

LIKI



Anonymous

Li Ki

The Book of Rites

Translator: James Legge

e-artnow, 2021

Contact: info@e-artnow.org

EAN: 4066338130198

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INTRODUCTION.

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CHAPTER I. THREE DIFFERENT LÎ KING, OR RITUAL BOOKS, ACKNOWLEDGED IN CHINA. THE RECOVERY OF THE FIRST TWO, AND FORMATION OF THE THIRD, UNDER THE HAN DYNASTY.

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How Confucius spoke of the Lî.

1. Confucius said, 'It is by the Odes that the mind is aroused; by the Rules of Propriety that the character is established; from Music that the finish is received.' On another occasion he said, 'Without the Rules of Propriety, respectfulness becomes laborious bustle; carefulness, timidity; boldness, insubordination; and straightforwardness, rudeness.'

These are two specimens of the manner in which Confucius expressed himself about the Lî, the Rules of Propriety or Ceremonial Usages, recognised in his time. It is a natural inference from his language that there were Collections of such Rules which could be read and studied; but he does not expressly say so.

How Mencius spoke of them.

The language of Mencius was more definite. In at least two passages of his works we find the usual form of quotation Lî Yüeh, 'The Lî says,' which, according to the analogy of Shih Yüeh, 'The Shih King, or Book of Poetry, says,' might be rendered,

'The Lî. King says.' In another passage, he says to a Mr. King Khun, 'Have you not read the Lî?' It does not appear that Mencius was always referring to one and the same collection of Lî; but it is clear that in his time there were one or more such collections current and well known among his countrymen.

Now there are three Lî King, or three Rituals.

There are now three Chinese classics into which the name Lî enters:--the Î Lî, the Kâu Lî, and the Lî Kî, frequently styled, both by the Chinese themselves and by sinologists, 'The Three Rituals.' The first two are books of the Kâu dynasty (B.C. 1122-225). The third, of which a complete translation is given in the present work, may contain passages of an earlier date than either of the others; but as a collection in its present form, it does not go higher than the Han dynasty, and was not completed till our second century. It has, however, taken a higher position than those others, and is ranked with the Shû, the Shih, the Yî, and the Khun Khiû, forming one of 'The Five King,' which are acknowledged as the books of greatest authority in China. Other considerations besides antiquity have given, we shall see, its eminence to the Lî Kî.

State of the Lî books at the rise of the Han an
dynasty.

2. The monuments of the ancient literature, with the exception, perhaps, of the Yi King, were in a condition of disorder and incompleteness at the rise of the Han dynasty. (B.C. 206). This was the case especially with the Î Lî and Kâu Lî. They had suffered, with the other books, from the fires and proscription of the short-lived dynasty of Khin, the founder of which was bent especially on their destruction; and during the closing centuries of Kâu, in all the period of 'The Warring Kingdoms,' they had been variously mutilated by the contending princess.

Work of the ancient emperors of Han in recovering the books.

The sovereigns of Han undertook the task of gathering up and arranging the fragments of the ancient books, and executed it well.. In B.C. 213 Shih Hwang Tî of Khin had promulgated his edict forbidding any one to hide and keep in his possession the old writings. This was repealed in B.C. 191 by the emperor Hui, so that it had been in existence only twenty-two years, during most of which, we may presume, it had been inoperative. Arrangements were also made to receive and preserve old tablets which might be presented, and to take down in writing what scholars might be able to repeat. In B.C. 164, the emperor Wan ordered 'the Great Scholars' of his court to compile 'the Royal Ordinances,' the fifth of the Books in our Lî Kî.

Recovery of the Î Lî.

i. Internal evidence shows that when this treatise was made, the Î Lî, or portions of it at least, had been recovered; and with this agrees the testimony of Sze-mâ Khien, who was born perhaps in that very year, and lived to between

B.C. 90 and 80. In the 61st Book of his Biographies, referred to in a note above, Khien says, 'Many of the scholars repeated (parts of) the Lî; but no other of them so much as Kâo Thang of Lû; and now we have only the Shih Lî, which he was able to recite.' In harmony with this statement of the great historian, is the first entry in Liû Hsin's Catalogue of Lî books in the Imperial library of Han:--'56 kûan or sections of Lî in the old text, and 17 phien in the (current) text (of the time);' forming, as is universally believed, the present Î Lî, for which the Shih Lî of Khien is merely another name.

That Kâo Thang should have been able to dictate so much of the work will not be thought wonderful by those who

are familiar with the power of memory displayed by many Chinese scholars even at the present day. The sections in the old text were found in the reign of the emperor Wû (B.C. 140-87), and came into the possession of his brother, known as king Hsien of Ho-kien. We do not know how much this mass of tablets added to the Î Lî, as we now have it, but they confirmed the genuineness of the portion obtained from Kâo.

King Hsien of Ho-kien, and his recovery of the Kâu Lî.

ii. The recovery of the Kâu Lî came not long after, and through the agency of the same king Hsien. No one did so much as he in the restoration of the ancient of literature. By name Teh, and one of the fourteen sons of the emperor King (B.C. 156-141), he was appointed by his father, in B.C. 155, king of Ho-kien, which is still the name of one of the departments of Kih-lî, and there he continued till his death, in 129, the patron of all literary men, and unceasingly pursuing his quest for old books dating from before the Khin dynasty. Multitudes came to him from all quarters, bringing to him the precious tablets which had been preserved in