



The diorama shows a group of Roman merchants, together with a Chinese escort, who have crossed the Tarim Basin and are now reaching the western end of the Chinese fortifications, a place called Yang Guan (The South Gate) in the area of Dunhuang. We now of this episode only because the 2nd century astronomer and geographer Ptolemy mentions it; he has his information from a book by a certain „Maes, who is also called Titianus“. The Syro-Roman merchant Maes Titianus in turn did the journey not by himself, his account is based on what his commercial agents told him upon their return in the Roman Empire.







Maes had sent these agents to the Parthian kingdom, perhaps around 100 AD. They finally left Parthian territory and traveled through Bactria, until they reached a place called Tashkurgan in the Pamir Mountains. It was a period when the Chinese Han empire controlled the whole Tarim basin, and the Chinese general Ban Chao sent these exotic strangers to the Chinese homeland, which they reached after seven further months of travel across Central Asia.







The small Chinese outpost in the diorama has a watch tower built from rammed earth reinforced with plant material, as was typical for such installments (note that the “Great Wall” was no continuous wall at that time, and large sections were not built from massive stone).







The roof chosen for the tower is not wholly appropriate (actually, it is taken from the Academy Set MA042 – the 14th century Korean Sungnyemun Gate in Seoul in 1/200 scale!), but this set was just too beautiful to be ignored. The Chinese figures in the diorama are mainly by Caesar (Ch'in Dynasty Army), 3D-Models (Han Chinese Command und Transport II) und Newline (ANHC01, ANHC02, ANHC04, ANHC10 and ANHC11). Further figures and models are by Hät, Nikolai, Italeri, Strelets and Hovels.





Further reading:

Peers C.J. und Perry M. (1995) *Imperial Chinese Armies (1) (Men-at-Arms 284)*. Osprey Publishing, Oxford.
 Turnbull S. und Noon S. (2007) *The Great Wall of China 221 BC - AD 1644 (Fortress 57)*. Osprey Publishing, Oxford.
 Lindsey W. (2007) *The Great Wall Revisited. From the Jade Gate to Old Dragon's Head*. Frances Lincoln Limited, London.
 Cary M. (1956) Maes, Qui et Titianus. *The Classical Quarterly* 6: 130-134.
<http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/cities/china/dh/dh.html>
<http://www.greatwallforum.com/forum/dunhuang/>

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