

HISTORICAL
NOTE

We're happy to share with you our fascination with the history and culture of Ch'in, a fascination of which this book is just the latest part.

Imperial Lady, although it is a work of fantasy, is based on an historical incident that has become one of the most beloved of Chinese tales and has served as the inspiration for countless poems and stories: the life of Chao Chun, the concubine who became, first, a princess of the Han dynasty, and, second, the queen of the *shan-yu* of the Hsiung-nu, the fierce, nomadic people who are, to a great extent, the ancestors of the Huns and Mongols.

In a graceful and useful book, *The Purple Wall: The Story of the Great Wall of China* (London: Robert Hale, Ltd., 1960), Peter Lum describes the Chao Chun of Han dynasty history as the daughter of a Hupei official. Like our own Silver Snow, the Chao Chun who actually lived was beautiful and high-spirited, rejected the offer of the corrupt eunuch-artist Mao Yen-shou, and lived for a time in isolation before she was packed off to marry, first, the *shan-yu* Khujanga, and then his heir, Vughturoi.

That much is history. Thereafter, history and legend co-exist. In some rather romantic accounts of Chao Chun, she throws herself into the Yellow River at the pass between the

river and the Great Wall because she cannot bear to leave China. Because of her tears, the grass along the river there is greener than it is anyplace else; and the river there is called the River of the Princess. In other accounts, the "real" Chao Chun bore a son to Khujanga, who died in 31 B.C. (a year after the death of the Emperor Yuan Ti, a date that we have simply altered for the purposes of the story). Thereafter, she indeed married Vughturoi, ruled as queen, with, apparently, a good deal of influence on peaceful relations with China, until 20 B.C. when Vughturoi died, leaving Chao Chun a thirty-three-year-old widow with two daughters by her second husband.

At this point in the story, history again fades into myth. No one knows for certain what happened to Chao Chun. Some say that she died within a few years, others that she died of grief when a new *shan-yu* murdered her son, still others that she and her son were both murdered in A.D. 18. Though she never did return to China, legend has it that she asked to be buried on its borders and that she is indeed buried by the Yellow River, beneath a huge artificial mound that is still called the Tomb of the Flower Garden of Chao Chun.

Also a part of history are the suits of jade armor, which are meticulously described and most beautifully photographed in Edmund Capon and William MacQuitty's *Princes of Jade* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, Ltd., 1973), which deals with the discovery on June 27, 1968, of the bodies of the Han dynasty Prince Liu Sheng and his consort Princess Tou Wan, which were decked in precisely the type of jade armor that we have given to Silver Snow.

We take much of the rest of the story from the many fine books that Western writers have provided to introduce 5,000 years of an astonishing wealth of culture to Western readers, whose knowledge of one of the most ancient civilizations on Earth is all too often limited to "here be dragons" on the map or "one from column A" on a Chinese menu. In the past thirty years, however, interest in China has flourished, extended far beyond the province of scholars, explorers, and the somewhat

eccentric "China hands" of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

For those readers who might be interested in learning more about the poetry and history of Han and Hsiung-nu alike, we would like to suggest Michael Loewe's *Crisis and Conflict in Han China* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1974), which provided the inspiration for the story of Silver Snow's father, as well as Loewe's *Everyday Life in Early Imperial China* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1968).

The fourth- or fifth-century Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, with a foreword by General Basil Liddell Hart (Oxford University Press, 1963), is undergoing somewhat of a renaissance of its own in the wake of current interest in Eastern martial arts.

Otto J. Maenchen-Helfen's monumental *The World of the Huns* (University of California, 1973) is probably the standard work on the Huns and Hsiung-nu, and is far more readable than it appears.

Finally, the poems in *Imperial Lady* are taken from actual verse from the Han and T'ang Dynasties; they are drawn, primarily, from two volumes and used with permission: *The Orchid Boat: Woman Poets of China*, translated and edited by Kenneth Rexroth and Ling Chung (New York: McGraw Hill, 1972); and *Translations from the Chinese* by Arthur Waley (Knopf, 1941).

We would also like to acknowledge our indebtedness to Dr. Morris Rossabi, director of The China Institute, in New York City.

Whether you actually do travel to China (as we would like to do) or travel no farther than your own bookstore, we wish you a happy and rewarding journey.

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