

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

When my friend Li Ling asked me in late summer of last year to translate the first volume of what promised—in spite of his own modest disclaimer—to be the definite monograph on the Zidanku Silk Manuscripts, I knew immediately that this request was too important to turn down. I consequently pushed aside all other commitments and freed up the time needed to do the job. I am now glad to have done it, for it has been a tremendous learning experience. Moreover, having more or less closely followed Li Ling's multiyear project of research on the Zidanku Silk Manuscripts since the beginnings of our acquaintance in the late 1980s, I feel honored at last to have become a small part of that project in this final stage; and having largely eschewed doing research on early China's "Writings on Bamboo and Silk" until now, I am grateful for this opportunity at last to engage with one very significant body of such material. Of course, the volume I have translated still does not involve hands-on philological work on the manuscript texts—a task that would be well beyond my capabilities—but reconstructs the archaeological context of the Zidanku Silk Manuscripts, traces their history of transmission in China and the United States, and explains aspects of their research history. These topics relate to my long-established historiographical interests, and the new knowledge gained in the course of this project will certainly carry over into my future research and teaching.

Although the difficulty of translating the present volume does not compare to that of the translation and English-language annotation of the texts inscribed on the Zidanku Silk Manuscripts themselves—a task Li Ling commendably entrusted to the very capable hands of our mutual friend Donald Harper—the challenges of the present translation (especially in the case of Part B, Section I) should not be underestimated. My aim throughout has been to produce a text that will be found accessible by a non-Sinological scholarly readership, at the same time as adhering to the scholarly conventions that readership is used to. I have therefore taken some liberties with both the formulations and the order of presentation of the original text. Moreover, I have verified all citations from classical texts and inserted further information in many places. My additions to the footnotes are marked by brackets; passages that I have added to the main text, by contrast, are not specially marked, as the content of these passages is in most cases directly derived from other publications by the author. I mention all this only in case a conscientious reader is disoriented by the discrepancies between the published Chinese text and this English version: the two are indeed not completely identical.

All my interventions into Li Ling's original text were not only condoned but strongly encouraged by the author, and I am grateful for his confidence in my ability to get his intentions across. Now I can only hope that his trust has not been misplaced.

Aside from exposing me to a great deal of information of which I had no previous knowledge, this translation project has also been the touchstone for many a trip down memory lane as I was being reminded of my own personal acquaintance with many of the protagonists. Some of them are no longer alive. For instance, I remember meeting the irascible and charmingly opinionated Noel Barnard; Chicago's Chinese librarian extraordinaire Tsien Tsuen-hsuei; the prematurely departed He Linyi, his generation's leading pioneer in Warring States paleography; the ever-immaculate esthete Max Loehr; Shang Zhitan, always his father Shang Chengzuo's filial son; the kindly Wang Xu, his generation's foremost textile expert; the sage-like and painfully modest Zhang Zhenglang, whose shyness belied his formidable scholarly prowess; the towering linguist Zhu Dexi, with his fine sense of humor; and, of course, my revered teachers K. C. Chang and Hayashi Minao. And there are other memories. I was present at the 1990 conference in Washington when Li Ling and I for the first (and for me, so far only) time saw Zidanku Manuscript 1 with our own eyes. Like Li Ling—though unfortunately not in his company—I once spent an unforgettable day with the late Dr. Paul Singer at his ground-floor apartment in Summit, New Jersey, filled to the brim with priceless Chinese antiques. Unlike Li Ling, moreover, I actually met the late Dr. Arthur M. Sackler during a conference on Chinese bronzes at Harvard in 1983; much later, at a function in Washington, D.C., I also met the late Mrs. Else Sackler, and I remain grateful to her and her daughter, Dr. Elizabeth Sackler, for their support of some of my early research. And I am told that the late John Hadley Cox once attended a lecture of mine to “check me out” after receiving the letter from Li Ling translated in Part II, Section XI(3), but regrettably he did not introduce himself; I suspect I did not pass muster. ...

Fortunately, many other protagonists in the story of the Zidanku Silk Manuscripts whom I have met in person are still with us. Mentioning them all would amount to a tedious exercise in name-dropping. Let it merely be said that many agreeable moments are coming to mind when reminiscing about my encounters with them.

For help in the course of this project I am grateful to three loyal friends: to Meng Fanzhi of Peking University for serving as a liaison with the author and for his unflagging logistical support; to Hanmo Zhang of Renmin University for carefully checking my text; and to Donald Harper of the University of Chicago for sharing his translation of Li Ling's then as-yet unpublished 2017 article on the Zidanku Silk Manuscripts (with which I have largely harmonized my renderings herein),¹ and for taking me to see some of the originals from the John Hadley Cox Archive at the University of Chicago Library. My interactions with them have greatly enhanced my enjoyment of this project.

Above all, I would like to take this opportunity to express my tremendous admiration of Li Ling, and to offer my profound thanks to him for being an inexhaustible source of inspiration and wisdom over many years. May my modest effort to make a portion of his important scholarship accessible to an international audience prove to be a durable token of our friendship.

Los Angeles,
December 2016
L. v. F.

¹ Li Ling 2017.