentioned later is stated to be a journey to a port and a sea voyage of seven stages. Nor does he mention Pigulevskaia’s plausible link of this Diaba~Diva to Sanskrit *dvīpa*; N. Pigulevskaia, *Vizantiia na putiakh v Indiiu* (Moscow: Akademiia nauk, 1951), 121–22.

⁵⁰ Cosmas Indicopleustes has *Ounnia*, and the Georgian text of the “Itinerary” corrupted Greek *Khōnai* to *Khounia*. I wonder therefore if Cosmas Indicopleustes did not originally have *Ounnai*, which might have been corrupted to *Ounnia*, as a parallel to the India associated with it.

⁵¹ Z. Avalichvili, “Geographie et legend dans un écrit apocryphe de Sainte Basile,” *Revue de l’Orient chrétien*, 3rd ser., 26 (1927–28): 279–304, here 281, 285, 289–90; Pigulevskaia, *Vizantiia*, 119–22, 409–410.

⁵² Moravcsik, *Sprachreste der Türkvölker*, 236, s.v. Ounnoi.

⁵³ Takata, *Tonkō shiryō ni yoru Chūgokugo shi no kenkyū*, §§0787, 0227.

**xwət-ηei*.⁵⁴ Keeping in mind that *rùshēng* 入聲 (“entering tone”)⁵⁵ characters were used very freely in transcriptions, with their character being usually determined by the initial consonant of the following character,⁵⁶ the actual Middle Chinese pronunciation of this binome should be something like **xunjjai* or **xoηei*, that is, a rather close match for the Greek *Khōnai*. The only major difference was the switch from a velar nasal to a dental nasal. But this is easily understood by the limitations of Greek syllable structure, where a velar nasal can be found only at the end of a syllable and before a *g-*, *k-*, or *kh-* which begins a new syllable (i.e., *-γγ-*, *-γχ*, etc.). From the Chinese transcription, it is evident that the syllable structure was **xo-ηei*, and in this situation, transforming the velar nasal to a dental nasal did no more violence to the word than would have the other possibility, transforming it into **xoηei*.

The semantic implication is that **xoηei* 忽倪 represents not a personal name, but the king’s title, “King of the **Xoηei/Khōnai*.” Such a confusion of royal titles and personal names is common enough and should cause no surprise. But such an identification also leads irresistibly to an identification of King of the *Khōnai*/**Xoηei* with the Shāh of the *’Onna/Hūna*, and both ethnonyms with the *Xiōngnú*.

Now if *Ounna/Hūna* may seem hard to relate to *Xiōngnú*, *Khōnai*/**Xoηei* actually bears a rather close resemblance to **Hoη-nâ* which in one reconstruction, at least, is given as the conjectural common Chinese form of the word.⁵⁷ The two significant differences are the *η* in **Xoηei* for *η-n* in **Hoη-nâ* and the final *-i* in **Xoηei*. The first may actually be an idiosyncrasy of the transcription. As mentioned, Chinese transcriptions of foreign words frequently geminate consonants in transcription. In the original Chinese transcription of *Xiōngnú*, one may plausibly assume that *ηa* was rendered as *na* (modern Mandarin *nu* 奴) both because of its meaning and because the final velar nasal of *xiong* 匈 “covered” that part of the pronunciation. That is, the *η-n* combination could be simply rendering a *η*.⁵⁸

As for the *-ai* vs. *-a*, Paul Pelliot early recognized a paradigm in Mongolian in which personal, place, or ethnonyms appear frequently in three forms: *-Ø*, *-i*, and *-n*, giving as examples *alasha~alashai~alashan*, as well as *altai~altan*

⁵⁴ Coblin, *Compendium of Phonetics in Northwest Chinese*, §§0787, 0227; Pulleyblank, *Lexicon of Reconstructed Pronunciation*, s.v. *hū* 忽 and *ní* 倪.

⁵⁵ This term in Chinese philology refers to characters which were pronounced in Middle Chinese and earlier forms with non-nasal final consonants, *-p*, *-t* (or *-r*), and *-k*.

⁵⁶ Edwin G. Pulleyblank, “The Chinese Name for the Turks,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 85, no. 2 (1965): 121–25.

⁵⁷ Schuessler, *ABC Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese*, 541, 404. Note that Schuessler’s **h* is actually an [x].

⁵⁸ On such use of a syllable final and syllable initial together to render a single foreign sound, again see Pulleyblank, “The Chinese Name for the Turks.”

and *qitai-qitan* as examples of the second two.⁵⁹ To the latter two one may add *alta*, a common form of “gold” today, and *khatā*, the form that *qitai-qitan* took in many Western transcriptions. The same three-way variant is found in adjectives and verb forms as well: thus with the adjective “bad,” we have *maghu*, *maghui*, and *maghun*.⁶⁰ The exact semantic valences of $-\emptyset$, $-i$, and $-n$ are still unclear (definiteness and plurality seem to be involved), but they were certainly productive of variant forms in ethnonyms.

Nor does invoking such a variation necessarily depend on seeing the *Xiōngnú* as Mongolic in language. As Pelliot’s examples show, the variant forms once generated easily cross language boundaries. *Kitan* is found in Mongolian, *Khitay* is found in Russian, and *Khatā* is found in Turkic languages—but all were generated as variant forms of a single stem. Moreover the $-i$ and $-n$ as morphemes, perhaps having a collective or plural meaning, may well cross language family boundaries, just as the Altaic vocational suffix $-chi$ was borrowed into Tajiki and the Romance plural in $-s$ was borrowed into English.

But if *Khōnai* can, via **Xoŋei* 忽倪, be seen as a variant of *Xiōngnú* 匈奴, then *Hūna* too can likely be seen as a variant of *Xiōngnú*. If we assume the Chinese $-ngn-$ of *Xiōngnú* actually represents a single velar nasal, then Sanskrit too, just like Greek, would have a serious problem representing this sound. Velar nasals (whether the η or η) must be followed by a stop, not a vowel. Sanskrit also has no velar spirant $[x]$ and so would have to represent it with an $[h]$. *Khōnai* and *Hūna* can both be seen, therefore, as independent transcriptions, not mediated through each other or through any other attested form, of the term *Xiōngnú* in two reconstructed variant forms: **Xoŋai*–**Xoŋa*.

With regard to the four differences between *Ounnoi* and *Xiōngnú*, the exact point at which they occurred can now be pinpointed:

1. The second syllable was lost twice independently, once in Greek as the final vowel $-a$ was assimilated into the nominative plural $-oi$, and once in the Eastern Iranian languages Sogdian and Khorazmian as a result of a usual process of dropping short final $-a$ from Sanskrit loan words.
2. The velar spirant $[x]$ became a glottal spirant $[h]$ in the Sanskrit transcription, because Sanskrit does not have velar spirants. It was lost in the process of transfer from Sanskrit to Greek, which took place in Bactria.

⁵⁹ Paul Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo*, 3 vols. (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1959–63), 1: 136, 31, 220; Paul Pelliot and Louis Hambis, *Histoire des campagnes de Gengis Khan: Cheng-wou ts'in-tcheng lou* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1951), 23, 129, 252.

⁶⁰ D. Tumurtogoo, *Mongolian Monuments in Uighur Mongolian Script (XIII–XVI Centuries): Introduction, Transcription, and Bibliography* (Taipei: Institute of Linguistics, Academia Sinica, 2006), 464–65.

3. The semi-vowel or glide *-i-* or *-y-* in *Xiōngnú* is an artefact of later Chinese phonetic evolution.
4. The nasal was originally a velar nasal [ŋ] followed immediately by a vowel. This sequence was impossible in Sanskrit and so [ŋ] was replaced by the retroflex dental nasal *ṅ*. The retroflex sound was likewise impossible in Greek and Iranian languages and was replaced by a coronal dental.

For a general summary of my conclusions on this group of terms related to Greek Ounna and Khōnai, see Table 3.

Khion(es~itae)

This term appears by itself only in Latin, in Ammianus Marcellinus' account of the years 356–59. There the Chionitae appear as a people in the east of the Sassanid empire, under their king Grumbates, who first fought against and then allied with the Sassanids. Ammianus Marcellinus explicitly defines these Khionites as a type of Hunni ("Huns"), although he says they were racially different from the other Hunni.⁶¹ As Étienne de la Vaissière has pointed out, the name Grumbates is now attested in Baktrian as Gorambad, adding to the verisimilitude of the account.⁶² The Latin name Chionitae appears to be also related to the term *Kermikhiōnes*, which the historian Theophanes Byzantios (author of a chronicle covering A.D. 566–81) says was the Persian name for the Türks. This may be analyzed as Middle Persian *Karmīr Xyōn* (Red Xyōn).⁶³

Although *Khion(es~itae)* is not particularly common in Greco-Roman sources, it is well-known in the Persian world. There it appears in Pahlavi sources as *Xyōn* and in Syriac as *Xyōn-*. The Pahlavi Middle Persian certainly goes back to Avestan, where the name appears twice in the Mazdean scriptures as local enemies of the prophet Zarathustra. The Avestan form is *Āyaona*, where the *Ā* marks a unique letter with a diacritical, of unclear reading.⁶⁴ As Jamsheed Choksy has noted, this certainly gives *Āyaona* the appearance of being a foreign word, even as the scriptural narrative seems to treat him as the ruler of an Iranian kingdom, whose king, Arejataspa (Pahlavi:

⁶¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, *History*, trans. J. C. Rolfe, 3 vols. (1935; repr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 16: 9.4, 17: 5.1, 18: 6.22, and 19: 1.7; cf. Frye, *History of Ancient Iran*, 311.

⁶² De la Vaissière, "Huns et Xiongnu," 19.

⁶³ Moravcsik, *Sprachreste der Türkvölker*, 158–59, s.v. *Kermikhiōnes*.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 236, s.v. "Ounnoi"; Choksy, "Āyaona- or Hun Reconsidered"; cf. Harold W. Bailey, "Iranian Studies," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 6, no. 4 (1932): 945–55, here 946; and Bailey, "Hyaona-," in *Indo-Celtica: Gedächtnisschrift für Alf Sommerfelt*, ed. H. Pilch and J. Thurow (Munich: Max Hueber, 1972), 18–28. Since the Greek and Latin transcriptions of the Pahlavi *Xyōn* clearly indicate a reading closer to [x] than [h], I follow Choksy in using *ḫ* rather than *h* for the initial consonant.

Arjasp), has an Iranian name.⁶⁵ In any case, the Avestan form is certainly the origin of the Greco-Roman variants: Avestan *Āyaona* > Pahlavi *Xyōn* > Latin *Chionitae*, Greek *Khiōnes*. Moreover, the vehicle of transmission to the Roman empire was via the Sassanid Empire, not the Pontic steppe. In Sassanid usage, the name designated both the ancient enemies of Mazdeism, but also the contemporary “Huns” broadly speaking, of which the Türks were seen as but a variety.

Can *Āyaona* be linked to the *Xiōngnú*? Not according to the present state of knowledge. Until Zarathustra’s time and place is located more specifically than “Bronze Age Central Asia,” any proposed link of *Xiōngnú*/**Xoṇa(i)* to Avestan *Āyaona* must remain purely speculative. Moreover, while Baxter reconstructs the name as **x(r)joṇ-na*, in which the initial [x(r)] could possibly represent the rare initial *Āy-*, Schuessler’s reconstruction of the *Xiōngnú* name goes back to **hioṇ-na* and eventually to **hoṇ-nâ* which I link to *Hūnī*/**Xoṇa(i)* 忽倪.⁶⁶ This much simpler initial is rather harder to link to *Āyaona* than Baxter’s complex reconstruction. Finally, *Xiōngnú*/**Xoṇa(i)* was not an ethnonym, but a dynastic name, almost or completely unknown before the time of the first ruler Mòdùn 冒頓 around 200 B.C.⁶⁷ This makes a historical link to *Āyaona*, a term attested at least several centuries earlier and far to the west, problematic, to say the least.

Not so difficult, but also not without its problems is any relation of Pahlavi *Xyōn* to the parallel Sogdian *xwn-γwn* and Syriac *Hunāyē*. As regards the Sogdian, the Khorazmian form *Hūn* would seem to indicate that Henning was correct in his argument that the initial consonant in *xwn-γwn* is to be read as a glottal spirant [h], not a velar spirant [x]. Likewise although Choksy points out that the *-yao-* of Avestan “experienced a variety of resolutions ranging from *yō* (as discussed below for *xyōn*) to *ō* (written as *w* and *v*),”⁶⁸ it seems very doubtful, even on the evidence he presents, whether an evolution of *-yao-* to *-ō-* could have occurred by the 3rd century A.D. in the conservative Eastern Iranian dialects, if it had not occurred in the more progressive Pahlavi dialects even by the 9th century. Meanwhile in Syriac, that *Hunāyē* (*hwny*) does not derive from *Xyōn* is indicated by the fact that Syriac does have a di-

⁶⁵ Choksy, “*Āyaona*- or Hun Reconsidered.” For these references in context, see the translations from the Mazdean scriptures in Mary Boyce, trans. and ed., *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 77 (*Āyaona*), 76, 77, 78, 79 (*Xyōn*), 96.

⁶⁶ Baxter, *Handbook of Old Chinese Phonology*, 798, 779; Schuessler, *ABC Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese*, 541, 404.

⁶⁷ Edwin G. Pulleyblank, “Ji Hu 稽胡: Indigenous Inhabitants of Shaanbei and Western Shanxi,” in *Opuscula Altaica: Essays Presented in Honor of Henry Schwarz*, ed. Edward H. Kaplan and Donald H. Whisenhunt (Bellingham: Western Washington University, 1994), 499–531; Goldin, “Steppe Nomads.”

⁶⁸ Choksy, “*Āyaona*- or Hun Reconsidered,” 98.

rect derivation from *Xyōn* which is quite different: *Xyonāyē* (*kywny*).⁶⁹ The presence of *k* instead of *h*, and *yw* instead of *w* in this second written form makes their absence in the first all the more significant. Joshua the Stylite indeed uses both forms, with *Kiyūnāyē* as a kind of specialized equivalent of *Hūnāyē*: “In our own time the Persian king Peroz received gold on many [occasions] from the Romans for his wars against the Kiyūnāyē, i.e., the Hūnāyē.”⁷⁰ Clearly this passage demonstrates that *Kiyūnāyē* and *Hūnāyē* are seen as two different words for the same people. The term is also found occasionally in other historical works, such as the *Martyrdom of Mar Maʿīn* (dated to c. 363), and the list of maphrians (roughly metropolitans) in Bar Hebraeus, demonstrating that the term here is no corruption.⁷¹ Since *Kiyūnāyē* is obviously derived from Pahlavi *Xyōn*, *Hūnāyē* is then just as obviously not.

Moreover, even if Sogdian *xwn~γwn* could be derived from *Āyaona* that does not mean it was. The Sanskrit *Hūṇa*, which as I have argued had already spawned Greco-Baktrian *ʾOnna/Ounna* in Baktria, and would later spawn Khotanese Saka *Huna*, could certainly have spawned Sogdian *xwn~γwn*, to be read as *Hun*. If there is a link between Sogdian *xwn~γwn*, then certainly Sanskrit *Hūṇa* must be the origin of Sogdian *Hun*, not the other way around. First, while Sanskrit has both retroflex and ordinary coronal *n*, Sogdian has only the coronal *n*. If this *Hun(n)a* form was borrowed into Sanskrit from Sogdian, it would be represented with an ordinary coronal *n* and not with a retroflex, but a retroflex *ṇ* in Sanskrit can only be represented by a coronal *n* in Sogdian (see Table 2). Secondly, Sogdian frequently omits final *-a* in borrowed Sanskrit words, but there is no reason for Sanskrit to add a paragodic *-a* to Sogdian or other Iranian words. In Tokharian languages, it is a general rule that Sanskrit final *-a* becomes *-e/ä* with animate nouns and *-Ø* (zero) in inanimate nouns.⁷² In Sogdian, however, even animate nouns ending in *-a* frequently go to *-Ø* (see Table 2).⁷³ We see another example of this in the dynastic name *Wēnnā* 溫那 < *ʾOnna* which from the mid-fifth to the late sixth century was abbreviated to *Wēn* 溫 < *ʾOn*. Finally, if *xwn~γwn* is to be read like

⁶⁹ Moravcsik, *Sprachreste der Türkvölker*, 236, s.v. “*Ounnoi*,” citing Janos Harmatta.

⁷⁰ Frank R. Trombley and John W. Watt, trans., *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 9–10.

⁷¹ Jean-Maurice Fiey, “Maʿīn, général de Sapor II, confesseur et Évêque,” *Le Muséon* 84 (1971): 437–53, here 441; Jean-Baptiste Abbeloos and Thomas Joseph Lamy, ed. and trans., *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*, 3 (Louvain: E. Peeters and Maisonneuve, 1877), 159–60. See Dickens, “References to Chionites in Syriac Literature.” I would like to thank Mark Dickens for sharing with me his expertise on Syriac philology.

⁷² Masahiro Shōgaito, “On Uighur Elements in Buddhist Mongolian Texts,” *Memoirs of the Toyo Bunko* 49 (1991): 27–49, here 29.

⁷³ The same is true in Baktrian; see Sims-Williams, “Ancient Afghanistan and Its Invaders,” 230–31.

Khorazmian *Hūn*, then it has a glottal spirant, a sound not native to the language,⁷⁴ but found in Sanskrit. As noted the Sogdian γ is used especially for the *h* borrowed from Sanskrit (see Tables 1 and 2). Thus Sanskrit *Hūṇa* could generate Sogdian *Hun* but not vice versa.

For these reasons, I think it most likely that de la Vaissière⁷⁵ is correct and Pahlavi *Xyōn*, when used to designate various nomads to the east, is a purely learned Sassanid and Mazdean term, derived not from any living tradition, but solely from an identification of contemporary nomads with the *Āyaona* of the Zoroastrian scriptures. It is thus the equivalent of the Greek designation of the Ounna as Massagetai or Sauromatai, one more of the many “archaistic names” of the Huns.⁷⁶ Sogdian *χων-γων*, Khorazmian *Hūn*, and Khotanese Saka *Huna-* are all most likely to be derived from Sanskrit *Hūṇa*, not from Avestan *Āyaona*.

For a general summary of my conclusions so far, see Tables 3 and 4.

Khounoi~Khōn(itai)

This brings us to the last Greek forms with a velar spirant. Under a form with a velar spirant [x] comes the earliest name to be identified, by some at least, with the “Huns”: *Khounoi* in Ptolemy, placed in the western Pontic steppe between the Iranian Rhoxolani and the Dacian or Germanic Bastarnae.⁷⁷ A form in *Kh-* next appears in the Chronicle of Menander Protector, covering years A.D. 558–82, and in the continuation by Theophylactus Simocatta, covering years 582–602. In these sixth-century instances, the name appears in a compound with *Ouar* (= *War*), as *Ouarkhōnitai* in Menander, and as *Ouar* and *Khounni* [sic] together in Theophylactus Simocatta and Nicephorus Callistus Xanthopulos (c. 1256–1317) who cites him. This twin people is part of the Turkic Oghurs and is identified with the Avars (*Abaroi*) in the Pontic and Caspian steppes.⁷⁸

The name thus appears to be of a Turkic people. No explicit identification is made with the “Huns” by any ancient author, although the variant in Theophylactus Simocatta, with *-ou-* for *ō*, the geminate *n*, and a plural in *-i*, seems influenced by a Greek back-translation of Latin *Hunni*. This name could be dismissed except that it is the only one of the names found in Greek sources

⁷⁴ Henning, “The Date of the Sogdian Ancient Letters,” 605; Gharib, *Sogdian Dictionary*, xxxii–xxxiii.

⁷⁵ See de la Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders*, 98.

⁷⁶ Maenchen-Helfen, “Archaistic Names of the Hiung-nu.”

⁷⁷ Moravcsik, *Sprachreste der Türkvölker*, 236, s.v. “Ounnoi”; Claudius Ptolemy, *The Geography* (1931; repr., New York: Dover, 1991), 80.

⁷⁸ Moravcsik, *Sprachreste der Türkvölker*, 223, 348; R. C. Blockley, trans., *The History of Menander the Guardsman* (Liverpool: F. Cairns, 1985), 171–79, frag. 43; Michael Whitby and Mary Whitby, trans., *The History of Theophylact Simocatta* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 188–93.

that can be plausibly associated with Sogdian *Xwn* (probably *Khōn*). This name would certainly have entered Greek with an initial velar spirant [x] (= *kh-*). Moreover, in the link with the *War-Khōn*, this seems to be the first name that we can convincingly call an autonym of the steppe peoples themselves, uninfluenced by Sanskrit or Avestan.

There is, moreover, a very similar ethnonym attested in Turkic languages: the *Qun* (attested in Chinese as 渾, pronounced *Hūn* in Modern Mandarin).⁷⁹ This name appears as one of many clan names among the original Turkic-speaking peoples, the Oghuz (also known as *Tegreg* or “High Carts”),⁸⁰ during the Türk and Uyghur eras.⁸¹ The Greek velar spirant *kh* [x] regularly corresponds to [q] in Old Turkic.⁸² Indeed the Greek and Chinese histories of the *Qun* and *War-Khōn* appear to refer to the same events. Just as the *War-Khōn* were opponents of the Türk empire, so too in the *Súishū*, the Abar (*Ābá* 阿拔) and *Qun* 渾 appear alongside the *Tegreg* 鐵勒, *Izgil* 思結, and others in a list of peoples rebelling against the qaghan Tardu of the new Türk empire.⁸³ Later, the *Qūn* also appear in al-Bīrūnī’s *Tafhīm* (c. 1029), and the geography of al-Marwazī (fl. 1056–1120) as one of the “eastern Turks.”⁸⁴

There is every reason to accept the identity of the *War-Khōn*(itai) with the *Qun* of Turkic history. It is thus the only Greek ethnonym I have reviewed so far which actually has a clear link to the Altaic world. *Qun* is often related to *Quman*, as two derivations from a single stem, Turkic *quba* “pale yellow, grey, dun” or Mongolian *gho’a* “beautiful, elegant; fallow (as an animal

⁷⁹ Cf. Early Mandarin *yun* (Coblin, *Handbook of Phagspa Chinese*, §378); Middle Chinese **yon~xʷən* (cf. Coblin, *Compendium of Phonetics in Northwest Chinese*, §§0782, 0616–17; Takata, *Tonkō shiryō ni yoru Chūgokugo shi no kenkyū*, §§0782, 0616–17).

⁸⁰ Cf. Edwin G. Pulleyblank, “The ‘High Carts’: A Turkish-Speaking People before the Türks,” *Asia Major*, 3rd ser., 3, pt. 1 (1990): 21–26.

⁸¹ Wei Zheng, *Suishu*, 84/1879; Wang Pu, comp., *Tang huiyao* [唐會要] (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1936), 96/1725, cf. Liu Xu [劉昫] et. al., *Jiu Tangshu* [舊唐書] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 199B/5343; Liu Xu, *Jiu Tangshu*, 3/59; Wang Pu, *Tang huiyao*, 73/1314, cf. Liu Xu, *Jiu Tangshu*, 195/5196, 199B/5348; and Wang Pu, *Tang huiyao*, 98/1744.

⁸² Moravcsik, *Sprachreste der Türkvölker*, 36, 344, s.v. “Kherkhis.”

⁸³ Wei Zheng, *Suishu*, 51/1335; cf. Li Yanshou, *Beishi*, 22/822. The Abar (*Ābá* 阿拔) or Awars appear elsewhere as a component people in the Oghuz or “High Cart” confederacy. See Wei Zheng, *Suishu*, 54/1368 and 84/1869, cf. Li Yanshou, *Beishi*, 99/3294. In the last citation, the Abar are called a kingdom/empire (*guó* 國).

⁸⁴ V. Minorsky, *Sharaf al-Zāmān Tāhir Marvazi on China, the Turks, and India* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1942), 29–30, 95–100; Omeljan Pritsak, “Two Migratory Movements in Eurasian Steppe in the 9th–11th Centuries,” in *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth Congress of Orientalists* (New Delhi: Ghosh, 1968), 157–63.

color).⁸⁵ This etymology is reflected in such terms as “pallid ones” that later become closely associated with the western half of the Qipchaq confederacy, which dominated the Pontic steppe from the 12th to 13th century. As part of the Quman-Qipchaq confederacy taking refuge in Hungary, Qun became the origin of the well-known *Kun* family name there.⁸⁶ On the other hand, if we accept an identification of the Qun with Ptolemy’s *Khounoi*, then it is most likely not an originally Turkic term, but one derived from Iranian or some other language; its association with *quba-gho’a* “fallow, pallid” would then be a folk etymology. In any case, I can see no justification for associating any of these terms with the Huns or *Xiōngnú*.

For a general summary of my conclusions on these terms, see Table 5.

III. From **Xoŋa(i)* to *Hūṇa*

Given the picture presented so far, the greatest difficulty in understanding the succession of variant names is not in their philological connections but in their historical connections. It has generally been assumed that the movement of the names for *Xiōngnú* and Hun followed the steppe migration routes westward. But instead we find a succession of variant forms that leap from Mongolia to India, and then from India spread north and west to the Roman empire.

To help explain this seemingly anomalous pattern, I would like to return now to Sanskrit *Hūṇa* and the origin of the “Huns.” As I have argued, *Hūṇa* is likely a straightforward transcription of the name *Xiōngnú*, in its original pronunciation as [*xoŋa] (with a variant [*xoŋai]). Confirming this fact is the clear evidence that *Hūṇa* was believed by well-informed Indians to be the same word as *Xiōngnú*. As Étienne de la Vaissière has demonstrated, the Buddhist translator Dharmarakṣa (Ch. Zhu Fahu 竺法護) in 288 and 308 found the word *Hūṇa* mentioned in two different Buddhist sutras, the *Tathāgatācintya-guhyānirdeśa-sūtra* and the *Lalitavistara-sūtra* as one of the far-flung peoples of the world and translated them both into Chinese as *Xiōngnú*. As a man of

⁸⁵ J. Marquart, “Über der Volkstum der Komanen,” in *Osttürkische Dialektstudien*, edited by W. Bang and Marquart, Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Philologisch-historische Klasse, N.F., 13, no. 1. (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1914); Paul Pelliot, “À propos des Coman,” *Journal asiatique* 15 (1920): 125–85. Cf. P. B. Golden, “Cumanica IV: The Tribes of the Cuman-Qipchaqs,” *Archivum Eurasiae medii aevi* 9 (1995–97): 99–122, here 101.

⁸⁶ Imre Baski, “On the Ethnic Names of the Cumans of Hungary,” in *Kinship in the Altaic World*, ed. Elena V. Boikova and Rostislav B. Rybakov (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 43–54, here 48 and 52.

Yuèzhī/Tokharian ancestry working at Dunhuang, he was presumably well-informed about these things.⁸⁷

When was **Xoŋa(i)* transcribed into Sanskrit as *Hūṇa*? This certainly happened well before the fifth-century *Hūṇa* invasions of India. The earliest known use of the term in Sanskrit is in the Buddhist sutras from which those translations were drawn, the *Lalitavistarasūtra* and *Tathāgatācintyaḡuhyā-nirdeśa-sūtra*. Sadly, these two texts, like most Buddhist sutras cannot be dated, except that they must obviously have been written before they were translated, that is, before 288–308. However, Étienne de la Vaissière has argued that the historical context of the other references to peoples such as the Śaka, Parthians, Greeks (Yavana), and Tokharians (Tukhāra), but without Kushans, place this text roughly around the first century B.C., and in any case before the Kushan expansion. Within this context, the *Tathāgatācintyaḡuhyā-nirdeśa-sūtra* refers to the *Hūṇa/Xiōngnú* as a language group, one distinct from these others mentioned.⁸⁸ Thus knowledge of the *Hūṇa/Xiōngnú* must have entered India as part of an early expansion of Indian geographical knowledge and international trade, long before the *Hūṇa* actually impinged on India's borders.

It may seem surprising that the eastern Iranian languages (Sogdian, Khorazmian, and Khotanese Saka) derived their name for these nomads from the south, from Sanskrit, and not directly from them as neighbors. But the same is probably true for their terms for China itself. The Indian and Iranian terms for China are fairly similar: Sogdian *čyn* > *čynstan*, Sanskrit *Cīna*,⁸⁹ and as Pelliot demonstrated, they certainly derive from the Qin 秦 dynasty.⁹⁰ The rather important philological question of whether the sequence of *Qin* 秦, in Middle Chinese *dzin* > *cīna* > *čyn* or *dzin* > *čyn* > *cīna* is more plausible or else whether *dzin* generated *čyn* and *cīna* independently has never been investigated, to my knowledge. But once again, a form with final *-a* is much more likely to be the origin of a form without, than the other way around.

Two avenues of contact between China and the West are documented. The first one is that through the Gansu 甘肅 corridor and the Tarim Basin that was opened by HanWudi's 漢武帝 conquests, from 121 B.C. on. The other began almost two centuries earlier with the Qin dynasty conquest of Sichuan 四川 in 316 B.C. This opened up trade through Yunnan 雲南 through Assam and Bengal into Northern India. That this route, much less famous than the

⁸⁷ De la Vaissière, "Huns et Xiongnu," 11–12; Boucher, "Dharmarakṣa and the Transmission of Buddhism to China," *Asia Major* 19, no. 1–2 (2006): 13–37, esp. 24, 26.

⁸⁸ De la Vaissière, "Huns et Xiongnu," 11–14.

⁸⁹ See Bailey, *Culture of the Sakas*, 81–82; Gharib, *Sogdian Dictionary*, §§3341, 3355; Henning, "The Date of the Sogdian Ancient Letters," 608–09.

⁹⁰ Paul Pelliot, "L'origin du nom de 'Chine,'" *T'oung pao*, 2nd ser., 13, no. 5 (1912): 727–42; Pelliot, "Encore à propos du nom de 'Chine,'" *T'oung pao*, 2nd ser., 14, no. 3 (1913): 427–28.

much bally-hoed “Silk Road,” predated the Central Asian route is demonstrated by the astonishment of the Han envoy and scout Zhang Qian 張騫 who found Sichuanese cloths and bamboos already in the markets of Bactria.⁹¹ It is by no means impossible then, that the Xiōngnú came to the attention of India as early as the second century B.C., and via trade through Sichuan and Yunnan, not Central Asia.

As de la Vaissière argued, the Xiōngnú do not appear to have actually directly impinged upon the eastern Iranian speakers until around A.D. 350. Serindia was mostly Tokharian-speaking, and one might imagine that there would be an independent Tokharian reflex of the Xiōngnú name in those languages, but such names have not survived. But Serindia itself was in no position to be an exporter or transmitter of Chinese or Xiōngnú names and terms to the eastern Iranian people. The image of Kashghar, Khotan, Kucha and others as flourishing cities along the Silk Road must not be projected back anachronistically. In a seminal article, Erich Zürcher pointed out that Serindia was until about 120 A.D. quite poor and underpopulated. Chinese was its only written language. By 260 at the latest, Serindian cities had begun writing in a non-Chinese language—not the native vernacular, but instead Prakrit in the Kharoṣṭhī script, derived from northwest India. Far from being a transmitter of East-West interaction, Serindia, until the third century, was an obstacle to cultural interchange (Zürcher 1990; Boucher 2006: 34-37; Hansen 1998). Even after that time, until the sixth century Serindian cities continued to use Indian languages exclusively, at least for religious purposes (Nattier 1990). It should thus not be surprising that the eastern Iranians did not adopt whatever term the Serindians had been using for the Xiōngnú but instead simply adopted the already well known Indian term. This the Serindians carried with them to the cities of China when they began trading there.

Contact with the *Hūna*/*Xiōngnú*, or at least with those that they and their neighbors all identified with *Hūna*/*Xiōngnú*, became much closer in the mid-fourth century. After a period of nomadic settlement in South Central Asia, around A.D. 350, Bactria emerged again, as it had under the Kushans/*Yuèzhī*, as a base for an expanding empire built by the new settlers. The Sassanids reached back into their history and revived the ancient Avestan term *Āyaona*/*Xyōn*/*Khiōn* to designate the invaders. By 420, these nomads, who continued the Kushan tradition of writing in Greek-script Baktrian, seem to have accepted the Sanskrit version of their ethnonym, i.e., *Hūna*, as their own. Thus Kidāra’s dynasty was called *Ounnoi* by the Greeks, *Hūna* in India, and, as I have demonstrated, *’Onna* by its own branch dynasty in Sogdiana.⁹² But with

⁹¹ A. F. P. Hulsewé, *China and Central Asia: The Early Stage. 125 B.C.–A.D. 23* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 211.

⁹² That the **Xoṇa(i)* accepted their sedentary neighbors’ version of their own ethnonym, *Hūna*, as their own can be compared to how the Mongols in Central Asia

an actual influx of Xiōngnú, the native ethnonym finally made its occasional appearance in direct transcriptions: *Xoŋei/Hūnī 忽倪 into Chinese and Khōnai into Greek.

V. *Hūna*, 'Onna, and the Origin of the "Huns"

But how did it happen that around 375, when the East Roman Empire heard of a new nomadic empire from across the Don attacking the Alans, the term that they took over to designate these new nomads was not an Iranian, Turkic, or other native term, but a Greco-Baktrian version of the Sanskrit word for the Xiōngnú of Mongolia?

The answer must be that this encounter was the first chapter in the well-documented history of symbiosis between Central Asian merchants and sedentary empires. Although Ammianus Marcellinus presents his Huns as utterly alien, with no conceivable policy or desire other than slaughter, the fact that he and the other Greco-Roman historians used for them a term which had passed through Bactria and Sogdiana shows that South Central Asians must have mediated the knowledge that the Roman frontier generals and armies had about this people. Either the people of this new polity themselves actually called themselves *Huna/Ounna*, in which case their state or confederation must be seen as a result of Sogdian/Baktrian leadership and organization, or else this term was simply what they called themselves when speaking with Romans, in which case South Central Asians must have been their interpreters and diplomats. Either way, the appearance of the name *Huna~Ounna~Ounnoi* beyond the Don River can only mean that oasis Iranian influence had penetrated through the steppes of Kazakhstan and was shaping a political unit on the Don River, at least in part, to fulfill its purposes.

But this Central Asian mercantile influence must have been working on an ethnic reality that was already being shaped by movements from the east. In the case of South Central Asia, the fact that the new fifth-century monarchs in Samarqand titled themselves not just the 'Onnashāh, but also the King of the *Xoŋai (transcribed as *Xoŋei/Hūnī 忽倪 or Khōnai) bears witness to a fresh influx of people named *Xoŋai/Xiōngnú into South Central Asia. In the Pontic steppe the evidence is less direct, but the fact that even the earliest of these Khiōnites and the Kidarites were identified by their Greek and Roman historians as species within the genus of *Hunni/Ounnoi* speaks to some linkage, however distant. And if nomads calling themselves *Xoŋa(i) were the titular powers in this new polity, it would explain why at least the Greek writers, unlike the Syriac and Armenian ones, borrowed the name in a form that preserved the final -a.

eventually came to call themselves by the Persian version of their name, i.e., Moghuls or Mughals.

The **Xoṅai*/*Onna*/*Ounna* assault west over the Don was likely intended to serve the aims of mercantile clients, by establishing an outlet to the sea, such as at Sudak in Crimea which was later known as a Sogdian colony.⁹³ Jordanes refers to “Cherson [i.e., Crimea], where the avaricious traders bring in the goods of Asia” as being under the protection of the Akatziri Huns.⁹⁴ This is quite late, around A.D. 551, but at least testifies that this link between Asian commercial centers and Crimea predated the rise of the Türk empire. But if Sudaq in Crimea was one anchor of a “Silk Road,” the other anchor was not in China, but in India. In the year 313, Sogdian merchants were writing about China that “all the details of how China fared, it would be a story of debts and woe; you have no wealth from it”⁹⁵—nor by 375 had Chinese affairs improved much. By contrast India was under the powerful and stable Gupta empire. Although Indian merchants and their trade in Central Asia and Russia have too long been neglected by historians,⁹⁶ India was probably the ultimate destination in view for the money used to pay for the “goods of Asia.”

Conclusions

My conclusions may be summarized fairly briefly in the form of certain identifications and historical propositions:

1. Sanskrit *Hūṇa* and Greek *Khōnai* are transcriptions of the word *Xiōngnú* 匈奴, transcribed in Old Chinese as **Xoṅa* (variant: **Xoṅai*). Sanskrit writers were using this term well before any migration of the *Xiōngnú* from Mongolia. They may have learned about the *Xiōngnú* not via the “Silk Road” but via the Sichuan-Yunnan route.
2. Sanskrit *Hūṇa* was read by Greeks in Bactria as *Ounna* (Middle Chinese *'Onna*), a term that was probably used for the far off *Xiōngnú* nomads by the first century B.C. Only in the fourth century A.D. did these *Ounna*/*Onna* become a matter of immediate political importance.
3. Sogdian *xwn-γwn* is to be read as *Hun*. It is a close relative of Khorazmian *Hūn* and Saka *Huna*. All derive from an original Sanskrit *Hūṇa*.

⁹³ De la Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders*, 242–49.

⁹⁴ Charles C. Mierow, trans., *The Gothic History of Jordanes* (1915; repr., Merchantville, NJ: Evolution Publishing, 2006), 59, §36–37).

⁹⁵ Henning, “The Date of the Sogdian Ancient Letters,” 607, citing Ancient Letter II, 30–31.

⁹⁶ See, however, Scott Cameron Levi, *The Indian Diaspora in Central Asia and Its Trade, 1550–1900* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

4. Sometime around A.D. 350, a polity in today's Kazakhstan/Caspian steppe formed, in which Central Asian (Sogdian? Baktrian?) merchants played a major part as merchant partners. People from the old **Xoŋa(i)* empire also certainly played a leading role in this new polity.
5. Starting around 350 in South Central Asia, and around 375 in the Pontic Steppe, this new *Hūŋa*/*'Onna*/*Hun* force launched various attacks on the Sassanid empire and the Alans of the Pontic Steppe.
6. Greeks called these new invaders *Ounna* following Baktrian Greek usage, soon nativized to *Ounnoi* (Latin *Hunni*). The Sassanids used an archaic scriptural term to call them *Khyōn* from the name of the enemies of Zoroaster in the Avesta. But the Syriac and Armenian writers used their reflexes (Syriac *Hunāyē*, Armenian *Honk'*) of the most common Sogdian form *Hun* (written *xwn~γwn*) to refer to them.
7. After a *'Onna*/*Hūŋa*/*Khōnai*/**Xoŋai* king conquered Sogdiana, the rulers of Samarqand called themselves *'Onnashāh*, or King of the **Xoŋai*/*Khōnai*, a title modeled on that of their Baktrian liege lord, "Kushānshāh."

Table 1

Sanskrit	Sogdian	Reference
Arhat	ry'nt	Kara 2000, s.v. arqad
Vihāra	βry'r	Kara 2000, s.v. buqar
Mahā-	my'	Kara 2000: s.v. maqarač

Table 2

Sanskrit	Sogdian	Tokharian	Reference
Ānanda	"n'nt	ānant (A)	Shōgaito 1991: 31
Asura	"swr	asūre	Kara 2000, s.v. asuri
pretyekabuddha	pr'tykpwt	pratikapañakte	Kara 2000, s.v. biratikabud
Preta	pr'yt	prete	Kara 2000, s.v. birid
Bodhisattva	pwtystβ	bodhisātve	Kara 2000, s.v. bodistv
Caṇḍāla	čnt'r	caṇḍāle	Kara 2000, s.v. čandalčid
Gandharva	knt'rβ	gandharve	Kara 2000, s.v. gandari
Kiṇnara	kynntr	kinnare	Kara 2000, s.v. kinari
Mahārāja	my'r'č	n.a.	Kara 2000, s.v. maqarač-nu'ud
śramaṇa	šrm'n	šamāne	Kara 2000, s.v. širamani
Śrāvaka	šr'βk	n.a.	Kara 2000, s.v. širavag
Vidyādhara	βyty'δr	vidyādhare	Kara 2000, s.v. vidyadari

Table 3

Ancient Terms			Medieval Terms			Modern Terms
*Xoŋa(i)	> OC *hoŋ-nâ 匈奴					> MM Xiōngnú 匈奴
	>		MC *Xoŋei 忽倪			> MM Hūní 忽倪
	>		Gk. Khōnai			
	> Skt. Hūna	> Gk. Oun(n)a	> Gk. Oun(n)oi	> L. Hunni		
			> MC 'Onna 溫那			> MM Wēnnà 溫那
				> MC 'On 溫		> MM Wēn 溫
		> Sgd. Hun (xwn~ γwn) = Kh. Hūn	> Syr. Hunāyē (hwny')	> Arm. Honk'		
		>			Sk. Huna	

Table 4

Ancient Terms	Medieval Terms	
Av. Xyaona >	Pah. Xyōn	> Syr. Kywny'
		> L. Chionitae
		> Gk. Khiōnes

Table 5

Ancient Terms		Medieval Terms		Modern Terms
Qun/ Xun?	?>	Tu. Qun	> MC x ^w ən 渾	> MM hūn 渾
			> Gk. Khōn	
			> Gk. Khounni	
	?> Gk. Khounoi			

Notes to Tables 3–5

Ancient and Medieval are roughly divided about A.D.150–200

OC = Old Chinese

Arm. = Armenian

Av. = Avestan

Gk. = Greek

Kh. = Khorazmian

L. = Latin

MM = Modern Mandarin

MC = Middle Chinese

Pah. = Pahlavi

Sk. = Khotanese Saka

Skt. = Sanskrit

Sogd. = Sogdian

Syr. = Syriac

> indicates derivation