

PREFATORY NOTE

The translations presented in this volume were originally undertaken in 1967 at the request of Professor Hellmut Wilhelm, director of the Chinese Dynastic Histories Project of the University of Washington in Seattle (since then succeeded by Professor Jack L. Dull), for publication in the series of the Han Dynasty History Project. However, the envisaged publication of the work by the University of Washington Press eventually proved to be impossible. We are therefore very grateful to the Netherlands Organization for the Advancement of Pure Research for their decision to grant a generous subsidy towards the publication of the present volume. These circumstances have caused some delay, for in principle the manuscript was completed by the summer of 1975; the intervening years have enabled us to introduce some minor revisions and some additional information, mainly based on recent periodical literature.

The work was done in close collaboration with Dr. M. A. N. Loewe, Lecturer in Chinese Studies in the University of Cambridge. We made the translation together, and together we decided which points merited annotation. Dr. Loewe wrote the first draft of the Introduction and I made the first draft of the notes, but we subsequently revised and emended each other's work, so that it is now difficult to distinguish between our individual contributions.

As Dr. Loewe was hard pressed by other commitments, I undertook the textcritical study of chapter 123 of the *Shih-chi*, the Memoir on Ta Yüan, a study which is indispensable for the correct appreciation of its counterpart, i.e. chapter 61 of the *Han shu*, the Memoir on Chang Ch'ien and Li Kuang-li. As the present work is destined first and foremost for the non-sinological reader, we considered it inadvisable to include that study here. It has been separately published in *T'oung Pao* 61 (1975), but its results have been assimilated in the Introduction, the translation and the annotation of *Han shu* ch. 61.

The annotation to our translation is extensive, for we have consistently tried to elucidate all points that would not be immediately clear to the non-sinological reader as well as to those students of Chinese history and culture whose field lies outside the domain of the Han period and Han institutions. We are well aware that recently the

writer of a review-article¹ has criticized the continued use of an annotated translation as the vehicle for presenting material concerning "the barbarians" assembled by Chinese historians. He believes that this results in "the background of policies and trends of development" being "appended to the facts; the essentials are appended to the accidentals". This procedure he calls a "pernicious tradition" and "an intellectually confining and stifling ... form".

Now this author is undoubtedly right in those cases where a wealth of material is available and where the quality of the basic texts does not constitute a major problem. In the present case, however, it is the basic texts which are at issue. As long as there remain doubts about the reliability of the few fundamental texts, and, consequently, as long as "the facts" cannot be definitely established, the first task must be the close critical scrutiny of these texts and the presentation of a faithful translation, openly avowing all doubts and difficulties, and warning the non-specialist reader against all possible pitfalls so as to enable him to avoid hasty conclusions. Still, the survey presented on pp. 39-66 of the Introduction partly fills the need expressed by the reviewer quoted above.

Some time ago, a colleague drew my attention to the remark made by the German historian Beloch that "the historian believes what his sources say only when it is proved that this is correct".² We cannot vouch for the historical reliability of what our sources say; we have only done our best to make their voices speak, however haltingly and falteringly, in an unambiguous manner.

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¹ Timothy Connor, "Translating the 'barbarians': a new book in an old tradition", in *Harvard Journal of Asian Studies* 32 (1972), pp. 240-255; this specific criticism is to be found on p. 241.

² K. J. Beloch, *Griechische Geschichte*, vol. I, pt. 2 (1916²), p. 16: "Der Historiker glaubt was in den Quellen steht nur, wenn es bewiesen wird, dass es richtig ist".