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The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by EDWARD C. HEGELER.



THE SARCOPHAGUS OF LIVIA PRIMITIVA.
In the Catacombs. (See pages 481-484.)

The Open Court Publishing Company

CHICAGO

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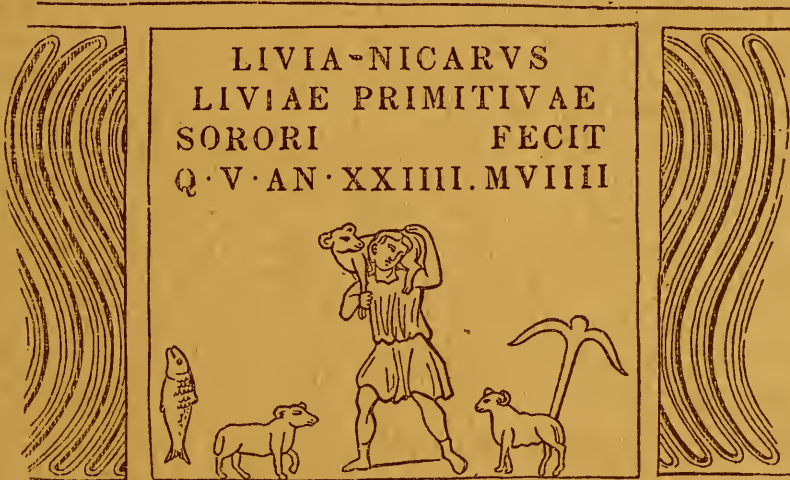
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CONTENTS:

	PAGE
<i>Frontispiece. The Burial of St. Cecilia in the Catacombs, W. A. BOUGUEREAU.</i>	
<i>King Tsing, the Author of the Nestorian Inscription. BERTHOLD LAUFER ..</i>	449
<i>Idols and Fetiches. JAMES B. SMILEY</i>	455
<i>The Catacombs (Illustrated). EDITOR</i>	471
<i>The Eroica Symphony of Beethoven. BARON VON DER PFORDTEN</i>	501
<i>The Old Statesman's Thoughts (Poem). Tr. by JAMES BLACK</i>	508
<i>Mr. Krebs's Disclosure of Paladino's Tricks</i>	508
<i>The Æonic Number of Babylon. ALAN S. HAWKESWORTH</i>	511
<i>Book Reviews and Notes</i>	511

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THE BURIAL OF ST. CECILIA IN THE CATACOMBS. W. A. BOUGUEREAU.

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KING TSING, THE AUTHOR OF THE NESTORIAN INSCRIPTION.

BY BERTHOLD LAUFER.

NO man of culture who takes an interest in the history of Christianity should fail to make himself acquainted with the Nestorian monument which is the greatest historical document produced by the Christian religion in Eastern Asia; and no student of Chinese ought to neglect to make it the basis of a thorough and untiring study. In making accessible to the general public a well printed text of the famous inscription accompanied by Alexander Wylie's excellent translation, the Open Court Publishing Company has merited the thanks not only of Chinese scholars but also of the public at large.¹ Their unpretentious and yet fruitful little book is well fitted to be placed as a text-book in the hands of university students or young missionaries who could select no better guide than this marvelous inscription to sharpen their sagacity in unravelling Chinese constructions and phrases and to familiarize them with the methods of Chinese philology.

It is not generally known that the Nestorian inscription is a literary production of the highest order, a perfect understanding of which requires the most extensive knowledge of ancient Chinese in all its various branches of style and literature. The following notes which do not lay claim to any originality of research may therefore be welcome to students.

The text of the Nestorian inscription is regarded by Chinese

¹*The Nestorian Monument; an Ancient Record of Christianity in China.* Chicago, 1909. This pamphlet was published with special reference to the replica of the Nestorian monument recently acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York.

scholars as a composition of considerable literary merit, and remains up to the present day one of the finest examples of Chinese erudition and elegance in style. The emperor K'ang-hsi, decidedly a good judge on such matters, greatly appreciated the style of the monument, and the abundance of metaphors and literary allusions have ever endeared it to Chinese scholars since the days of its discovery in 1625. The author of the inscription was the first to be confronted with the difficult task of rendering Christian terms into Chinese, and was quite right in following a sanctioned Chinese usage of borrowing quotations from Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist writers. There is, accordingly, a double signification inherent in many terms used in the inscription, and a Chinese scholar of wide reading will experience the same sensation of enjoyment in perusing it as, e. g., a humanist of the sixteenth century in studying a theological treatise written in a gracefully flowing Ciceronian Latin. Father Henri Havret who has devoted a life of study to our inscription published the most profound investigation on this subject betraying a truly stupendous erudition.² He had a Chinese savant prepare a list of these borrowings, with the result that more than thirty phrases were found to be derived from the Book of Mutations (*Yih-king*), nearly as many from the Book of Songs (*Shih-king*), and about twenty from the Book of Annals (*Shu-king*). The so-called classical literature (*king*) furnishes altogether a total of about 150 allusions. The historians yield a tribute of over a hundred other terms, the philosophers about thirty, and the remainder is made up by various collections.

To quote a few examples: All divine attributes occurring in the inscription are derived from the *Tao-Tch king* of Lao-tse,—eternity, veracity, tranquility, priority of existence, intelligence, independence, profoundness, spirituality, mysterious causality of all beings; the term *San-i* (lit. Three-One) denoting the Trinity is met with in the historical Annals of Sze-ma Ts'ien and in the History of the Former Han Dynasty (*Ts'ien Han shu*) where it refers to the three unities Heaven, Earth, and Chaos to which the emperor offered a large sacrifice every third year. Curiously enough, the word *A-lo-ha* formed to signify the Hebrew word *Elohim* can be traced back to Buddhist sources which, as the Saddharmapundarikasutra, translated into Chinese early in the fifth century, employ this term as the equivalent of Sanskrit *Arhat*. Another much more common way

² *La stèle chrétienne de Si-ngan-fou*, in 3 parts. Part I, (Shanghai, 1895) contains the text in facsimile reproduction; Part II (*ibid.*, 1897) gives the history of the monument (420 pp.) and Part III (*ibid.*, 1902) the translation with admirable commentary, unfortunately a fragment edited after his death.

of writing this word in Chinese is *Lo-han*, and the Chinese-Jewish inscriptions of K'ai-fung fu use this form for the transcription of the name Abraham.

The Nestorian inscription is, after all, not an exception in this respect, though exceptionally well and carefully written, for the Mohammedan and Jewish inscriptions of China are framed on the same principle and also teem with classical allusions and selections. It should be well understood that this process of language is not wholly identical with what has been practised all over the world when new religions were preached and a new terminology had to be coined for them; Nestorians, Mohammedans, and Jews were not satisfied merely to form the necessary words for their doctrines, but shot far beyond this mark in parading with verbose quotations from Chinese classics, and forcing them into a new meaning which the uninitiated could not always grasp at once. In this connection it may be interesting to refer to the Buddhist studies of the author of the Christian inscription.

The fact that the Nestorian missionary Adam, presbyter and chorepiscopus, and papas of China, called in Chinese *King Tsing*, which means "illustrious and pure," was interested in Buddhist literature and actually engaged in the translation of a Buddhist work from Uigur, a Turkish language, into Chinese, was first established by Dr. I. Takakusu, professor of Sanskrit and Pali at the University of Tokyo, in an article published in the *Journal T'oung Pao* (Vol. VII, 1897, pp. 589-591). In the Chinese Buddhist Tripitaka, there is a book extant under the title *Chêng-yüan sin ting Shih kiao mu-lu*, i. e., Catalogue of Buddhist Books newly drawn up in the period *Chêng-yüan* (785-804 A. D.), compiled by Yüan-Chao, a priest of the *Si-ming* Monastery in Si-ngan fu. In this work, Takakusu discovered a passage relating to the Nestorian missionary, translated by him as follows:

"Prajña, a Buddhist of Kapiça in North India, traveled through Central India, Ceylon, and the islands of the Southern Sea (the Malayan Archipelago) and came to China, for he had heard that Mañjuçri was in China.³

"He arrived at Canton and came to the upper province (northern China) in 782 A. D. He met a relative of his in 786 who had arrived in China before him. Together with King Tsing (Adam), a Persian priest of the monastery of *Ta-Ts'in* (Syria), he translated

³ This is apparently an allusion to the famous mountain Wu-t'ai-shan in Shansi Province, the temples on which are devoted to the cult of this Bodhisatva.

the Satparamitasutra⁴ from a text in the *Hu* (Uigur) language, and completed the translation of seven volumes.

"At that time, however, Prajña was not familiar with the *Hu* language, nor did he understand the Chinese language; and King Tsing did not know Sanskrit, nor was he versed in the teachings of the Buddhists. Thus, though they pretended to be translating the text, yet they could not in fact obtain half of its gems (i. e., its real significance). They were seeking vain glory for themselves, regardless of the utility of their work for the public. They presented a memorial (to the emperor), expecting to get their work propagated. The emperor (Tai-Tsung, 780-804 A. D.) who was intelligent, wise, and accomplished, and who revered the canon of the Buddhists, examined what they had translated, and found that the principles contained in it were obscure and the wording diffuse.

"Moreover, since the Samghārāma (lit. the park of the clergy, i. e., monastery) of the Buddhists and the monastery of Ta-Ts'in (i. e., the Nestorians) differed much in their customs and their religious practices were entirely opposed to each other, *King Tsing* (Adam) ought to hand down the teaching of Messiah (*Mi-shih-ho*), and the Çramana, the sons of Çākya, should propagate the Sutra of the Buddha. It is desirable that the boundaries of the doctrines may be made distinct, and the followers may not intermingle. Orthodoxy and heterodoxy are different things just as the rivers *King* and *Wei* have different courses."

It seems that the last clause is part of an imperial edict. The year is not given in which the translation alluded to was made, but as Prajña did not reach Si-ngan fu until 782, and as the Nestorian monument was erected in 781, it seems that this translation work took place after the time of the inscription. At all events, this striking passage throws light on Adam's literary inclinations and ambitions, and his interest in the study of Buddhist literature. It was most natural for him, as Takakusu justly remarks, to obtain a knowledge of Buddhism in order to learn the correct religious terms in which to express his ideas to the people.

The Chinese characters representing the word "Messiah" in the above document are phonetically the same as in the inscription except that the syllable *shih* is expressed by a different character, but one having the same sound. The Sutra translated by Adam and Prajña is preserved in the Buddhist canon but is attributed exclusively to the latter (in Nanjio's Catalogue No. 1004); the question as to whether the existing translation is identical with the

⁴Treatise of the Six Perfections (*pāramitā*).

one made by both has not yet been investigated. There is no doubt that an examination of this Sutra may shed some light on the phraseology of the inscription.

Father Havret,⁵ when commenting on this passage, is doubtless right in considering the account of Yüan-Chao exaggerated. In opposition to Takakusu he prefers to conjecture that King Tsing took up this Indian moral treatise in the expectation of finding Christian doctrines attested therein. He might have believed that Buddhist books owed their first inspirations to Christianity with as much good faith as de Guignes later recognized a "false gospel" in the well-known Sutra of the Forty-Two Articles, the first Buddhist work translated into Chinese. The reproaches indirectly addressed to King Tsing by Yüan-Chao for having attempted to confound two doctrines, the one true, the other false, Havret is inclined to think, render this explanation sufficiently probable. The choice made by him for this venture was fortunate, for he could have made use of such moral categories as occur in the last part of the Sutra in question, for instance, charity, morality, patience, energy, contemplation, wisdom. However it may be about these conjectures, Havret concludes his argument, we must insist on the fact that King Tsing was fond of mental labors, and that his researches in Buddhist literature doubtless dating back much earlier had accustomed him to, and endeared to him, the terminology of this religion.

I concur with F. Havret in the supposition that the vast Chinese erudition embodied in the text of the monument cannot be the individual work of King Tsing alone, but that he availed himself of the assistance of a native scholar, and, even more likely, of several scholars. He must certainly be credited with having prepared the first draught of the document which he submitted to his staff of learned assistants together with suggestions and recommendations. Presumably the text has been revised and rewritten several times before receiving its final shape from the hands of the chief editor King Tsing who was surely justified in signing the article with his name, as expressly stated in the inscription that it is composed (*shu*) by him.

F. Havret most felicitously points out also the Buddhist influence in the very name of King Tsing. Just as the Buddhist monks after ordination abandoned their family names and surnames of worldly origin and chose a monastic name usually composed of two words, sometimes a translation or reminiscence of

⁵ *Op. cit.* Part III, p. 6 (Shanghai, 1902).

some Indian name, so the presbyter Adam adopts the two words *king tsing* meaning "illustrious and pure," the word *king* being the appellation of his religion (*king kiao*). Other analogous Nestorian names appear in the inscription, as *King Tung* and *King Fu*. Moreover, he assumes the prefix *sên* before his name, a Chinese abbreviation of the Sanskrit word *samgha* denoting the Buddhist clergy and a Buddhist priest; as a matter of course, it serves to *King Tsing* merely as a translation of the Syriac word *qassisa*, "priest." Also in his designation as "the priest of the temple of Ta-Ts'in," the word *sze* for temple is derived from Buddhism, and the style of wording *Ta-Ts'in sze* for "Syrian church" is fashioned after Buddhist models.