

**THE OLDEST BOOK OF THE  
CHINESE, THE YH-KING,  
AND ITS AUTHORS, VOL.  
I, HISTORY AND METHOD**

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The Oldest Book of the Chinese, the Yh-King, and Its Authors, Vol. I, History and Method by A. Terrien de Lacouperie

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# THE OLDEST BOOK OF THE CHINESE

## THE YH-KING

AND ITS AUTHORS.

BY

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VOL. I.

HISTORY AND METHOD

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## INTRODUCTION.

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SUMMARY.—I. How the discovery that the *Yh-King* was based upon old documents and vocabularies has been misunderstood for a foreign origin. II. New translators and writers on the subject since 1893-4. III. Symbolism of *Yh* in *Yh-King*. IV. The *Yh* of *Chü* was probably an adaptation of parts of the *Kwei-tsang*. V. Instances of very ancient lore hidden in the *Yh-King*.

### I.

THE *Yh-King*, the first in rank of the canonical books of China, was the result of a transformation in the twelfth century B.C. of an older work made of documents very ancient in date, and which entitles it to be called the oldest book of the Chinese. I came to that conclusion twelve years ago, and since that time the proofs on which it was based have grown stronger every year. The discrimination of its various strata and sources does away with the apparently insoluble meaning of the work, insolubility shown by the 2,200 or more explanations which have been suggested in China, and the remarkable discrepancies appearing in the European renderings of the text.

The views put forward in several previous papers and in the first part of the present work are simply that the basis of this most abstruse book of the Chinese consisted, for the greater part, of vocabulary lists or *glossarial explanations* of the ideograms forming the heading of every chapter, and that these lists had been framed by the early Chinese leaders for the benefit and teaching of their followers, in imitation of similar lists used in Anterior Asia, with which they

were acquainted, explaining the various uses and meanings of the ideographical characters of the writing which had been taught to them. Now there is a great difference between that contention and an assumed western origin of the work. It has been erroneously and repeatedly stated, at first by *The Athenæum*, Jan. 21, 1882, that we wanted to acknowledge in the *Yh-King*, an Akkadian book, a Babylonian work, or a foreign vocabulary, all statements equally false and inaccurate, as if to throw discredit on our researches.

Although, as shown by the previous exposé, the question of West Asiatic origin of the Chinese civilisation is distinct from the suggested explanation of the *Yh-King*, this side-question (the most important at large, but secondary with special reference to the *Yh-King*) has overshadowed the principal, and the chief point of my views concerning that most ancient Chinese book, viz., that the main portion of it rests on lists of the meanings special to the written symbols headings of the chapters, has been overlooked. In the thoroughly unscientific condition of present sinology, where routine and vested interests take the lead over science, our first communications on the subject could be but variously received. Abused by some, even before anything was published yet, or after the first part of my paper; received scientifically by others, they have been however praised and accepted by not a few independent scholars and colleagues in sinology. In order to avoid personal allusions and remain in the serene atmosphere of scientific research, I refrain mentioning any name. Buried in the fascicula of periodicals my purpose has often been misconceived.

Notwithstanding this unsatisfactory state of things, the little that has been known of the present researches, contemporary with the most disappointing translation by the venerable Dr. J. Legge, in the *Sacred Books of the East*, has awakened a greater and wider interest than could be expected in the matter. Several publications have been made, which we

shall notice directly in this introduction. But the awakened interest has not yet received satisfaction, and we may say cannot be satisfied until our new method of translating the *Yh-King* has been proved. In these conditions it has been thought necessary to re-publish separately, as the first part of the present work, the extensive paper of mine which appeared in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, for 1882-83. The paragraphs 1 to 41 are exactly the same, while the others, viz. 42 to 117 have been slightly altered and improved for a second edition. The actual printing of pp. 1 to 101 was made in 1883, and had remained in sheets at the printers since that time. The pp. 102-121 are new.

## II.

The first writer in the field,<sup>1</sup> after the publication of our first articles on the subject, was Dr. J. Edkins, of Peking, in an elaborate article on the *Yh-King as a book of divination*,<sup>2</sup> where he has re-translated from his own point of view with a good deal of extraneous matter the chapters vii. xiii. xv. xx. xxx. and xxxi., translated below (pp. 69-91). His contention is that the work has been devised as a book of divination, and that the internal arrangement of the text and augural words, show a wilful connection with the symbolic meanings attributed to the separate lines composing the *Kwas*. This we are quite disposed to admit, as the result of the transformation undergone by the work under the pencil and interpretation of Wen Wang and Chou Kung.

The first part of the French translation by Mr. C. L. F. Philastre, mentioned below (p. 49) has appeared in 1885, including the *Kwas* 1 to 30, but the second part with the conclusions of the author have not yet appeared (May 1892). All that has been published is free of anything like the self-

<sup>1</sup> We leave aside the many articles which were only reviews of the subject.

<sup>2</sup> J.R.A.S. 1884, vol. xvi. p. 371, 372.

<sup>3</sup> *Annales du Musée Guimet*, tom viii.