

THE MOHAMMEDANS OF CHINA

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By ISAAC MASON, F.R.G.S.

MOST Westerners who have resided in China, or who have read widely about the Chinese, are aware that Mohammedans form an appreciable part of China's population. It is also known that in the Republican flag of five strips of colour, the white strip is considered to represent the Moslem inhabitants of the land. Yet comparatively few know much about the Far-Eastern followers of the Arabian Prophet, so it may be that the China Society will find it not without interest to spend a little time hearing something further about the Mohammedans of China.

Estimates as to their present numbers vary all the way from four millions to thirty millions. There can be little doubt that the larger figure is excessive, and on the other hand, the estimate of Commandant d'Ollone, which is the lowest, is probably much too low. Mr. G. F. Andrew—who lives in Kansu—in his recent book, "The Crescent in North West China," estimates the number in Kansu alone at about three millions. The most careful calculation I know of is found in Mr. Marshall Broomhall's "Islam in China," and is based on over 200 replies to questions sent to missionaries; the estimates so obtained range between five and ten millions; in the absence of a reliable census, we may assume the number to be about eight millions, scattered over the whole country, but found in larger proportions in Kansu, Yunnan, Szechwan and Chihli, of China Proper, and in Sin Kiang and Chinese Turkestan on the North Western borders.

When, and how, Moslems first entered China, are matters of uncertainty about which many differing views have been held. The traditions of the Moslems are interesting, but mostly rest on very slender foundations. We do not know of any Chinese Moslem book written as long ago as three hundred years; a bibliography of about 150 titles is known to exist—of which I have collected over 100; some of these profess to be historical, and tell of Moslems reaching China 1,300 years ago; but no satisfactory proofs are given for such claims, and the silence which covers 1,000 years from the supposed entry down to the 17th Century, and the absence of documents, must be

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regarded as unfavourable to the claim. There exist a few monuments which are referred to in support of the early-entry claim; the most famous of these is a stone tablet in a mosque at Si-an fu, and it is dated A.D. 742. The inscription on it says, among other things, "The teaching of Mohammed prevailed at first only in the West and was not heard of in China until the time of the Emperor K'ai Huang of the Sui dynasty (A.D. 581-601), when it entered China and gradually spread throughout the Empire." The evidences for and against the genuineness of this monument have been carefully weighed by Mr. Broomhall, who concluded that it is an "extraordinary forgery," a conclusion in which I concur. I need not here enter fully into the reasons for this judgment, but just remark that the date given is prior to the Hegira, and before Mohammed had received his first revelations. As the stone claims to have been erected only 140 years after the events referred to, it is not easy to account for such a discrepancy of dates; it is most likely due to the copying of an erroneous calculation made centuries after the date claimed for the stone, and is therefore one of the reasons for rejecting the monument as a forgery. The mosque at Si-an fu is a very old one, and from Chinese writings it is known to have been repaired on several occasions, under the Sung dynasty in 1127 A.D., under the Yuan dynasty in 1315 A.D., and again under the Ming dynasty in the 14th and 15th centuries; it is probable that the monument referred to was erected on one of these occasions to perpetuate the supposed history; it is frequently referred to in Moslem books, and is considered by Chinese Moslems to be genuine.

Another ancient monument is found in the "Prophet-Remembrance" mosque at Canton; it is dated 1351 A.D., and has a bilingual inscription in Arabic and Chinese, recording the rebuilding of the premises; there is a vague allusion to a Sahib who went to the East "by command of the Prophet about 800 years" previous to the inscription, which would take us back to some little time before Mohammed's birth, and is therefore valueless for our purpose.

To continue with Moslem traditions before turning to other sources of information as to the entry of Islam into China, we next refer to the writings of Liu Chai-lien of Nanking, the most famous of Chinese Moslem writers, who, 200 years ago, after long preparation wrote "The True Annals of the Prophet of Arabia." This is the standard "Life" of Mohammed in

Chinese, and an English translation by the present writer is now available.* The account given of the first entry of Moslems into China says that in the sixth year of K'ai Huang of the Sui dynasty, (A.D. 586) there was seen in the sky a strange star; the Emperor commanded the Chief Astronomer to divine its meaning, and he said that an extraordinary person was appearing in the West. The Emperor sent an envoy to investigate, and he arrived in Mecca after about a year's travelling. The envoy desired Mohammed to proceed to the East, but he declined; he sent, however, his maternal uncle Saad Wakkas, and three others, to accompany the envoy to China. The envoy secretly had a portrait of the Prophet made to take back with him; this was given to the Emperor who proceeded to worship it, and when he arose, the scroll was there but the picture had vanished. Saad Wakkas explained that this was due to the influence of the Prophet who had forbidden to men the worship of images and the "kowtow." The Emperor was so impressed that he gave directions for the building of the "Prophet-Remembrance" mosque at Canton.

There is still to be seen at Canton an ancient tomb which Moslems say is the tomb of Saad Wakkas, the "maternal uncle" of the Prophet. The Wakkas mentioned in Muir's "Life of Mohammed" never travelled to the East; his son Saad fought at Bedr and Ohod in Arabia, and was ultimately buried at Medina, never having been near China. The date given for the arrival of the apostle is prior to the Hegira, and as the accounts are otherwise contradictory, it is evident that we are dealing with tradition only. The tomb is probably that of some Moslem pioneer, but of a much later period than is claimed by tradition.

Two small Moslem books written in Chinese and named "Hui Hui Yüan Lai" (The First Coming of the Moslems), and "Hsi Lai Tsung P'u" (The First Entry of the Moslems from the West), contain traditions of the coming to China of Mohammedans by overland routes. There is the same story of an omen being given to the Emperor about a wonderful man appearing in the West; the Emperor referred to here is T'ai Tsung of the T'ang dynasty (A.D. 628) some years later than is given in the previous tradition. An envoy was sent, and apostles went to China and were received with favour; they were encouraged to practise their religion and eventually it was arranged that 3000

* "The Arabian Prophet," Translated by I. MASON, F.R.G.S. (LUTZ & Co., 1921.)

Moslem soldiers should take up residence in China, wives being found for them from the province of Kiangsu. It is implied that we have here the source of the Moslem population of China Proper as apart from those of the outlying dependencies who were probably made Moslems by contact with their Moslem neighbours of Central Asia.

Turning now to the available records apart from those found in purely Moslem books, mention should be made of an Arab geographer, Ibn Khurdadhibeh, who, in a book composed in A.D. 846 gives descriptions of the roads leading to China both by sea and land. Relations were principally maintained by sea, and the geographer describes the harbours and cities of the sea border, and says it is two months' journey along the coast. Another Arab writer, Abu Zaid, says that in 878, after the capture of Khanfu (Canton), a large number of foreigners perished, among them being Moslems, Jews and Christians. The same writer mentions an Arab trader who went from Canton to Si-an fu.

These accounts apparently imply the quiet observance of the Moslem religion by traders and others who arrived from abroad and brought their faith with them for their own satisfaction rather than with propagandist aims among the Chinese. It is probable that many small communities of foreign Moslems were formed in this way. There is a record in stone at Ch'ian-chon Fu, the nearest commercial town to the north of Canton, which, if we may trust the inscription of 1310, proves the existence of a mosque there in 1010.

In the Chinese *T'ang shu* there are records of several embassies of the Caliph to the Chinese Court in the 7th and 8th centuries. Bretschneider says that "there can be no doubt that at the time of the T'ang, many Mohammedans were settled in China." In the Liao dynasty an embassy from the Ta Shih—by which name the Arabs were known—was received in 924, and it was during that dynasty that the term "Hui lui" for Moslems was first used. The History of the Sung (960—1280) mentions some twenty embassies sent by the Ta Shih.

The first European mention of the Saracens in China appears to be that of Marco Polo who came across them in his travels in the latter part of the 13th century.

We may sum up by saying that while the Moslem claims for a phenomenally early and somewhat sensational entry cannot be accepted, yet there is sufficient evidence to justify the

belief that some Mohammedans reached China during the early centuries of the Moslem era; there were two routes of arrival, by sea and by land; that by sea went as far as Hangchow, and very little attempt was made to advance into the interior. So Moslems arriving by water remained at the coast, and those by land remained in the interior, forming communities at certain centres. In all probability the arrivals were not numerous, nor were the Moslems of much prominence before the 13th century of our era.

In 1262, after the accession of Kublai Khan, a decree appeared ordering that the Moslems, among others, should do their share of military duty, which would imply that they were then regarded as an integral part of the nation. In 1271 a Mussulman observatory was established at Peking, with a Persian at the head of it; in the following year a Medical Hall was started at Peking by a Moslem. In 1289 a Moslem High School was established in Honan province, and about 200 families were given grants of land. It is recorded that Sayid Adjal—a reputed descendant of the Prophet—was appointed by Kublai Khan as governor of Yunnan, perhaps from 1273 to 1279. His son Nasir-ud-Din, mentioned by Marco Polo, did much to spread Islam. He also became governor of Yunnan, where he died in 1292. From the time of Kublai Khan the number of Moslems increased considerably, by immigrations and intermarriages, by conversions, and by the adoption of children; the increase was most evident in the western parts of China, Kansu and Yunnan having become especially the strongholds of Islam; it was in these provinces that political risings took place during the Manchu reign, when the Moslems made attempts to become independent.

The Mohammedans of China style themselves the "Ch'ing Chên Chiao," the Pure and True Religion. More familiarly they use the term "Chiao mên" which is often seen written on a small signboard exposed in the shops of believers, especially those dealing in food stuffs. The most common term in general use by believers and others alike is "Hui hui chiao." The character "Hui" is well understood in its general meaning of "To return," or "go back,"; but it is by no means clear how the term came to be used in connection with the Moslems. Famous sinologists disagree on this matter, and Moslem books give varying interpretations; it would take too long to give the several attempted explanations, and as I have not at present a

satisfactory theory to advance myself, I will not delay over the point.

It is sometimes asserted that the Moslems of China form a type which can be easily distinguished from other Chinese, thus indicating their foreign origin, and that the type has persisted through centuries. Mr. G. F. Andrew in his recent book expresses this view very decidedly; he says: "Although they have adopted the Chinese style of dress they indulge nevertheless in peculiarities sufficiently marked to distinguish them on sight. In features, the high nasal bridge, the absence of the pronounced Oriental cheek-bone, the splendid build and haughty carriage, the tendency to cultivate the beard, in contrast to the Chinaman who usually objects to such an appendage till he has reached the age of forty, all single out the Hui-hui from among the sons of Han." Many notable observers deny that this is the case, though it is admitted that individuals are found with faces differing from the accepted Mongolian type. I have seen such individuals, but in the main I have found little in the facial or physical appearance of Moslems I have known to distinguish them from their neighbours of other faiths. Chinese faces vary very considerably, and differences exist among the Moslems as amongst all other sections. In habits and deportment, and by their clannish social and religious life, Moslems may be detected from others, but not, in my experience, by special racial features.

In political and social status the Moslems have long stood on practical equality with the general population; in places where they have been very numerous a more rigid Mohammedan social life has been possible and religious zeal has occasionally led to fanaticism and rebellion. The Government has at times used strong methods of repression, and at other times has given great power to Mohammedan officials and followed conciliatory methods. In the greater part of the country, where Moslems are few and scattered, they seem to have been treated with fairness, and in general they are law-abiding and dutiful citizens. In official life they have been much more prominent on the military side than as civil rulers; their traditions as warriors may partly account for this, but it may also have been in part due to the fact that civil official life necessitated much more contact with religious and social duties at variance with their own religious beliefs and practices than was called for from military officers. Another reason why few rose high in civil

officialdom may have been that Moslems in general are not great students of Chinese classical literature. Boys spend some of their time in Moslem schools learning something of their faith and traditions, and often the rudiments of Arabic. There has not been the same ambition to master Chinese literature, except on the part of a few, therefore in the days when this was the only gate of entrance to civil official life, it is not surprising that few Moslems found entry through it, and their young men preferred to ride the horse and draw the bow in the military competitions of the "Wu hsün-ts'ai." It may be added that military officials in the Manchu times were not altogether exempt from certain ceremonies of worship at temples; but Moslems seem to have made a compromise with conscience and went with the rest; one said to me long ago in Szechwan that though his bodily presence was there, and he shared in the prostrations, his heart was not there, so it didn't matter!

Polygamy exists amongst Moslems in China as elsewhere. The Koran allows believers to have four lawful wives at the same time, but for obvious reasons this permission is taken advantage of by comparatively few. As polygamy has long been practised among the wealthier Chinese, the Moslems have not on that account been regarded as peculiar; probably the practice has been one which has lessened religious diversity.

Footbinding has been practised among Chinese women in general, and no difference has been made by Moslem women. This strengthens the belief that very few women entered China as Moslems immigrants; the marriages were with women of the country who retained footbinding as a matter of common custom. Women from outside would not have been likely to adopt it.

The veil for women is seldom seen in China; it is found only at and around Ho Chou in Kansu of the Moslem communities. It is made of black silk and is worn below the eyes.

Chinese Mohammedans practically all speak the Chinese language as their mother tongue; only one group is distinguished by their language—the Salars—who live at Hsiün-hua T'ing, on the right bank of the Huang Ho; they speak a corrupt form of Turki. A considerable number learn more or less Arabic; the *a-hong* or mullahs use it in conducting services, and others repeat transliterations of Arabic sounds represented by Chinese characters. Believers who make the Pilgrimage often learn some Arabic, and the ordinary Moslem is proud