

# THE TEMPLE

AND OTHER POEMS

TRANSLATED BY

ARTHUR WALEY

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY ON  
EARLY CHINESE POETRY, AND AN  
APPENDIX ON THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF DIFFERENT METRICAL FORMS

LONDON: GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD.  
RUSKIN HOUSE, 40 MUSEUM STREET, W.C.1

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TO  
MR. F.-D. AND B., ESQ.

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## INTRODUCTION



## CHAPTER I

### THE ODES—THE LAND OF CH'U—CH'Ü YÜAN AND SUNG YÜ

IN *170 Chinese Poems* I said little about the kind of poem which is called *fu*, and what I did say stands in need of correction. I shall here first give a short account of the earliest Chinese poetry, and then an account of the *fu*.

#### The Odes.

The *Book of Odes* is a collection of 312 songs, chosen and arranged by Confucius in the fifth century. The earliest seems to date from about 1753 B.C.; the latest belongs to about 600 B.C. Many of them are folk-songs of the most primitive type:

*We are gathering the plantain,  
We pluck but little;  
We are gathering the plantain,  
We find but little.  
We are gathering the plantain,  
We have plucked a few spikes.  
We are gathering the plantain,  
We have pressed out a few grains.  
We are gathering the plantain,  
We have put a little in our aprons.  
We are gathering the plantain,  
We have tucked in our aprons at the belt.*

This is a mere action-song. The words have no significance apart from the movements which inspired them and the tunes to which they were sung. There are also love-songs, soldiers' songs, eulogies of kings and queens, and festival-songs. Many of them make a great use of refrain, so that each verse only differs from the last by the alteration of a few words.

The beauty of the *Odes* is almost entirely musical. It is impossible to read them to oneself, even in the most barbarous and Occidental pronunciation, without one's senses being invaded by the freshest and most delightful tunes. In translation all this is lost, and what remains may be interesting as anthropology, history or mythology, but it has little value as literature.

In China folk-songs were collected for political purposes. They were regarded as a means by which the governing classes could get into touch with the common people, could discover their grievances and aspirations. The followers of Confucius interpreted the *Odes* entirely as politico-ethical documents. The love-songs were all explained as referring to the relation between the Minister of State and his Prince. This led to an interpretation as odd as the ecclesiastical gloss upon the *Song of Solomon*.

Most European translators of the *Odes*, being unfamiliar with the very similar folk-songs of other countries, have been content to accept the Confucian interpretation or have at any rate thought it worth while to expound it. Recently M. Marcel Granet, approaching the *Odes* as a student of comparative folk-lore, has recognized their true character and, incidentally, furnished some of the best translations that have been made.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Fêtes et Chansons anciennes de la Chine*, 1919.



The only other poems of this period which survive are inscribed upon a set of "stone drums," supposed to date from about 900 B.C., and now preserved in the Confucian College at Peking :

*Our chariots were strong,  
Our teams well-matched.  
Our chariots were beautiful,  
Our horses were swift.  
Many were the princes  
That pressed upon the prey,  
Chasing, ever chasing,  
In rings round the field.  
Stags and does swiftly  
Fled from our galloping,  
But we followed after  
With bows hard bent,  
Bows bent in our hands. . . .*

After 600 B.C. comes a gap of three hundred years in our knowledge of Chinese poetry. During this period the power of the central government was rapidly declining, and the practice of obtaining political information through official "song-collectors" (*tsai shih kuan*) seems to have been suspended. Literary poetry (as opposed to song-words) did not yet exist, and the anthology of Confucius during the whole period enjoyed a prestige which defied competition. "Poetry" at this time meant the Confucian *Odes*.

A few short songs survive, scattered about the works of historians and philosophers. Moreover, rhyme was sometimes used as an ornament to prose—frequently, for example, by the Taoist philosopher, Chuang Tzū—but without that definite pattern of rhythm which distinguishes verse from prose. Lao Tzū, the predecessor of Chuang Tzū, uses a kind of rûde, mnemonic doggerel.