CHAPTER 2

THE ANCIENT RECORDS

AT a very early date, kingship in China, as elsewhere, implied divine authority. The king was the mainspring of government, and accepted as regent upon earth for Heaven. More, for as the ages passed, and his rule extended beyond the confines of the first clans, he was declared to be the monarch of the world, the one and only *T'ien Tzŭ*,[1] or Son of Heaven, holding the sole mandated sceptre over all lands. As there could not be two suns in the sky, it was said, so there could not be two emperors on earth. According to this theory, all other races were barbarians and outside the divine enlightenment; their duty and hope lay in submission to the Son of Heaven, the duly appointed and one legitimate representative of Deity on earth. It was in accordance with this logic that, when presents were sent by foreign potentates, even in modern times, to the court of China, they were labelled as "tribute", and the potentates given in exchange a *ju-i*, or baton of delegated authority over their own subjects.

A study of kingship in early China discloses a close relation to astronomy: which, in its turn, is found to be associated with an institution known as the Ming T'ang,[2] Hall of Illumination, Light, or literally, the Bright Hall, where things were made clear. The very character *Ming*[3] of its name is composed of the two great luminaries of the sky, the sun and the moon, put into juxtaposition, and is significantly applied to the hall where they were the object of observation.[4] Perhaps this Ming T'ang is the most ancient institution in China: its ritual was certainly the prerogative of the king and the source of his power and potency. The study of it bristles with many difficulties, and has hitherto been little handled by Western scholars, nor have many modern Chinese scholars shown the interest in it which it deserves.[5] Yet it appears that this royal and astronomical institution, originating in a stargazer's primitive thatched hut amidst the rudest conditions, became the means which drew

[1] 天子.　　[2] 明堂.

[3] 明 *Ming*, is composed of 日 *jih*, sun, or day, and 月 *yüeh*, moon.

[4] According to H. Maspero (*Journal asiatique*, Oct.–Dec., 1933), *Ming* has the meaning of "sacred"; but this seems to be derivative from its connection with the sun, moon, and stars with their religious significance.

[5] A certain number of papers by modern Chinese scholars on the Ming T'ang have appeared in the *Ku-shih-p'ien* (Eds.).

into closer alliance untutored contiguous tribes and welded them into nationhood. The disclosures concerning the heavens, the sun, moon and stars, which emanated from that hut, invested it with power, and made it the focus of the religious and governmental life of the growing nation. And this more especially because, through these discoveries, the king and the kingdom could give forth from it that first essential of an agricultural people—the calendar, with its forecast of seasonal heat and cold, wet and dry.

What, then, are our sources of information concerning this Ming T'ang, Hall of Light? Chinese archæological discoveries may in time prove as adequate as the stone inscriptions of Egypt or the brick libraries of Mesopotamia. After the oracle bones and the bronzes with their short inscriptions, frail strips of wood or bamboo formed the written records in China before the invention of paper in the first century A.D., and these have almost entirely disappeared. It has been due to the excavations of Sir Aurel Stein at Tun Huang in Kansu in recent years that we possess some precious slips of these ancient bamboo records, of which we only knew by tradition. From these we first realized the size and shape of the slips and, as the result of careful examination, learned of the clever method of making them into book-form in ancient times. They were bound by leathern thongs in such a manner that these narrow slips opened side by side and lay flat, after the manner of the pages of a modern book. But these and other cognate facts were unrecorded in Chinese history and tradition, had escaped the memory of Chinese scholars and awaited the modern archæologist.

When considering early written Chinese sources, moreover, we have to find our way through the difficulties of the ancient characters which are readable only by the epigraphist. China's system of writing became conventionalized, at first gradually and later somewhat suddenly, to a form much simpler than the ancient script. Chinese history—which was written of course much later, and by Confucian scholars—attributes, probably with justification, the loss of the ancient records chiefly to the action of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti, the founder of the Ch'in Dynasty and destroyer of the feudal system, and of his Prime Minister Li Ssŭ. This latter took office traditionally in 214 B.C. and the next year prompted his Emperor to order, under pain of death, the destruction of the historical, political, and philosophical records of the past. It is relative to our present subject that works on divination, medicine, and agriculture were excepted.

Li Ssŭ had guided his royal master into welding with hammer blows the Warring States under one monarchical rule, by ridding the country of the barons who had laid it waste in strife for generations, and he now desired to change the whole attitude of thought and ideas of government. In modern times we see this method employed in certain states in the re-teaching of history. In 213 B.C. four hundred and fifty scholars chose to perish rather than submit to this régime of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti's.[1] Nevertheless, a new literature began and what is equally important, a less complex form of the writing, called the Lesser Seal, was devised—it is said, by Li Ssŭ himself, for he was a scholar also. This remarkable enforced change actually succeeded; so much so that, when some of the older writings were recovered at a later date, scholars of the new school found them almost indecipherable.

This "Burning of the Books" made a great cleavage in early Chinese literature, although the gap entailed was only some twenty-two years. The Ch'in Dynasty did not last long, and the second emperor of the succeeding Han Dynasty repealed the Edict in 191 B.C. Some of the books were hidden and saved, but many more were lost, and the Han scholars were faced with great textual difficulties. Many more years passed before the Han rulers were settled peacefully on the throne and the nation became in any sense organized. It may also be conjectured that the revolution in society and the system of government made the old writings of little practical use to scholars, who had been officials attached to the various petty baronial courts, and who with the downfall of their patrons had to consider other sources of livelihood. But the most serious obstacle to our elucidation of the ancient writings is the editorial and creative talents of these Han scholars. Like the cuttle-fish, they have obscured China's past with a screen of ink, and cast a cloud of doubt over the whole of her older literature. And yet we have to thank these same Han writers for preserving for us nearly all the written records of the remoter past which we possess: and it is on their collections and collations that the conclusions in this book are based. To discard their witness would leave us entirely without guide. Whatever dispute there may be as to the actual authors of the texts, or whatever were the more-to-be-dreaded emendations and redactions of the Han and later scholars, the substantial contents of their records were the truth as they knew it, and undoubtedly refer to conditions and

[1] See also *China's First Unifier*, Bodde; Leiden, 1938 (Eds.).

events much older than their own era. They remain our chief source of information concerning those far-off peoples and their leaders.

Higher Criticism is no new science in China, though the name for it may seem to be sufficiently appropriate—the *Hsiao Hsüeh*, or Lesser Learning. From the Han Dynasty down to our own day, Chinese scholars have called in question the authenticity of most of their ancient records, and discussed them "with daggers of ink". Especially since the Revolution of 1911 has the spirit of criticism been at work, reinforced by the necessity of overthrowing the now unpalatable Confucian ideas of monarchy and state religion and of replacing them with republican ideology. Yet, while every effort of Chinese and foreign critics to subject the origins and authenticity of the ancient records to keenest scrutiny is of first importance, their researches do not seriously affect the argument of this book, for the chief point of interest in our study is the traditional matter which they embody and which is of a much older date. Confucius himself said that he was but a "transmitter" of former wisdom, and his constant desire to restore the older rites and ritual proves the truth of his saying. Books have been written in modern times on Chinese history which lose value as much by their extravagant rejection of these records as do others by their uncritical acceptance.

With the store of information gathered all over the world and compiled for us to-day in such works as *The Golden Bough* and researches into the origin and significance of "the Golden Stool", we now can place in truer perspective the traditions of China, and in particular the genesis of her kings and of their priestly office. Such information did not exist in the times of my great predecessor at Oxford, Dr. James Legge. I have carefully checked over or occasionally retranslated such parts of his Classics as I needed to use, but ever with growing admiration for the meticulousness of his scholarship. With the most praiseworthy fidelity he has translated much which must have appeared to him sheer nonsense. Indeed he occasionally comments that he hopes the reader understands "this jargon" or says that he is insufficiently informed about "Taoist superstitions" and magic. Yet he continued to translate with accuracy the strange phrases, and for this we cannot be grateful enough to him to-day when, by the light of our new comparative knowledge, they can be interpreted, and the ancient Chinese brought into line with other races. It was through the constant recurrence in the Classics of references, often curiously worded,

to the usages and practices within the Ming T'ang that I was led to the study of it, for the evolution of Chinese culture seemed one and simultaneous with the evolution of its "Hall of Light". In fact, it may very well be the situs, the root of the Chinese social structure, the stem which gives rise to that distinctive, rather than "peculiar", development which we call Chinese civilization, with its government and laws, its learning and religion.

Now, among the Chinese works of recognized authority, none carries us far into the second millennium before Christ.[1] A small part of the *I Ching*, or "Book of Changes", the primer of divination with its groupings of numbers, may have been put into writing by some official diviner before 1200 B.C. On the other hand, even that part may have been at that date the hieratic unwritten possession of a school of diviners. We do not know. But, as we have it, the book is certainly not older than the fifth century B.C., and may be considerably later.

The *Shih Ching*, or "Odes", is a collection of short poems and hymns, a few of which may be of the second millennium, but most are of the early half of the first millennium, and depict the manners and customs of a people well advanced in culture.

The *Shu*, or "History", is relatively a late compilation. It was destroyed during the Burning of the Books in 213 B.C., and was restored and edited later. It consists chiefly of addresses to and from the Throne, supposedly beginning with the period of the legendary emperors Yao and Shun, early in the third millennium B.C. Reduced to its present form shortly before our era, it conveys nevertheless a certain sense of historicity; and its style and character forbid its being dismissed with a wave of the pen as valueless. The *Ch'un Ch'iu*, or "Spring and Autumn Annals", are records of one of the early States for about 250 years, from 722 B.C. to 464 B.C. This work is a bare chronicle of events, to which have been appended elaborate commentaries covering a wide range of events in various other States. The principal of these commentaries is the *Tso Chuan*,[2] concerning which much dispute has arisen. It is described as a forgery of the Han Dynasty, but that charge is at least extreme. It would be more reasonable to say that an unknown Han scholar compiled all the information then available concerning the period he recorded, and that he was at least as well informed about it as Ssŭ-ma Ch'ien (*circa* 100 B.C.), the great redactor of

[1] See Creel, *The Birth of China*.
[2] See *On the Authenticity of the Tso Chuan*, by Karlgren. (Eds.)

ancient history. The *Li Chi*,[1] or "Book of Rites", the Institutions of the Chou Dynasty, is a work generally believed to have been compiled late in the Han times, embodying earlier material. The work is evidently not a creation, but a compilation of existing material, some of it ancient, but probably most of it re-edited.

The *Chu Shu*, or "Bamboo Books", have a particular interest of their own at this stage of our anthropological researches into primitive cultures; although as far as this work is concerned they await further and closer examination. They give a condensed record of the reigns and events supposedly from 2700 B.C. to 300 B.C., and their authenticity has been debated ever since their recovery in A.D. 279. Reported as having been found in the grave, rifled by robbers, of Duke Hsiang of Wei, who died 294 B.C., the disordered bamboo slips were rearranged by royal command, placed in the royal library, and copied from the ancient into the modern script. The curious information which they offer as to the manner of birth of the first emperors is obviously the echo of primitive tribal notions concerning such births, and parallels can be found in early civilizations elsewhere. There is no mention of a male parent but only of a female. Moreover the conception of each of the so-called legendary emperors is caused by his mother perceiving some unusual motion of the stars with regard to the moon, or in connection with a rainbow and clouds; and the period of gestation, different in each case, is strangely exact as to the number of months, as though this were some further astronomical calculation. The *Bamboo Books* indeed, at the very outset, would suggest the theory propounded in this work, that the first kings rose to their rank through knowledge of the stars, that this knowledge was their prerogative, and that through this they were enabled to set forth finally the Calendar for the guidance of their people. The second half of the *Bamboo Books* is the conventional and usual brief chronicle of kings and wars and treaties. The marvels have practically ceased.

The *Ssŭ Shu*, or "Four Books", consist of the Confucian *Analects*, the *Great Learning*, the *Doctrine of the Mean*, and the *Book of Mencius*. *The Analects* and *The Book of Mencius* may be accepted as of the period to which they are ascribed, *circa* the fourth century B.C., but the other two, being chapters of the *Li Chi*, are involved in its dating. The *Chan Kuo Ts'ê*, or Record of the Warring States, and other accounts, lead us on

[1] The *Li Chi*, as well as the *Chou Li* and the *I Li*, are discussed more in detail in Chapter 3.

to the *Shih Chi*, or Historical Records of Ssŭ-ma Ch'ien, the first accredited historian of China (*circa* 100 B.C.), most of whose work has been translated into French by that great savant, Edouard Chavannes. Its authenticity is not doubted, and, generally speaking, it may be accepted as a reliable account of the records and traditions existing in the second century B.C. The works of other writers, such as Han Fei Tzŭ and Mo Tzŭ, vary much in value, as does the authenticity of the existing versions. Many of them have not met with the attention they deserved from the comparative anthropologist, and the contents of most of them are as yet little known in the West.

While the authenticity of many of the above works may be in question, and present complex textual problems, the traditions which they embody are not, however, necessarily invalidated. Unlike the folklore stories of modern collating which are often fanciful creations, the majority of these ancient Chinese records are definite attempts at historical writing, and may thus be reasonably accounted to have significance. While some of them belong neither to the recorder's own age, nor to the period to which they are attributed, their contents cannot have been in serious disagreement with the oral traditions still existing when they were penned. Redaction, in short, could not be creation, for even the Chinese redactor, notably ingenious, has his limitations. Moreover, when we find that the early recorded traditions are in line with those of other races, their usefulness may be greater than the authenticity of the books which record them.

The *Lü Shih Ch'un Ch'iu* or the Spring and Autumn Annals compiled by Lü Pu-wei is a work of this order, especially the *Yüeh Ling* chapters, which give an account of the Monthly Observances for the kingly ritual. The two guides which have been of special service in supplying a considerable quantity of material, as well as giving a large number of references, both to this ritual and the building in which it took place, the Ming T'ang, are works of much later date—which goes to show how deep was the influence and how long were the memories of that early priestly conception of Kingship. The *Ming T'ang Ta Tao Lu*[1] was composed by Hui Tung-hsia, who is identified somewhat imperfectly with the celebrated historical and astronomical writer, Hui Shih-ch'i of Kiangsu, A.D. 1670–1741. The book was written, or at any rate published, probably about 1740, and copies are somewhat scarce. The work has

[1] 明堂大道錄

a confused system of its own and much repetition, so that it is extremely difficult to follow: but it contains much valuable matter which is often wisely discussed. Secondly, K'ang Hsi's great encyclopædia, the *T'u Shu Chi Ch'éng*,[1] devotes a substantial section to the Ming T'ang; and its historical presentation, showing the frequent attempts at the resuscitation of that building from earliest times to the Ming Dynasty, is particularly enlightening.

[1] 圖書集成