



PREHISTORIC CHINA

*PART ONE*

ORACLE RECORDS FROM  
THE WASTE OF YIN

殷 虛 卜 辭

BY

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To my father.

國神位信壽前祥祀奉也

# PREHISTORIC CHINA.

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## RECORDS OF YIN.

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### PREFACE.

Early in the spring of the year Chia Yin 甲寅 (1914) the writer was riding his old white horse along the south bank of the Yüan 洹水 river north of Changtê 彰德 city in the province of Honan. The ground had just been harrowed for cotton planting, and the farmers had thrown the freshly ploughed up potsherds and rubble to the edge of the fields. A number of potsherds of a very early date attracted the rider's attention, and led him on from sherd to sherd to a bend in the river where the débris disappeared, either washed away into the river through the centuries or buried in the drift of sand. Along the low sandy banks the willows were just putting forth their first, tender leaves and a number of half-clothed dirty children with baskets on their arms were stripping the trees for willow tea leaves. At the sight of a foreigner they gathered about me as I stood by a well examining a little pile of potsherds. "What are you doing?" said the leader, "Examining some broken potsherds," said I. "What for?" said he; "Because they please me;" I replied. "Do bones please you?" he ventured.

“Well, that depends,” I answered. “But I can show you some dragon bones with characters on them.” Upon which I said that I was very much interested, and off we went around the bend and up over a barren, sandy waste to a little hollow on the western slope white with powdered particles of bones. This was the Waste of Yin 殷 the ancient capital of Wu I 武乙 of the Yin Dynasty 殷朝, lost in the centuries before CONFUCIUS and only known to have been “North of the River”—武乙遷河北; (*Bamboo Ann.*, *Wu I 3rd Year*: 竹書武乙三年). About fifteen years ago a Chinese archaeologist named WANG went into a Chinese drug store in Peking to buy some dragon bones for medicine. Among the fragments was a small piece on which were engraved small, delicate characters, which in some cases closely resembled the characters on the earliest bronzes in his collection. He inquired diligently for more and as to the district from which they came, but no immediate information was forthcoming and he went away with his treasure wrapped in his bosom, only examining it in secret. He was the first discoverer of the bone fragments that have now become known as the Oracle Bones. Just after the Boxer year 庚子 REVS. SAMUEL COULING and F. H. CHALFANT of Ch'ing Chou fu 青州府 and Weihsien 濰縣 in Shantung secured a number of fragments in Weihsien. It was through the good offices of these two gentlemen that the collections were formed in the British

Museum, the Royal Scottish Museum, the Field Museum, Chicago, as well as the private collection of L. C. HOPKINS, Esq., I.S.O. who has written much on the subject in articles in the Royal Asiatic Journal. It was they who introduced these objects to the Scientific world. But the place where they were excavated was not then known to them. Indeed, Mr. CHALFANT thought that they either came from Chao Ko ch'eng 朝歌城, the famous city of the notorious CHOU HSIN 紂辛, the last of the Emperors of Yin, or from the Tomb of PI KAN 比干 whom he murdered at the instigation of his consort 妲己 to see if there were really seven orifices in the heart of a righteous man. The writer, then, was the first foreign or Chinese archaeologist to visit the Waste of Yin with a purely scientific interest in these objects. Many a subsequent day has he stolen away on his old white horse to tread the ruins of this old adobe city. Even Lo CHÊN YŪ 羅振玉, the collector and publisher of the most famous Chinese collection 殷墟書契, who was in Changtê once or twice in recent years has only once visited the site of this ancient capital of China; while LIU T'IEH YŪN\* 劉鐵雲 made and published his, the first collection 鐵雲藏龜, in Shanghai.

The writer, then, can claim to have that intimate knowledge of these objects which is impossible for

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\* 劉鐵雲 from 丹徒.

others. Many spurious specimens purporting to come from this site are on the market. Many of these are actual bones and objects exhumed, or manufactured from exhumed bones which are afterwards skilfully engraved with copies of other inscriptions. These are to be found in abundance in Changtefu, and even in the village of Hsiao T'un near the Waste of Yin. The first large objects the writer secured were all false. It was then that he learned not to despise the little things. For the little pieces are practically all of tortoise shell, which was very precious in those ancient days and reserved for the king's sacrifices, while the larger, coarser animal bones were used for divinations of lesser import, just as some of the ancient Greeks wrote on sheep's shoulder-blades because they could not afford parchment. These tortoise shells were so precious that the diviner inscribed on them sometimes as many as one hundred inquiries, and the characters written were no larger than a grain of rice. This sometimes necessitated the contraction of the characters, and where the King's oracle set the fashion, the people followed. Each divination required the cutting of an oblong hollow in the underside of the shell and the production by fire of two cracks, one horizontal and one perpendicular. This generally has resulted in the tortoise shells being broken into very small fragments. It is, therefore, not the size of the fragments that is important, but the characters on them,

and these the writer claims to have selected with the greatest care, having regard to new characters and complete sentences. Had the author so wished he might have made his first volume ten times as large. Perhaps some day he will publish another volume of plates. For there still lies in his chests his first collection of fragments. The drawings were made as the pieces were secured, and in his ignorance some were drawn upside down and some sideways, while scratches not belonging to the characters were also reproduced. As gradual increase in accuracy came, disgust with former blunders caused him after a year and a half to place the whole collection in his chests and begin anew, with the result that after three entire corrections of the manuscript and many corrections of the proof from a fresh comparison with the objects themselves, the present volume is presented to the public.

It is the first part of an extended work on the dawn of history and the development of civilization in China. *Prehistoric China* has been chosen as the title of the series notwithstanding the fact that the first volume concerns itself with written characters. These records are the earliest archaeological remains of China, and they throw such a fresh light into the dim origins of Chinese religion and culture that the author feels compelled in the interests of Sinology to place these plates before the public before he has been able to



complete the whole of his design. Should the contingencies of war render that completion impossible, the basal material from which to work will at least be in the hands of scholars.

The derivation of the mysterious characters of the written language has long exercised the ingenuity of sinologues, but until the discovery of these bones, satisfactory evidence failed the investigators, who were soon in wandering mazes lost. The author believes that his researches will place the subject on a sure foundation, besides adding much to our knowledge of Prehistoric Man in China. This volume contains accurate reproductions of inscriptions on 2369 selected fragments of tortoise shell and animal bones. This selection was carefully made from a total collection of nearly fifty thousand, and is the first comprehensive publication of facsimiles of these inscriptions.

The second volume which is to follow will contain a dictionary of the characters appearing in the plates. The life-history of each character through the five most distinct forms of it will be shown, with excerpts from actual inscriptions in each case. The five forms are (1) the tortoise shell form 龜板文 as engraved on this collection of Oracle Bones of the Shang Dynasty 商朝 B.C. 1766-1122. (2) Bronze forms 鐘鼎文 as engraved on the bronze bells and tripods of the Chou Dynasty, 周朝 B.C. 1122-255. These forms differ from the above, partly

because of the difference of materials and implements used and partly from a conventionalizing of the character. They include Ku Wên, 古文 or ancient forms, the Greater Seal, 大篆 and such Lesser Seal 小篆 characters appearing on bronzes of the Chou Dynasty 周朝 as indicate a less developed form than appear in the Shuo Wên Dictionary 說文解字. Only characters taken from actual rubbings will be included.

(3) The Lesser Seal Form 小篆 as given in the Shuo Wên Dictionary. These characters assumed their form during the Ch'in Dynasty, 秦朝 255-206 B.C.

(4) Early Brush Forms or Li Wên 隸文, sometimes spoken of as the Official Script. This will be drawn where possible from inscriptions on Monuments of the Han Dynasty 漢朝, 206 B.C.—220 A.D.

(5) Present form as given in KANGHSI'S Dictionary 康熙字典. Where the introduction of Buddhism has been responsible for the alteration either of the form or common meaning of the present characters this will be noted by excerpts from Buddhist monuments of the Six Dynasty 六朝 period, but otherwise the vagaries of meaning and form introduced at this time will not be mentioned. It is to be noted that the three main developments in the characters occur through a complete change in writing materials. First the instrument was a knife and the material written upon was tortoise shell. Then came the chisel and bronze vessels, and later the

brush and bamboo slips. The other two forms are the standard forms found in two dictionaries, Shuo Wên and KANGHSI Tzū Tien, being the completed development of the second and third stages.

The third and following volumes will contain a dissertation on the early religion of the Chinese race as shown on these fragments and by other objects that the author has collected. A dissertation on the earliest culture period in China with corroborative evidence from stone, bone and pottery objects, both of the chase and of the hearth, will follow.

The author had not intended revealing these secrets of his study until such time as they could appear before the public with the explanations and conclusions based upon these. At present he is but a voice crying in the wilderness of Yin. He thought he had much goods laid up for many years for study. But duty has knocked at the door and at the call of his country the writer has had to abandon his researches for the present, while these plates in the hands of Sinologues will furnish the material for much new work.

An apology is necessary for the numerals on the plates. They were printed in the interior in Honan, where the author resided for a number of years. He has used the spare moments of a busy missionary life in bending over the lithographic stones with brush and erasing knife in hand, and correcting proofs. Whatever

the plates have lost in typographical appearance, they have gained in accuracy of reproduction. Three years of almost daily study of these inscriptions with a lover's eye has taught that it would have been impossible to publish the plates without constant supervision and personally making the corrections on the lithographic stones.

This Preface has been written in a few hours in Shanghai in the midst of hurried preparations for his family's leaving for Canada and his own departure to Europe on War service. It cannot in any way be considered an adequate introduction to the plates which follow.

明義士(子宜)著

*Shanghai, March 31, 1917.*

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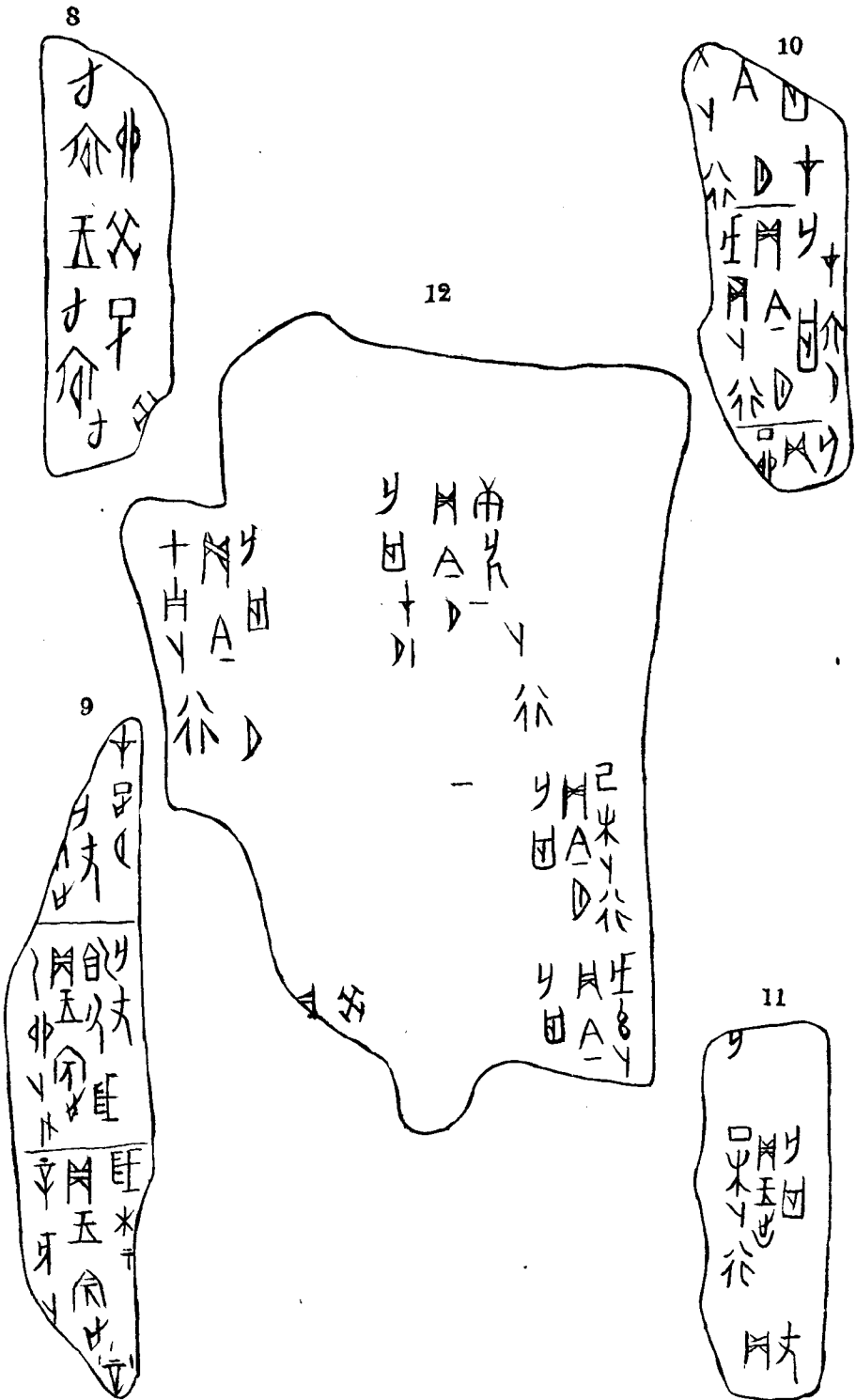
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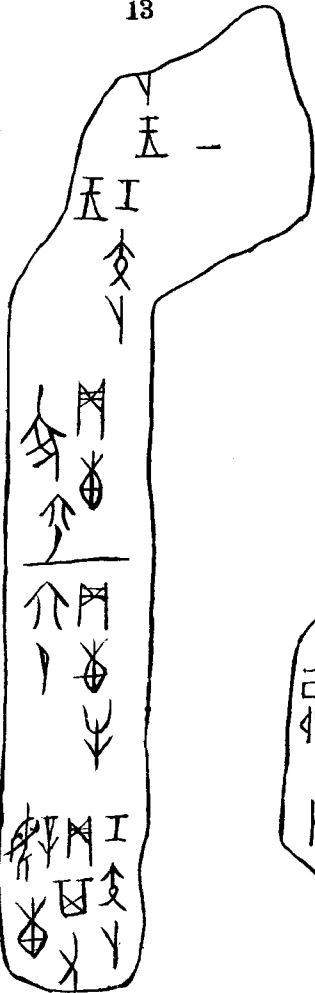
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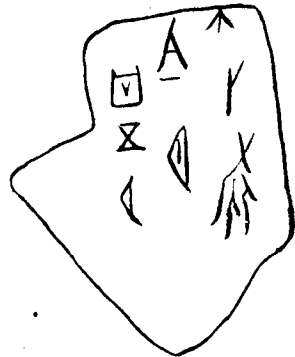
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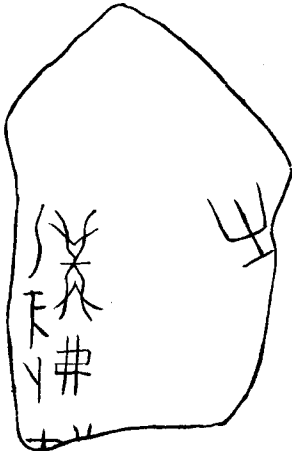
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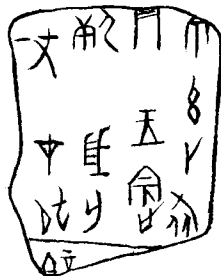
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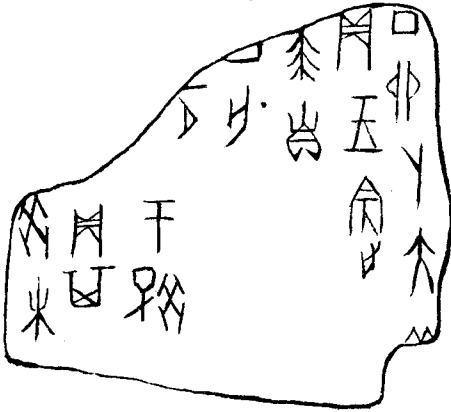
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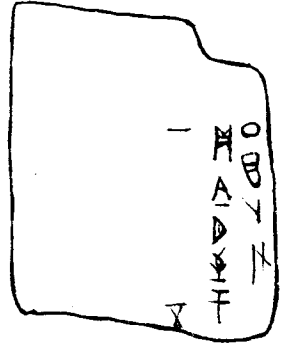
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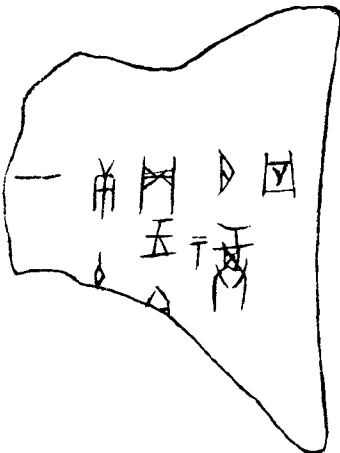
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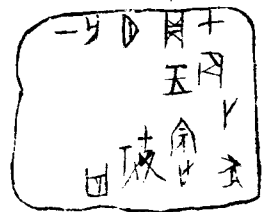
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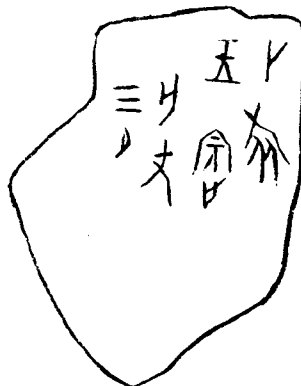
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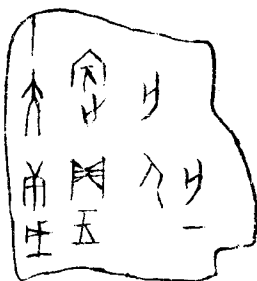
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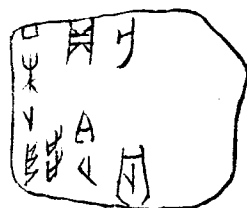
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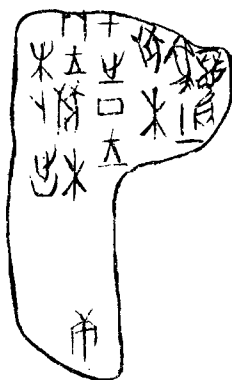
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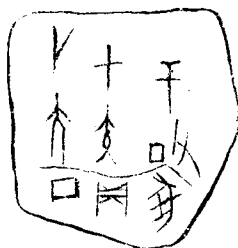
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