CHINESE MEDICAL STELAE*

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Well over two hundred years ago there appeared in Paris a French translation of a 9th century Arabic manuscript on China and India which created considerable excitement in the learned world of that time. The Arabic work consisted of two parts alleged to have been written by two persons, a merchant named Sulaymān and one Abū Zaid Hasan. This paper is concerned with the first part, the date of which corresponds to A. D. 851, and is attributed to Sulaymān. It is composed of a number of observations of varying length on different aspects of Chinese life and culture in general, and purports to have been written by one who had lived and travelled in China.

Formerly it was believed that Sulaymān had compiled this account in India from reports gathered from travellers who had been to China, and that perhaps he himself had briefly visited that country. But a more recent and authoritative opinion has it that Sulaymān had never been to China, and that he probably did not even compile the work attributed to him.(1)

This Arabic manuscript was discovered in the library of the Comte de Seignelay by Eusèbe Renaudot (1646–1720), a Jesuit abbot and one of the leading Orientalists of the time. He published a translation of it in 1718 in Paris under the title of *Anciennes relations des Indes et de la Chine, de deux voyageurs mahometans, qui y allerent dans le neuvième siècle.*(2)

* I wish to express my thanks to the officials of Academia Sinica, Taipei, for their hospitality and for making available to me the excellent facilities of that institution during the academic year 1959-60; and I am grateful to the Guggenheim Memorial Foundation and the Fulbright Foundation in China for making it possible for me to spend the year in Taiwan.

(1) Paul Pelliot, *T'oung Pao*, vol. 21 (1922), p. 402, in his long review of Ferrand's translation; see the following note.

(2) There are two later translations: Joseph Toussaint Reinaud, *Relation des voyages faites par les arabes et les persans dans l'Inde et à la Chine dans le ix^e siècle de l'ère chrêtienne* (Paris, 1845), and Gabriel Ferrand, *Voyage du marchand arabe Sulaymān en Inde et en Chine rêdigê en 851 suivi de remarques par Abu Zayd Hasan (vers 916)* (Paris, 1922). Some English translations based on the translations of Renaudot and Reinaud have appeared in collections of travels such as John Pinkerton, *A General Collection of the best and most Interesting Voyages and Travels in All Parts of the World; many of which are now translated into English*, vol. 7 (London, 1811), which is based on Renaudot.

Eusèbe Renaudot, born in 1646, was educated by the Jesuits and entered the clergy. But "partly" owing to ill-health, as his biographers put it, he divorced himself from the Jesuits and never received more than minor orders. He was considered to be a brilliant man, however, and was given important assignments of various types by the government. He eventually became an important political adviser and one of the prominent figures of the reign of Louis XIV. He was an outstanding scholar of Oriental languages, especially Arabic, and was in many quarters regarded as the greatest Orientalist of his time. He was also a member of the Académie Française and the Académie des Inscriptions. A lively and popular dispute with the philosopher and critic Pierre Bayle, caused by Renaudot's *Jugement du public sur le dictionnaire de Bayle* (Rotterdam, 1697), was only one of the numerous political or religious controversies in which he seems to have been a willing, if not aggressive, participant. A voluminous writer, most of his works were prepared in defence of the Catholic church. He died in 1720, and in his latter years "assumed the unfriendly attitude of the Gallican and Jansenist."(3)

Renaudot's translation of the manuscript was published in book form, but the actual translation accounted for only one-third of the work; the rest was taken up with a wordy preface and equally wordy appendices on Christians in China, Mohammedans, Jews, and Chinese science, philosophy and government. The original manuscript contained numerous errors, but Renaudot added to these in many of his superfluous remarks. Moreover, controversial material extraneous to the translation which was introduced by Renaudot, such as the long appendix "Eclairissement touchant la prédication de la religion Chrétienne à la Chine," provided many opportunities for his critics to attack him.

A number of the Jesuit missionaries in China violently attacked Renaudot's work although their criticisms did not appear in print until some years after his translation was published. The most voluble of the critics were the Fathers Parrenin, de Prémare, and d'Entrecolles.(4) Their lengthy and caustic

(3) *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, vol. 10 (Firenze, 1953), p. 771, and *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 12 (New York, 1911), p. 770. A complete bibliography of his writings is given in *Nouvelle biographie gênêrale depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à nos jours*, vol. 41 (Paris, 1866), cols. 997-999. A detailed account of his part in numerous public controversies may be found in Antoine Villien, *L'abbê Eusèbe Renaudot, essai sur son vie et sur son oeuvre liturgique* (Paris, 1904).

(4) For bio-bibliographical details, see Louis Pfister, *Notices biographiques et bibliographiques sur les Jêsuites de l'ancienne mission de Chine* (Variétés Sinologiques No. 59, Shanghai, 1932-34), pp. 516, 527, 548.

criticisms attacked not only the translation but also the original Arabic work, and many barbs were aimed at Renaudot personally. The general reason given for these attacks was that the work did an injustice to the Chinese and to China. In the words of the famous Orientalist Abel Rémusat:

> "Ce livre célèbre, dont plusieurs passages ne dépareraient pas la collection des Contes arabes, a, de tout temps, excité l'indignation des missionaires de la Chine, à cause des fables et des absurdités dont sont chargées les *Relations* traduites de l'arabe par l'abbé Renaudot, et dont les notes et les additions du traducteur sont loin d'être exemptes. Plusieurs missionnaires se sont attachés à en relever les inexactitudes; mais la réfutation du P. Prémare est la plus compléte et la plus solide."(5)

This "réfutation....la plus complète et la plus solide" appeared in 1724, four years after Renaudot's death and six years after the publication of the *Anciennes relations*. This review attacks Renaudot in the most unfriendly manner, implies that he even may have forged the manuscript (and had made a poor translation of his own forgery), and refutes most of Renaudot's personal remarks and many of those in the original Arabic work.(6)

The missionaries were indeed justified in their critical attitude, for the Arabic work did contain much nonsense and many errors in fact, and Renaudot invited attack by not disclosing details about the manuscript and especially by the dogmatic and often belligerent attitude assumed by him in most of his own comments, many of which were unfavorable toward China and the missionaries there. But on the other hand, these attacks were so violent and personal, and the language so vitriolic, that one may well wonder if they may not have been engendered by personal or religious motives. Some of the criticisms are of a petty nature, and sometimes in themselves are at fault. One such criticism, which started the present inquiry, is directed against a passage in the translation concerned with medical stelae. This passage, as translated by Renaudot, reads as follows:

> "Les Chinois ont une pierre de dix coudées de hauteur elevée dans les places publiques, sur laquelle sont gravez les noms de touts

(5) Abel Rémusat, *Nouveaux mêlanges asiatiques*, vol. 2 (1829), p. 264; quoted by Pfister, *op. cit.*, pp. 527-528.

(6) This long review was written as a letter to a superior in France and was published, *inter alia*, in *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses écrites des missions étrangères, par quelques missionaires de la Compagnie de Jésus*, Nouvelle édition (Toulouse, 1811), vol. 21, pp. 145-188.

> sortes de remèdes, avec la taxe de leur prix. Lors que les pauvres en ont besoin ils reçoivent du tresor, le prix que doit couster chaque remède."(7)

De Prémare has the following to say about this passage although Renaudot made no comment on it:

> "Les lettres étaient donc bien menues, et la pierre d'une largeur bien énorme, car la liste des remèdes Chinois serait seul un juste volume; et je ne conçois pas comment on les eût pu lire a dix coudées de haut sans le secours d'une échelle."(8)

This remark, while not denying the existence of medical stelae in so many words, certainly implies by its petty sarcasm that such objects did not exist in China.(9) This implication is entirely wrong. Medical stelae not only existed in the 9th century when the Arabic work was composed, but also in de Prémare's time, and at least two exist at the present time.

Charitable help for the sick poor has been a common practice in China from ancient times, and Buddhism seems to have been one of the prime forces in this work after its introduction there.(10) The early Buddhist missionaries to China dispensed free medical aid as an act of charity, just as their later western counterparts did, in order to "mend bodies and heal souls," and to gain converts.(11) The oldest medical stelae that still exists in China was created in A. D. 575 as one manifestation of this type of charity.

(7) *Anciennes relations,* p. 36. This passage appears in the translations of Reinaud and Ferrand on pp. 46 and 62 respectively. They agree in general with Renaudot's version, but with one important exception: There is nothing in the two modern versions to correspond with Renaudot's "avec la taxe de leur prix."

(8) *Lettres édifiantes, loc. cit.,* p. 149.

(9) It is indeed ironical that an attempt by the Jesuits to introduce scientific anatomy into China met with similar sarcasm from the Chinese. Thus, in 1815, in the same Galenistic spirit of those ultra-conservative European medical men who opposed and rationalized the discoveries of the pre-Vesalian experimental anatomists, Yü Cheng-hsieh 俞正燮 in his *Kuei ssu lei kao* 癸巳類稿 ridiculed the work on anatomy, the *Jen shen t'u shuo* 人身圖說, compiled by the Jesuits, holding that traditional Chinese views were correct and that bodies of foreigners differed from those of the Chinese. This subject will be treated in detail in a forthcoming study, "The Rise of Anatomy in China."

(10) For a discussion of public medicine, actual or utopian, in pre-Buddhist China, and for a detailed account of Buddhist medical practices in China, see Paul Demieville, *Hōbōgirin: Dictionnaire encyclopédique du Bouddhisme d'après les sources Chinoises et Japonaises* (Paris, 1937), pp. 224-265. Cf. F. Hübotter, *Die chinesische Medizin zu Begin des XX. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig, 1929), pp. 345-346.

(11) For a modern western exposition on this aspect of medicine and religion, see H. W. Boone, "How Can Medical Work be Made Most Helpful to the Cause of the Church in China?," *The China Medical Missionary Journal,* vol. vol. 8 (1894), pp. 13 ff.

Besides medical monuments in stone, there were probably countless numbers of less enduring efforts made to bring free medical advice to the needy public.(12) No less a person than the famous Sung dynasty poet and statesman Su Tung-p'o helped the poor in this manner. While serving in the Hangchow region, he had the more useful prescriptions for common ailments copied out in large characters and posted as magistrate's bulletins in the public squares of the town to make them better known to the common people who could not afford medical help. He also used his own and government funds to establish a public hospital for the poor which was probably the first public hospital in China.(13) Any edition of the *Hang chou t'ung chih* 杭州通志 will give lists of free medical dispensaries established there in the 11th century, and the *Te i lu* 得一錄 gives detailed accounts of the regulations of the Buddhist inspired free dispensaries and shelters for the sick poor and vagrant. According to this work, any needy patient could received free medicine for his ailments if he would submit to the conditions imposed. These included fasting, burning incense as a thanks offering to the God of Medicine, and subscribing to the twelve "commandments."(14)

As far as stone monuments created for the purpose of making medical prescriptions available to the public—the type mentioned in the work ascribed to Sulaymān—are concerned, the following have been noted in Chinese archaeological literature:

1. *Tu i shih tao hsing....fang* 都邑師道興....方, so-called.(15) It is carved on either side of the entrance to one of the caves at the Buddhist site of Lung-men, Honan, and bears a date corresponding to A. D. 575.(16) This long inscription is composed of a Buddhist preamble and one hundred

(12) "To give away medicine and sticking-plaster to the poor is merit, but it is reckoned still greater merit to give away good prescriptions, as these are often a legacy of ancestors.." from James Hutson, *Chinese Life in the Tibetan Foothills* (Shanghai, 1921), p. 59.

(13) Lin Yutang, *The Gay Genius* (New York, 1947), pp. 304-305.

(14) *Te i lu*, Ch. 3. Cf. F. Hirth's "Bausteine zu einer Geschichte der chinesischen Literatur," *T'oung Pao*, vol. 7 (1896), pp. 301-302.

(15) This inscription is transcribed and commented upon at length in the *Chin shih ts'ui pien* 金石萃編, ch. 35, pp. 12a-19a, where it is referred to as 都邑師道興造石像記並治疾方. Modern investigators say that the inscription shows no trace of such a title.

(16) This cave, commonly called *yao fang tung* 藥方洞 "Prescription Grotto," is referred to by Chavannes, *Mission archéologique dans la Chine septentrionale*, vol. 1, pt. 2 (Paris, 1915), pp. 461-467, as Cave V; by S. Mizuno and T. Nagahiro, *Ryūmon sekkutsu no kenkyū* 龍門石屈の研究 (Toyo, 1941), pp. 77-87, *et passim.*, as Cave No. 20; by Kuan Po-i 關百益, *I ch'üeh shih k'o t'u piao* 伊闕石刻圖表 (Kaifeng, 1935), pp. 71-74, as Cave No. 16.

and twenty prescriptions under forty headings.(17) The *Chin shih ts'ui pien* claims a similarity between this text and the prescriptions engraved at Yao-chou, Shensi, which are attributed to Sun Ssu-mo (see no. 3 below). But the *P'ing chin tu pei chi* 平津讀碑記 ch. 3, asserts that there is no connection between the two and that the Lung-meng prescriptions were derived from the 4th century *Chou hou fang* 肘後方 by Ko Hung 葛洪.(18) Mizuno and Nagahiro suggest that these remedies were compiled from various Chinese medical works available in the 6th century.(19) This is in agreement with Chavannes' opinion that these prescriptions are Chinese and do not reflect any Indian or Central Asian influence. Regardless of the sources used, this medical stele of 575 is the earliest one still in existence.

2. *Ch'u teng tsa yao fang* 褚澄雜藥方 A pre-T'ang inscription named after the physician Ch'u Teng and mentioned in the preface to his medical work *Ch'u shih i shu* 褚氏遺書. Because Ch'u flourished during the Chien yuan 建元 period of Southern Ch'i (479–483), this inscription, if it actually did exist, must have antedated the one at Lung-men by about one century.

3. *Sun ssu mo ch'ien chin fang* 孫思邈千金方. It was carved in the Sun Chen-jen shrine 孫眞人祠 on Wu T'ai Shan 五臺山 Yao-chou 耀州, Shensi. Sun Ssu-mo (601?–682), immortalized as Sun Chen-jen, was the Taoist author of the famous medical works *Ch'ien chin yao fang* 千金藥方 which was a large collection of prescriptions, *Yin hai ching wei* 銀海精微, the earliest Chinese work on ophthalmology, and others. The title of the medical inscription engraved in his shrine in Shensi indicates that it comes from the first of these two works. But this inscription and the one at Lung-men (no. 1) are identical in all details, even to missing characters, so it appears that a

(17) Chavannes, *op. cit.*, translates a number of these prescriptions which treat common ailments ranging from heart trouble to hemorrhoids. This translation shows his method of working, at least in this particular case: he relied upon the transcription given in the *Chin shih ts'ui pien* rather than the rubbing of the inscription which he published. The transcription is both inaccurate and incomplete as a comparison with the rubbing will clearly demonstrate. Mizuno and Nagahiro, *op. cit.*, pp. 295–298, provide a much more accurate transcription of the entire text; they sometimes depend upon the *Chin shih ts'ui pien* for the reconstruction of defaced characters, and sometimes they identify characters not given in this work. No transcription of the inscription is given by Kuan Po-i.

(18) On his work, see Hübotter, *op. cit.*, and K. Chimin Wong and Lien-teh Wu, *History of Chinese Medicine: Being a Chronicle of Medical Happenings in China from Ancient Times to the Present Period*, second edition (Shanghai, 1936), p. 82.

(19) Mizuno and Nagahiro, *op. cit.*, p. 81, where they enumerate some of the possible sources.

(20) *Op. cit.*, p. 81, n. 16.

(21) *P'ing chin tu pei chi*, ch. 3.

rubbing of the Lung-men prescriptions was the source of this later inscription in Shensi.(22)

4. *Ch'ih yao fang* 齒藥方 on Hua Shan 華山, Hua-yin 華陰, Shensi.(23)

5. *Lü wei k'o yang ch'i fang* 呂謂刻養氣方. Dated corresponding to A. D. 1122, this medical inscription was carved at Liu hsien yen 劉仙岩 in Kuangsi. It is still in existence.(24)

6. *Ch'en wen chung kung k'o yao fang* 陳文忠公刻藥方 This medical stele was erected at the post-house at Kuei-chou 桂州, Kuangsi, by Ch'en Yao-sou 陳堯叟 when he was an official there.(25)

7. *Fan min k'o liao ping fang shu* 范旻刻療病方書 When Fan Min became magistrate of Yung-chou, Kuangsi, in 960, he found that the common people there overindulged in lascivious and spiritual practices and had no respect for the use of medicine. He issued edicts prohibiting these practices and spent part of his own income to provide medicine for the poor. Later, he had a number of prescriptions engraved in a stone slab which was erected at his yamen.(26)

8. *Sun teng shih shih yao fang pei* 孫登石室藥方碑 This stele contains 20–30 prescriptions and is said to have been found in a cave a short distance southwest of Anyang around 1070.(27)

Although the above list could probably be expanded, it is sufficient to prove that there is no question about the existence of medical stelae in China. The question which remains to be answered is: why did Father de Prémare fail to recognize the existence of these monuments?

The Jesuits in China in the 18th century were, on the whole, accomplished scholars in the sciences and humanities as well as theology, and they took a sincere and profound interest in all phases of Chinese culture. Much of Europe's early knowledge of things Chinese was due to the penetrating studies made by these missionaries who were well versed in the Chinese language. De Prémare, in casting doubt on the existence of medical stelae, certainly could not have been acting in the same spirit as John Barrow, secretary to the 1793 Macartney embassy to Peking, who made sweeping condemnations

(22) *Op. cit.*, and *Chin shih ts'ui pien*, ch. 35.
(23) *Yü shih*, 語石, ch. 5.
(24) *Op. cit.*
(25) *Ibid.*
(26) *Sung shih* 宋史, ch. 249, and *Ta ming i t'ung ming sheng chih* 大明一統名勝志, ch. 8.
(27) *An yang hsien chin shih lu* 安陽縣金石錄 ch. 2, p. 16a.

of Chinese painting and sculpture through lack of appreciation or experience.[28] Even if he had no personal knowledge of these prescriptions in stone, he could easily have determined the authenticity of the statement about these objects in the Arabic manuscript by consulting with Chinese scholars with whom the Jesuits freely associated. Why, then, did the scholarly de Prémare fail to approach this matter in an objective manner and use the resources at his disposal? And why did he resort to criticism which, in this instance, was petty, unjustified, and beneath the dignity of a man of his stature? It is not the purpose of this paper to investigate such questions in detail, but a tentative solution may be offered to explain this paradox.

As pointed out above, Renaudot's biographers all agree that he was an ardent supporter of Jansenism. This is the name given to the interpretation of the teachings of St. Augustine by Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638), Bishop of Ypres, and the resulting religious movement. He attacked what he considered to be three evils in the religious theory and practice of his time and this brought him into sharp conflict with the Jesuits and caused a violent storm in France which lasted for many years. The Jesuits eventually obtained a papal bull in 1713 which was designed to eradicate Jansenism, but it was not immediately successful. The movement had not been entirely suppressed when Renaudot's translation appeared in 1718, and there was much bitter feeling and disorder in religious circles in France long after the bull was published. Not only was Renaudot a confirmed Jansenist, he also took part in the celebrated Question of Rites by defending the priests of the Missions Etrangèrs against the Jesuits in this serious quarrel, and he made many bitter and unkind remarks about the latter.[29] He also expressed himself in the same manner in many of the unnecessary remarks appended to his translation. And, as stated before, he made many remarks in the same work that put the Chinese in an unfavorable light. Thus the Jesuits, especially those in China, had ample reason to cross swords with Renaudot.

For these reasons it is suggested that the animosity engendered by personal and religious motives caused de Prémare to become careless in his eagerness to refute Renaudot at every possible opportunity, and consequently to make his sarcastic comment on medical stelae in China without proper investigation.

(28) "With regard to painting, they can be considered in no other light than as miserable daubers." p. 323, and "In a country where painting is at so low an ebb, it would be in vain to expect much execution from the chissel..In the whole empire there is not a statue, a hewn pillar, or a column that deserves to be mentioned." p. 328 of his *Travels in China* (London, 1804).

(29) Antoine Villien, *op. cit.*, pp. 79 ff.