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1902–1992

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Two autograph pages from C. P. Fitzgerald’s diary of February 1928, reproduced with the permission of his daughters, Mirabel and Antbea.

February 25th

Temp 50. Sunny. A very warm day so far, quite extraordinary for February.

The stream down 1 inch. It is very little over the banks now, only just around the middle bridge and greenhouse, and by the weir bridge.

In the morning we went into the woods for primroses. Christopher arrived in time for dinner.

The morning has at last held a plenary session of the Central Committee, at

Thanking which definitely seals the stamp of legality on that government as opposed to the oligars in Shanghai or Canton.

This is a great political triumph for Chiang, who position is thus consolidated. Teng is reported to be attacking 大明.

The Nanking Odeon election resulted in the town losing 1000 out of 1500 of the previous majorities, almost all of which went to the 就职.

February Temp 50. Sunny a warm 26 but a breeze makes the stream down again. In the morning,
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Cover photograph  Rubbing of a bas-relief, Hsin-ching, Szechuan Province
(C. P. FitzGerald, Barbarian Beds [London: Cresset Press, 1965])
MOSES, THE BAMBOO KING

Donald Daniel Leslie

Introduction

Herbert Giles, in an article "Moses," which first appeared in Adversaria Sinica 3, c.1905, translated three stories from Chinese sources which referred to Moses in the bullrushes.1 The third of these was in fact about Hagar and Ishmael and not Moses, as Giles himself later acknowledged after it was pointed out by Chavannes. This particular story was derived from Muslim sources dating from about the twelfth century on, and there are others, including one, "Moses and the Golden Calf," that are also clearly Muslim in origin.2

We are thus concerned here only with Giles's first two passages. I will be giving below translations of the Chinese texts that I believe are those translated by Giles. But first I would like to trace his sources.

The first, Giles writes, is from "the Chu p'u 竹譜, by Tai K'ai-chih 戴凱之 of the Chin 晉 dynasty, AD 265–419." I have checked this work, and am confident that it does not include this story.3 In any case, if it had done so, there can be no doubt but that the various encyclopaedias which quote this story would have cited such a well-known work. They do not. Nevertheless, Giles obviously did not invent this passage. It is, in fact, fairly certain that he took it from the great eighteenth-century encyclopaedia, the Ku-chin t'u-shu 趙娟全書 古今圖書集成. This cites the Sun-p'u 筠譜 (Register of bamboo shoots) by the Buddhist monk Tsan-ning 贊寧 (919–1000). Giles must have misread 'bamboo shoot' as 'bamboo'. This text, incidentally, mentions the river Shêng 勝, not found in the earliest versions of the story.

Giles cites the source of his second translated passage as "the Ch'engch'ai tsa chi 誠齋雜記 (author and date)." He did not give the author or date presumably because he had not seen the original, and was translating the passage as quoted in a later work which merely gave the title without other details. I have not found any such citation for this story, though that is not

1 I would like to thank Ken Gardiner, Igor de Rachewiltz and Benjamin Penny for some valuable comments. I am also indebted to J. M. Streffer's 1971 translation of Hou-Hanshu 86 (see n.6), and to the 1981 article by Ho Chi-ch'üan 何祖全 and Huang Ts'ai-kuei 黃才貴, "Hsi-Han Yeh-lang nu-li chih ch'ü-tan" [A first enquiry about the slave system in Yeh-lang during the Western Han], Yeh-lang k'ao [An investigation of Yeh-lang], 2 vols. (Kuei-chou: Universal, 1979–81), 2: 31–53, for some parallel passages that I had missed. Most of the sources were already noted by W. Eberhard (see n.3 and pp.13–14).

2 See D. Leslie, "The Old Testament and biblical figures in Chinese sources," Sino-Judaica 1 (1991), pp.37–46; idem, Islam in traditional China (Canberra: Canberra College of Advanced Education, 1986), passim. We are not concerned in this article with such stories. The one dealt with here is of a completely different nature.

3 The Chu-p'u is a well-known work found in several editions. J. Needham, with Lu Gwei-djen and Huang Hsing-tung, Science and civilisation in China (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), vol. 6, pt 1, pp.378–87, has translated a large


5 Chavannes, review of Giles, writes: “Le second de ces deux textes est tiré du *Tch’ enf tchais tsa ki* 諡鬼雜記. M. Pelliot avait fait remarquer (BEFEO 2, p. 133) que, dans le *Chou jeou* 說郛, cet ouvrage était attribué à Tcheou Ta-kouan 周達觀, mais il a bien voulu m’informer qu’il a retrouvé ce même ouvrage incorporé dans le *Ts’in tai pi chou* 津逮秘書 où il est mis sous le nom de Lin K’ouen 林坤. The text I have used is this *Chin-tai pi-shu* (compiled by Mao Chin, 1630) (Shanghai, 1922), vol. 9.

6 This possible link was not noted by any Chinese scholar, so far as I know, nor by Streffer (see J. M. Streffer, “Das Kapitel 86 [76] des *Hou Han shu*” [PhD diss., Tübingen, Göttingen, 1971]). Chavannes, Maspero and Straughair (see nn. 1, 28, and p. 14) actually reject it as a coincidence (and compare the methodology of Eberhard, discussed below [p. 14]). See Chavannes, review of Giles; Henri Maspero, review of Giles in BEFEO 9 (1909); Anna Straughair, “*I-yuan*: the garden of marvels,” MA (Asian Studies) diss. (Australian National University, 1974). However, Yves Hervouet, *Un poète cour sous les Han: Souma Siang-fou* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), p. 108, n. 3, clearly realized the striking resemblance to the Moses story, for he wrote: “Inutile de souligner le rapproche­ment curieux entre cette anecdote et l’histoire de Moïse. Ce qu’il y a d’étrange ici, c’est que nous ne sommes pas dans une région désertique, où l’absence d’eau se fasse cruellement sentir. La contrée est au contraire trè­shumide.”

**Figure 1**

_Hagar and Ishmael (from Wang Ch’i, San-ts’ai tu-hui [Collected illustrations of the Three Powers] [1609; reprint ed., Taipei: C’b’eng-wen C’b’u-pan-she, 1970], vol. 2, p. 837)_

to say it might not be found in the *Ku-chin t’u-shu chi-ko* 古今圖書集成 or some other encyclopaedia. It is also possible that Giles had simply forgotten where he had seen it. It is certainly inconsistent to give the name Tai K’ai-chih as the author of the *Chu-p’u*, while giving no author for his second text.

There are in fact two Yuan period works with the title *Ch’ enf-chai tsai­chi*, one by Chou Ta-kuan 周達觀 (fl. 1297), and one, quite a bit longer, though based on the same material, by Lin K’un 林坤. It is this longer version only that contains the story of the Bamboo King, which Giles took to be based on the biblical story of Moses. We should note that, though Giles’s scholarship was not at its best here, he was the only early scholar who (rightly in my opinion) saw the linkage with Moses.

**The Sources**

Both of Giles’s sources, of the Sung and Yuan, were in fact very late. However, we can find the story of the Bamboo King in much earlier sources, going back to the third or fourth centuries, and even to the first century CE. There are two basic texts, the *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 and the *Hua­yang kuo-chih* 華陽國志. However, we should note also the *Shui-ching­chu* 水經注 and the *I-yuan* 異苑, also early and perhaps better preserved than the HYKC, though possibly copied from that work. According to Tu Yu 杜佑 in his *T’ung-tien* 通典 and Ma Tuan-lin 馬端臨 in his *Wen-hsien t’ung­k’ao* 文獻通考, the HHKS story was taken from the HYKC, but this is by no means certain; it is even unlikely. Also of great significance is the *Shu-wang pen-chi* 蜀王本紀, attributed to Yang Hsiung 楊雄 of the first century BCE,
which has a completely different version. Perhaps we should stress also the *Sun-p'u* 蘭譜, for, though much later, it may possibly be traced back separately from those just mentioned.

Here follows a list of all the descriptions of the Bamboo King that I have found—to date well over twenty. I would add that on several occasions when I thought that the possibilities had been exhausted I came across a further parallel. There are probably one or two more that I have missed:


It would be a serious mistake to consider this work, compiled by Fan Yeh in the fifth century, as stemming from that period. As Ken Gardiner and I have stressed, the dynastic histories are based on material from the period of the dynasty concerned, not from the time of its historical compiler. The story of the Bamboo King in *HHS* thus dates from the first century CE.


5. *Shu-wang pen-chi*, ascribed to Yang Hsiung, first century BCE.


The remaining references are to encyclopaedias and other later works which cite the above as their sources or which have clearly copied one or other of them without making specific reference:

---

*One might legitimately add to this last point that the story was presumably an imported one, not native to Yeh-lang.*

7 The following abbreviations will be used to refer to works after their first mention:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Chinese Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TC</td>
<td><em>T'ung-chib</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPHYC</td>
<td><em>T'ai-ting huan-yu-chi</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPK</td>
<td><em>T'ai-ting kuang-chi</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPR</td>
<td><em>T'ai-ting yu-lan</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTY</td>
<td><em>T'ung-tien</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHKT</td>
<td><em>Wen-bien t'ung-k'ao</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YCLH</td>
<td><em>Yuan-chien lei-ban</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


9 Li Tao-yuan 劉道元, *Shu-ching-chu* [Commentary to the “Classic of rivers”] (Taipei: Chung-hua Shu-chü, 1971); Liu Ching-shu 劉

10 *Tu Yu*, *T'ung-tien* [Encyclopedic history of institutions] (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1935); Ma Tuan-lin, *Wen-bien t'ung-k'ao* [General history of institutions and critical examination of documents and studies] (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1936).


12 Tsan-ning, *Sun-p'u* [Book of bamboo shoots], in *Pai-ch'uan sbu-bai* [The ocean of learning of a hundred streams], with the title “Bamboo shoots of the Bamboo King’s forest,” cited in KCTSCC, *ts'e* 546, ch.187, p.26b.

13 In an as yet unpublished work, “The Roman empire in Chinese sources.” See also D. D. Leslie and K. H. J. Gardiner, “Chinese knowledge of Western Asia during the Han,” *T'oung Pao* 68 (1982), pp.254-308. H. Bielenstein, “The restoration of the Han dynasty; with prolegomena on the historiography of the Hou Han Shu,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 26 (1954), pp.11, 15, has expressed this view very clearly, referring in particular to the *HHS*: “In rearranging his material, Fan Ye did not rewrite it. He copied his sources so closely as actually sometimes to make the *HHS* inconsistent”; and “It is, of course, of immeasurable value that the *TKK* [the *T'ung-kuan Han-chi* 東觀漢記, considered as a main source of the *HHS*] was composed at such intervals all through the Later Han dynasty. In this way the historians always described events which were close to their own time, and which often had been witnessed by themselves.”

14 Jen Fang, *Shu-i-chi* [Record of oddities], in *Han-Wei ts'ung-shu* [Han-Wei collection], reprint ed. (Taipei: Hsin-hsing Shu-chü, 1966) and in *Pai-tzu ch'uan-shu* [Complete works of the hundred philosophers] (Shanghai: Sao-ye Shang-fang, 1927).

16 Chia Su-hsieh, *Ch'i-min yao-shu* [Techniques essential for the common people], reprint ed. (Peking: Chung-hua Shu-chu, 1956).

17 See n. 8 above.

18 Tao-shih, comp., *Fa-yuan chu-lin* [Forest of pearls in the garden of the Law], in *Ssu-pu's t'ung-kan* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1919-37), vol. 513.


20 Li Fang et al., comp., *Tai-p'ing yu-lan* [Imperially viewed encyclopedia of the T'ai-p'ing era] (1812; reprint ed., Taipei: Tai-pei Shu-tien, 1962).

21 Yu Shih-nan, comp., *Ch'i-min yao-shu* [Techniques essential for the common people], reprint ed. (Peking: Chung-hua Shu-chu, 1956).

22 Li Fang et al., comp., *Tai-p'ing kuang-chi* [Wide gleanings made in the T'ai-p'ing era] (Peking: Chung-hua Shu-chu, 1961).

23 Li Fang et al., comp., *Tai-p'ing kuang-chi* [Wide gleanings made in the T'ai-p'ing era] (Peking: Chung-hua Shu-chu, 1961).


8. *Pei-t'ang shu-ch'ao* 北堂書鈔, compiled by Yu Shih-nan (Yuan dynasty). 15 This encyclopedia cites the HYKC, in chapter 144 under “soup,” and in chapter 160 under “rock”.

9. *Ch'i-min yao-shu* 齊民要術, by Chia Su-hsieh (sixth century). 16 This encyclopedia of agriculture cites the HYKC in its chapter 10.

10. *Hou-Han-shu chi-ch'eng* 後漢書集解, by Li Hsien Li-shun (T'ang dynasty). 17 This encyclopedia of agriculture cites the HYKC in its chapter 10.

11. *Fa-yuan chu-lin* 法苑珠林, compiled by the monk Tao-shih 道世, 668. 18 This Buddhist encyclopedia cites the HYKC in chapter 79.

12. *T'ung-chen*, compiled by Tu Yu, 801. This encyclopedia cites the HHS and HYKC in the commentary to chapter 187.

13. *T'ung-chen* 通志, compiled by Cheng Ch'iao 鄭樵 (1149). 19 This encyclopedia gives the HYKC story in chapter 197, and also cites the HYKC in its commentary.

14. *Wen-hsien t'ung-k'ao* 文獻通考, compiled by Ma Tuan-lin 麻端臨 (1319). This encyclopedia cites the HYKC and the HHS (and HYKC) in the commentary to chapter 329.

15. *Tai-p'ing kuang-chi* 太平御覽, compiled by Li Fang 李昉 et al. (983). 20 This encyclopedia cites the HHS in chapter 791, and the HYKC in chapter 962.

16. *Tai-p'ing kuang-chi* 太平廣記, compiled by Li Fang et al. (983). This encyclopedia cites the SCC in chapter 291, section 19. 21

17. *Tai-p'ing huan-yu-chi* 太平寰宇記, compiled by Yeh Shih 楊史 (c. 976-83). 22 This encyclopedia cites the HYKC in its commentary to chapter 178.

18. *Shib-lei-fu* 事類賦, by Wu Shu 吳叔 (947-1002). 23 This encyclopedia cites the HYKC in chapter 27.

19. *Ch'eng-chai tsai-chi* 誠齋雜記, by Lin K'un 林坤 (Yuan dynasty). 24 This encyclopedia cites the HYKC version closely, but without reference.

20. *Sou-shen-chi* 輯神記, by Lo Mao-teng 羅懋登 (fl. 1593-98). 25 This Taoist work (as distinct from the fourth-century work with the same title by Kan Pao 千寳) cites the HYKC in its Part 5.

21. *Yuan-chien lei-ban* 溯源類函, compiled by Chang Ying 張英 et al. (1710). 26 This encyclopedia cites the HYKC in chapter 417 (and chapter 332).

22. *Kuei-chou t'ung-chib* 貴州通志, 28 This Ch'ing-dynasty gazetteer cites the HYKC in chapter 38, an I-wen-shu 藝文疏 section.

According to Ho Chi-ch'uan, there are other local gazetteers of the Ch'ing dynasty which give the story, including *Kuei-chou (fu-) chib* 貴州府志, *An-shun fu-chib* 安順府志, and *Hsing-i (fu-) chib* 興義府志. 29

I would like to point out here the great variety in the encyclopaedic citations. One might imagine that one had found the earliest source by using that cited by the TPKC for example, or by the YCLH, or the KCTSCC (under
MOSES, THE BAMBOO KING

‘bamboo’). In fact, the earliest source is really the \textit{HHS}, mentioned under ‘Yeh-lang’ in the \textit{KCTS\text{CC}}, though not under ‘bamboo’. I would point out also the remarkable number of copies of the story. It certainly was well recorded by Chinese scholars through the ages.

\textit{The Texts}

I give below all the basic texts, even though they are very similar, for the small discrepancies may be significant. When we compare them, we find one set which deals with the Bamboo King springing from the river, and another set with the “striking of the rock” story. One might imagine that this second story is a late addition. However, one or two of the later extracts omit the baby taken from the river, others the second part of the story. Each version emphasizes what it thinks important or interesting, ignoring other parts. It seems likely that the whole anecdote, with both stories, preserved in the less serious works, the \textit{HVKC}, \textit{IY} and \textit{SCC}, has been abbreviated in the standard history, the \textit{HHS}. I suggest that we posit an earlier source, from which both main versions have extracted what they wanted.

\textit{Hou-Han-shu} 86 \textsuperscript{30}

Among the south-western Yi tribes, beyond the frontier of Shu commandery, is the country of Yeh-lang 夜郎. In Yeh-lang, in the beginning, a girl was bathing in the Tun 洱 river when a large bamboo in three sections floated between her legs. She heard a cry from within it, cut open the bamboo to look and obtained a male child. She returned home and brought him up. When he was grown, he had martial skills, and subsequently set himself up as Marquis of Yeh-lang, and took Chu 竹 [Bamboo] as his surname. In the 6th year of Yuan-ting 元鼎 of Emperor Wu 武 [111 BCE], the southern Yi tribes were pacified, and made into Tsang-k'o 彝柯 commandery; the marquis of Yeh-lang submitted, and the Emperor bestowed the insignia of king upon him. He was subsequently killed … The Lao 拔 [clan] of the Yi tribes, considering the Bamboo King as not born of flesh and blood [lit. “blood and \textit{cbi}’’], revered him greatly. They sought to establish heirs for him. When the Commander of Tsang-k'o, Wu Pa 吳霸 heard this, the Emperor enfeoffed his three sons as marquises. After their death, they shared the sacrifices to their father [in his shrine]. The ‘spirits of the Bamboo King’ and the ‘three gentlemen of Yeh-lang county’ today refer to this.

When we turn to the earlier \textit{Han-shu} 95 and \textit{Shib-chi} 116 descriptions of Yeh-lang,\textsuperscript{31} we find mention of the marquis of Yeh-lang who submitted to Emperor Wu and was made a king, but not of the Bamboo King. Nor is there a mention of the execution of the Yeh-lang king [or of the Bamboo King] by the Han Chinese at the time of Emperor Wu.

\textsuperscript{30} See \textit{Hou-Han-shu chi-chieh} (Chung-hua Shu-chu edition—ref. n.8 above), pp.2844-5; also repr. in \textit{Kuo-hsueh chi-pen ts'ung-shu}, pp.3143-4; Streffer, “Das Capite!,” pp.116-17. See also the \textit{HHS} commentary given by the above sources; and quotations in \textit{TT} 187, p.1000; \textit{TC} 197, p.3164; \textit{WHTK} 329, p.2581 (trans. by d'Hervey de Saint-Denys, \textit{Ethnographie des peuples étrangers à la Chine}, 2 vols [Paris: H. Georg, 1876, 1883], 2: 136); \textit{TPYL} 791, p.366 (p.3b); \textit{TPHYC} 178, p.18a; \textit{KCTS\text{CC} ts'e} 547, ch.195, p.1b; \textit{KCTC} 38, p.3b.

During the end period of the Chou 周 dynasty, king Wei 威 of Ch'u [339–328 BCE] sent a general ... to attack Yeh-lang, and Yeh-lang submitted. When the Han dynasty arose, Yeh-lang did not submit ... The Bamboo King rose up in the T'Un River ... [TPYL: "Before this (time),"]; SSC: "In the beginning."] A young girl was bathing by the bank of the river when a large piece of bamboo in three sections floated between her legs. She pushed it away but it wouldn't go away. She heard a child's cry, and picked it up and returned home. She broke it open and obtained a boy child. When he grew up, he was skilled at warfare. Thereupon he lorded it over the Ti 狄 [other texts give P'u 濆, which is preferable] clan of the Yi tribes, and took Chu [Bamboo] as his surname. The broken bamboo was thrown away in a field and produced the Bamboo Forest. This is the present Bamboo King's Shrine bamboo forest. The king [SLF: "once entered a mountain and"] with followers stopped on a large rock. He ordered them to make soup. The followers said: "There is no water." The king took his sword and struck the rock, and water came out. This is the present [Bamboo] King River. The broken rock is still there. [The river] also can communicate with the Yeh-lang circuit ... 

Thereupon, [T'ang Meng] cut off the head of the Bamboo King and established Tsang-k'o commandery, and made Wu Pa Commander .... Later, the P'u [clan] of the Yi tribes hindered [the development of] the city. All complained that the Bamboo King was not born of flesh and blood, and sought to establish heirs for him. [Wu] Pa submitted a report and his three sons were enfeoffed as marquis, and when they died they shared in the ancestral sacrifices to their father. The present day spirits of the Bamboo King and the Three Gentlemen are these.

I-yuan

During the time of Emperor Wu of Han [140-86 BCE] the fame of the spirit of the Bamboo King of Yeh-lang first began to spread. In the beginning, a girl was bathing in the T'Un River when she saw three segments of a large bamboo floating between her feet. She pushed at it, but it would not go away, and from inside it she heard the sound of someone calling. She picked it up and broke it open and found a male child. When he grew up he proved to be a skilful fighter, and subsequently became chief of the Lao clan of the Yi tribes. He then set himself up as Marquis of Yeh-lang, and took 'Chu' [Bamboo] as his family name. The broken bamboo which had been thrown down in the open field grew into a forest.

On one occasion, the king followed others [HYKC: "with followers," which is preferable] and stopped on a rock, and he ordered them to make some soup. The followers said: "There is no water," whereupon he struck the rock with his sword and a spring bubbled forth. The Bamboo King's River and the forest which grew from the broken bamboo are both still in existence today. Later, the Han sent T'ang Meng 唐蒙 to establish Tsang-k'o commandery, and he beheaded the Bamboo King. The Lao [clan] of the Yi tribes all claimed that this king had not been born of flesh and blood, and they paid him great reverence,
and sought to set one of his descendants on the throne. The Commander Wu Pa reported this, and the Emperor enfeoffed three of the King's sons as Marquises; when they died they joined their father's shrine. Nowadays in Yeh-lang county there is a shrine to the Bamboo King and his three sons, and this is [the story of] those particular spirits.

**Shui-ching-chu** 35

The Yu River is in fact the Tun River of Yeh-lang. In the time of Emperor Wu of the Han (140–86 BCE), the Bamboo King rose up from the river Tun. A girl was bathing on the bank of the river when a large bamboo in three sections floated between her legs. She pushed at it but it wouldn't go away. She heard a cry, picked it up and took it home. When she broke it open, she discovered a boy child. [*TPKC:* "When he grew up,"] Thereupon he lorded it over the Pu clan of the Yi tribes, and had [*HYKC* has "took"] the surname Chu [Bamboo]. The broken bamboo thrown in a field grew to produce a forest. This is the present Bamboo King shrine bamboo forest. The king was once following others [*HYKC:* "with followers"—better] and stopped on a large rock and called for soup, but his followers said "there is no water." Thereupon the king struck the rock with his sword to produce water. This is the present-day Bamboo King River. Later, when T'ang Meng opened up Tsang-k'o, he cut off the Bamboo King's head. The Lao (clan) of the Yi tribes all regretted this. They thought the Bamboo King was not born of flesh and blood, and wanted to establish an ancestral shrine [*HHS, HYKC:* "heirs"] for him. The Emperor enfeoffed his three sons as marquises. When they died they joined their father's shrine. Now the Bamboo King and Three Gentlemen are worshipped as spirits.

**Shu-wang pen-chi** 36

Once upon a time there was a young girl washing some gauze in a stream when a large bamboo floating on the water bumped into her. This caused her to become pregnant and she later gave birth to a child who set himself up as king, and because of his origin took Chu [Bamboo] as his surname. Emperor Wu of the Han sent T'ang Meng to attack Tsang-k'o and kill the Bamboo King. As a result of this, the local people did not forget where he came from and established a shrine for the king and worshipped him.

This account is unlikely to be the earliest version of the story, but seems to have summarised it, adding a personal touch: "she became pregnant." It would be absurd to use this passage as evidence that Moses was actually the true son of the daughter of Pharaoh! However, one should note that the author (whether Yang Hsiung, a Confucian rationalist, or not) is expressing a skeptical view, similar to the criticism of the Moses story by skeptics and cynics among Western scholars. Thompson gives examples of young girls becoming pregnant by various objects, also found commonly in Chinese sources. His examples are usually, however, remoter from our Moses-motif. 37

35 This is given in *SCC* 36, pp.13a–b, and is also quoted (abbreviated) in *TPKC* 291/19. This version is based as much on the *HHS* version as on the *HYKC* one, but does include the "striking of the rock" motif not found in the *HHS*. The *CCTC* version, vol.1, p.7a, follows mainly this *SCC* account, slightly abbreviated. Giles translated this *CCTC* version as follows: "It was under the reign of Wu Ti of the Han dynasty (140–86 BCE), that King Bamboo 竹王 arose from the river Tun 竹. A girl, who was bathing from the bank, found that a three-section piece of large bamboo had floated between her legs. She was trying to push it away, when hearing a sound, she caught hold of the bamboo, and carried it home. On breaking it open, she discovered a boy, who grew up to be very strong, and adopted Bamboo as his surname. The broken receptacle grew into a grove of bamboo, known as King's Words 王言." This king was once resting with his attendants on a large rock, and called for soup, but there was no water to make it; whereupon he struck the rock with his sword, and water gushed out."

36 Yang Hsiung, *Shu-wang pen-chi* (see n.11 above), p.374. It should be noted that this passage does not occur in some of the other editions of Yang Hsiung's text, so it might be a later interpolation.

Yeh-lang county is the name of a country of the Yi tribes in the far south-west. Formerly, a young girl was washing gauze when suddenly three pieces of bamboo floated between her legs. She heard from inside it a cry, and when she cut open the bamboo and looked inside, she found a male child. She returned home and brought him up. When he grew up he was warlike and set himself up as marquis of Yeh-lang, taking Chu [Bamboo] as his surname. In the 6th year of Yuan-ting 元鼎 [111 BCE] of the Emperor Wu, the south-western Yi tribes were pacified and made into Tsang-k'o commandery. The marquis of Yeh-lang surrendered and the Emperor bestowed jade 印 [HHS: "kingly"—better] insignia upon him. Afterwards he died. The Lao [clan] of the Yi tribes took the Bamboo King as not made of flesh and blood, and all set up a shrine for him. The Bamboo King spirit of present-day Yeh-lang county is he.

Sun-p'u 39

In the time of [Emperor] Wu of the Han, a girl was bathing in the river Sheng 聖, when she saw a section of bamboo come floating down the stream. When it neared her, she pushed it away; but it came back again, and then, hearing a sound from within, she took the bamboo and carried it home. On opening it, she discovered a little boy, who, when grown up, adopted Bamboo as his surname, and afterwards rose to be the ruler of the State.

Some Notes to the Texts

1. Places mentioned are: Yeh-lang 夜郎 (part of the south-western Yi tribes, later incorporated as a county in China); T'un 遠 (another name for T'un River); Tsang-k'o 襄柯 (another name for Kuei-chou) 40; Shu 蜀 (part of the Chou dynasty, west of Shu); and of Yung-ch'ang 永昌 county (in Yun-nan, on the route from the Roman Empire to China, second century CE). 41

2. People mentioned are Emperor Wu 武 of Han (140-86 BCE); King Wei 威 of Ch'u 楚 (339-328 BCE); T'ang Meng 唐蒙 (who established Tsang-k'o commandery between 135 and 109 BCE); Wu Pa 吳霸, Commander of Tsang-k'o. 42

3. Dates given are 111 BCE (during the reign of Emperor Wu); the period 339-328 BCE. We might reconcile these dates by pointing out that several of the texts fairly clearly make the origin of the story and the girl bathing in the river much earlier than the historical reference to the Yeh-lang king enfeoffed by Emperor Wu. As Hervouet, Streffer and Liu Lin point out, there is no certainty that the Bamboo King is the Yeh-lang marquis or king.
of the HHS, as assumed by several of the texts, for the other basic text, the HYKC, does not give this equation. The Bamboo King may be legendary, the Yeh-lang king historical. Hervouet writes: “Le Houa-yang kouotchê mentionne seul ce fait que le roi à la naissance mystérieuse est celui qui se révolta contre les Han tout au début de la dynastie. D’après le Heou Han chou, on croirait plutôt avoir affaire à l’origine légendaire de toute la tribu.”

4. The following foreign tribes are mentioned: Yi 羌, Ti 疊, and Lao 拓. The mention of Ti tribes is probably an error. It is the south-western Yi tribes that we are concerned with. Liu corrects the HYKC “Yi and Ti” 羌狄 to “Yi and P’u” 羌濮 (or “P’u clan(s) of the Yi”). He bases his correction on the SCC version. The Lao (clan or) tribes were aboriginal tribes in Kuei-chou and Yun-nan, associated with or part of the south-western Yi tribes. I am not sure whether we should read it as “Yi and Lao tribes” or as “Lao tribes (or clans) among the Yi tribes.” Most passages have only “Yi Lao,” but we do find also 羌濮氏, which may suggest “Lao clans of the Yi.” The P’u (clan or clans) of the Yi tribes are mentioned several times by the HYKC.44 The surname Chu 竹 “Bamboo” is found elsewhere.45

Region of the Western Tribes where the Moses story is found
(Map courtesy Nigel Duffey, ANU Cartography Unit)

44 For an analysis of the various P’u clans or tribes and their relation to the Yi and Lao tribes, see also She Hung-mo 余宏模, “Ku Yeh-lang ching-nei ti I-tsu hsien-min” [The antecedents of the Yi tribe within the territory of ancient Yeh-lang], in Yeh-lang k’ao, vol.1, pp.175 ff.

45 It would be a mistake to relate this to the Chu-hu 竹忽 (also 拓忽) of the Yuan-tien-chang 元典章 for 1320, which stands for Jews (Djuhad). David Dukes has pointed out in “Question : Zhou is a Jew?”, Jerusalem Post International Edition, 29 Dec. 1990, also in Points East (Newsletter of the Sino-Judaic Institute, Menlo Park, Ca.), vol.6, no.1 (March 1991), p.4, a reference in the Yuan-shih.
suggesting that he was "Chou the Jew." This is certainly possible, for these two characters undoubtedly do refer to Jews in the Yuan-shih and Yuan-tien-chang; see, e.g., D. D. Leslie, The survival of the Chinese Jews (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), pp. 14, 201. However, further research is needed, for the characters chu-hu 腔虎 occur several times in the Chin-sib 金史 (see the Japanese index Kineki got sbisei [Index to historical terms in the standard history of the Chin], 3 vols [Kyoto: Jinbun Kagaku Kenkyūjo (Kyoto University), 1960–62]), and some of these suggest that 'Chu-hu' is a personal name rather than a designation.


5. 遂雄夷濱氏以竹為姓 is found in SCC and CCTC, though not in this exact form in the very earliest versions. There is a possibility that shih 氏 ('clan') is an error for yi 以 'taking', which seems to have dropped out in some versions. I have translated this as "he lorded it over the P'u clan of the Yi tribes, and had the surname Chu (Bamboo)." Giles had mistranslated this or rather ignored it with "who grew up to be very strong, and adopted bamboo as his surname." Liu punctuates differently: 遂雄夷(狄)濮氏氏以竹為姓. He presumably read it as "he lorded it over the P'u (clan?) of the Yi tribes. The clan (shih 氏) took Chu as its surname" (or "The gentleman in question (shih 氏) took Chu as his surname").

Non-Chinese Parallels

Redford gives thirty-two accounts describing the 'exposed child'. He writes: "The reasons given (for the exposure) fall into three categories: I. the child is exposed through shame at the circumstances of its birth; II. the king (or whoever is in power), either at the instigation of an oracle or simply because the child is a potential threat, seeks to kill the child who is fated to supplant him; III. a general massacre endangers the life of the child." Redford includes Indian, Greek and Babylonian parallels. We might add Chinese, Japanese and South-east Asian legends, though none I have found are as

Figure 2
Moses in the bullrushes (from Dona Z. Meilach, First Book of Bible Heroes [New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1963], pt 1, p. 45)
close to the Biblical story as that of the Bamboo King. As Straughair writes, the young girl finding a baby in the river is “a typical example of the sort of foundation myth which is common to many cultures of the East Asian area, and indeed beyond.” The hundreds of parallels given by Thompson make it hazardous to see anything other than separate folklore inventions in the various different cultures. This seems to be Eberhard’s view which I will discuss in more detail below.

The biblical Moses story and the version of Sargon, king of Agada, in the Akkadian legend are among the clearest parallels to the Chinese story of the Bamboo King. We should note that none of Redford’s analysis applies to the Chinese version, which simply takes for granted the (Western) story, and has no hidden motives or causation.

(Sargon)49

My mother was a priestess [Pritchard: changeling]. I did not know my father. The priestess, my mother, conceived me and gave birth to me in hiding. She placed me in a basket made of reeds and closed the lid with pitch. She put the basket in the river which was not high . . . . Akki drew me from the river. He adopted me as his child and brought me up. He made me his gardener . . . . Then I became king.”

Exodus 2.3–2.10

And the daughter of Pharaoh went down to wash herself at the river; and her damsels walked by the river’s side; and when she saw the ark [of paper-reed, daubed with bitumen and with pitch] among the flags, she sent her maidservant and she took it. And when she had opened it, she saw it—the child; and behold it was a weeping boy . . . . And she called his name Moses; and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.

Babies are found in a cabbage patch, floating down the stream in a peach (Momotarō), inside a pumpkin, inside a grape growing on a tree—and similar stories abound. Some of them may have a phallic emphasis, some hint that the finder was the real (secret) mother. Almost all the stories exist to describe the unusual birth or origin of a hero, or a founder of a dynasty.

Chavannes and Maspero (and also Straughair) reject the link with Moses.50 In my opinion, Chavannes is quite unjustified in claiming: “en effet, les textes invoqués par H. A. Giles n’ont aucun rapport avec Moïse . . . . cette fable doit sans doute être rapportée au cycle des traditions relatives à un totémisme végétal primitif; la donnée est en effet ici tout à fait analogue à celle

/bushes). Legends of Moses, Cyrus, Beowulf and others”; and (obviously taken from the Moses story) S351.0.1: “Abandoned child made over to its own mother (sister) acting as wet nurse.” Eberhard, Chinesische Volksmärchen, p. 100, gives several Chinese parallels in addition to seven sources for the Bamboo King story, which he clearly takes as the closest parallel to the Moses story found in the Chinese sources.

47 An example of the type of story in Chinese sources is the following: “Chien Ti, the mother of Hsieh, while bathing in a river, met a black bird, which dropped an egg. She swallowed it, and subsequently gave birth to Hsieh.” See, e.g., Lun Heng, book 29, ch. 83, in A. Forke, Lun-beng, 2 vols (London, 1907, 1911; reprint ed., New York: Paragon, 1962), 1: ch. 37, p. 464. Among later Chinese legends is that of Hsuan-tsang 玄奘, the famous Buddhist writer and traveller, who, according to the seventeenth-century novel Hsi-yu-chi by Wu Chêng-ên (see Anthony C. Yu, The journey to the west, 4 vols [Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1977–83], 1: 203–4; and see also Eberhard, Chinesische Volksmärchen, pp. 100–1), was found as a boy on a plank in the river by a Buddhist monk. The story of the Bamboo King is not related to these in any way.


50 Chavannes, review of Giles, p. 307; Maspero, review of Giles, p. 597; Straughair, “I-yüan.” Streffer (“Das Capitel 86”) does not mention Moses in connection with the story. Eberhard strikingly entitles his analysis “Moses-Motiv.” I will discuss Eberhard’s basic analysis below.

I have looked at Huber's article of 1905, and can see no link or even similarity to our Bamboo King. Huber translates:

Le roi de Campa fendit cette grappe d'aréquier et il vit à l'intérieur un petit enfant au visage d'une extrême beauté ... et il le nomma le prince Po Klon.51

He adds: “Quant à l'origine du clan des Cocotiers ... c'est l'histoire d'un enfant miraculeux, tout pareil à une noix de coco.”

Chavannes, Maspero and Straughair are not wrong to consider that the finding of the Bamboo King in the river was insufficient evidence for Giles' identification of the story as originating from Moses in the bulrushes. However, not one of them mentions the second, far more significant, motif— "the striking of the rock to produce water.” Hervouet, we should note, attaches his “rapprochement curieux entre cette anecdote et l'histoire de Moïse” to the passage with the “striking of the rock.” Here are the two biblical versions, as given in Exodus and Numbers.

Exodus 17.6

And thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the eyes of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah . . . .

Numbers 20.8

And the Eternal spake to Moses, saying, Take the staff, and gather thou the assembly together, thou and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye to the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth its water, and thou shall bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. And Moses took the staff from before the Eternal, as he commanded him. And Moses and Aaron assembled the congregation before the rock; and he said to them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we bring you forth water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his staff he smote the rock twice; and the water came out abundantly; and the congregation drank, and their beasts also . . . . This is the water of Meribah.

This story of the "striking of the rock" is one of the most famous in the Bible because, according to Jewish tradition, Moses's striking of the rock instead of merely speaking to it was what caused God not to allow him to enter the Promised Land.52

Parallels to the striking of the rock are noted by Stith Thompson in considerable detail (though he does not mention Moses or the Bible versions).53 The closest are:
D1567.6. “Stroke of staff brings water from rock” (Jewish, Irish, French).
D1549.5.1. “Rock beaten by sword provides water” (Chinese).
A941.5.1. “Spring breaks forth where saint strikes rock” (Irish).
D1472.1.2.1 “Man strikes stone; wine flows” (Swiss).
D1549.5. “Magic staff draws water from stone” (Spanish, Jewish, Indian).
A941.3. “Spring from striking earth with sword” (French, Chinese).
D2143.1.7. “Rain produced by striking rock” (Irish).
D1567.5. “Saint’s crozier produces fountain” (Irish).

Thompson has taken most of these examples from Neuman (for Jewish legends), Eberhard (for Chinese), and Cross (for Irish). It may be that there are other parallels in other literatures less well investigated. So we cannot draw strong inferences from the fact that mainly Jewish, Irish and Chinese parallels are found. It is highly likely, however, that the Jewish Talmudic-Midrashic parallels and also the Irish (Christian) ones are consciously based on the well-known Bible story. It is tempting to infer from this that the

Figure 4

Eberhard rejects the suggestion of Paul Pelliot ("Deux itineraires de Chine en Inde à la fin du viiiie siécle," BEFEO 4 [1904], pp. 131–43, at 166–7), that this dragon-mother motif is linked to the Indian Ashoka Myth. Pelliot, Notes on Marco Polo, 3 vols (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1959), p.529, writes: "the 3rd century of our era was a great epoch for the propagation of all sorts of legends between China and the West." Hirth and Laufer in particular discuss several other early western stories or legends that are found in Chinese sources. See esp. Hirth, China and the Roman Orient, pp.200–2, 202–3, 279–83; Berthold Laufer, The diamond: a study in Chinese and Hellenistic folklore, Field Museum of Natural History, Anthropological Series, vol.15, no.1 (Chicago, 1915), pp.6 ff., 59–60; Arthur Waley, Ballads and stories from Tunhuang: an anthology (London: Allen & Unwin, 1960), p.184 and n.196 on pp.259–60; and see also Leslie & Gardiner, "Roman Empire in Chinese sources," ch.18, "Legends," for a detailed analysis. Among these stories, the most convincing are: "The Crane and the Pygmies" (Homer, Aristotle, etc.); "The Jewels in the Valley" (Epiphanius, Arabian Nights, etc.); "The Grateful Crane" (Aelian); "Silent Barter" (Pliny, Ammianus Marcellinus, etc.). Others include the Cinderella story, Solomon’s Judgement, and the Amazons. As with the Bamboo King story, we have no certainty of a direct transmission, for the stories have been distorted or transmuted, and identifications are a matter of probabilities. Important are the intertwining strands and the mention in the Chinese sources of a western origin or linkage, some from Ta-Ch'lin 大秦 (the Roman Empire centred on Rome), some from Fu-lin 撫林 (the Byzantine Empire centred on Constantinople). Many of the Chinese texts are of the fifth to seventh centuries; some are linked to India or South-east Asia. So far we cannot trace the Bamboo King story beyond the border areas of south-west China. The finding (by Streffer originally [Streffer, "Das Capitel 86"] of the version attributed to Yang Hsiung (first century) suggests that more western legends may well be hidden in less well-known Chinese sources.

Chinese version was also derived from the Biblical story. We might note that whereas the Jewish version of the ‘striking of the rock’ produces water, the Swiss produces wine, and the Chinese one is to make soup! Moreover, when we add the association with the young girl bathing in the river and finding a boy-child who grows up to be a hero, the probability of a biblical origin is, so to speak, squared. The likelihood of the independent creation of parallel unrelated stories is enormously reduced when we have such linkages. It is only in the Jewish and Chinese stories that both elements are found.

Eberhard’s analysis is significant. He discusses the story of the Bamboo King with other Chinese parallels under the heading "Mose-Motiv," observing:

1. Auf einem Flusse treibt ein Stück Bambus oder Holz an.
2. Man findet in diesen ein Kind.
3. Das Kind wird Ahn eines Geschlechtes oder tut grosse Dinge.

Eberhard does not mention the part of the story concerning the striking of the rock. There can be little doubt but that he did not consider the story as based on that of Moses in the Bible, but looked on it as a separate folk tale independently created. He rightly dates it as first century CE, and suggests that the Yeh-lang people were “T’ai-Völker.” He associates the story with the Dragon-mother motif, which he considers as stemming from the T’ai.

There are three basic possible explanations for similarities in stories and ideas found in such distinct cultures as, for example, Jewish and Chinese, in this particular case between Moses and the Bamboo King:

– Independent invention, the similarity being due to the fact that man is a single species whose mind works in similar ways all over the world.
– Cultural transfusion—that is to say, people of one culture, hearing a story or rumour from another culture, reinvent their own version incorporating their own special attitudes and ideas.
– Copying, that is, the new version is taken directly from the earlier version in the other culture.

I wish to state firmly my view that in this case the story has been copied (albeit with changes and distortions). The similarities (missed by Eberhard and everybody else except Giles and Hervouet) are too great for the coincidences to be accidental. The folklore scholar is happy to see parallel versions confirming the view that a universal culture might exist; the historian looks for actual linkages between the stories. I will now turn to some of the inferences we might make if we assume the Bamboo King’s story was taken directly from the Biblical Moses story.

**Conclusions**

Is the Bamboo King Moses? The answer must surely be a qualified “No.” Too much detail is found in Chinese sources, in particular in the standard history the HHS (even though it adds considerably to that given in the
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earlier HS), of the historical relation of this king with Han China. For the Chinese, the story is firmly rooted in Yeh-lang and the South-west Yi tribes, and with the Chinese penetration and conquest of this area. We cannot be too confident of the date 111 BCE and the reference to the Emperor Wu, for a large number of later legends were posthumously associated with this Emperor and this period, a period in which the great explorer Chang Ch’ien ventured into Central Asia and brought back descriptions of the Parthian and Seleucid Empires, as well as of the places in Central Asia that he actually did visit. The reference in the HYKC placing the story in Chou times is even more suspect, though some of the versions quite clearly have the story of the girl washing by the river and finding a baby predating the time of Emperor Wu. One might consider the Bamboo King as a legendary person, the Yeh-lang king having contact with Emperor Wu occurring much later.

Nevertheless, whether or not we consider that there were one or two versions, the story itself must go back at least to the first or second century CE. This is already remarkably early. Even the HYKC, IV and SCC were written long before the well-known transmission of biblical stories to China by Nestorian and Muslim, and even before the Mazdean (Zoroastrian) or Manichaean influence from Iran. It would be a mistake to suggest a direct Jewish involvement in the transmission to the Chinese. Though the oral tradition of the K’ai-feng Jews, as reported by the Jesuits Gozani, Domence and Gaubil, claims a Han-period entry of Judaism to China (as does their 1512 inscription), this is very flimsy evidence. In any case the distortions in the story suggest indirect transmission.

The Chinese texts, in particular the HHS, attribute the story to a specific area, with a specific historical linkage. One can only speculate that the story of Moses reached there some time earlier, presumably, though not necessarily, through Jews, and was adopted or “appropriated” as a local legend. We know that Jews reached India and possibly Afghanistan very early. Is there any substance to the claims of Jewish descent for various groups in Burma, Northern India, etc., which have surfaced recently? Were there Jews among the Roman traders or envoys of 166, 226 and 285? There is no real evidence. It is possible, though unlikely, that new finds in this area may suggest a Jewish presence or Jewish linkage in the east earlier than previously thought.

We should note, too, that this story comes from Yeh-lang, a place which during the Later Han period and earlier lay outside China proper, populated by and classified among the south-western Yi and Lao tribes. This area, close to the Kuei-chou/Yun-nan border, was on or very near the route from the Roman Empire to China at this time. The HHS and WL texts concerning Ta-Ch’in (the Roman Empire) stress that Yung-ch’ang county in I-chou circuit, not far from Yeh-lang, was a source of jewels and exotica from Ta-Ch’in. There were also conjuror-magicians from

59 See Hirth, China and the Roman Orient, and Leslie & Gardiner, “Roman Empire in Chinese sources.”
61 We should note that earlier scholars also discovered various Biblical stories in Chi­nese sources. For example, N. B. Dennys, The folklore of China (and its affinities with that of the Aryan and Semitic races) London & Shanghai, 1867; reprint ed., Chicago: Argonaut, 1969), p.139, mentions a Chinese version of ‘Solomon’s Judgement’, but un­fortunately gives no source. F. H. Balfour, Waifs and strays from the Far East (London & Shanghai: Trübner/Kelly & Walsh, 1876), pp.202–8, also unfortunately without a refer­ence, writes: “we find in some old books the story of a woman who was turned into /}
Hai-hsi 海西 (thought to be another name for Ta-Ch'in) in an embassy to China from the state of Shan 撫 (in the Burma region) in 121. We should note that the sea route became important only from the second century CE. The story of the Bamboo King may well have taken root before there was any Chinese contact with or even real knowledge of the Roman Empire (from 97 CE, when Kan Ying 甘英 visited Charax and Mesopotamia, but failed to reach the Roman Empire).

Are there parallels to this story elsewhere in the region? Liu Lin writes: “Now the minorities of Kuei-chou have never heard of this kind of legend.” He summarises a story, not really very close, of the White Yi 白彝 from the border region between Yun-nan and Kuei-chou: “In olden times, a bamboo tube was floating on the Han 漢 River, and floated down to the river bank and broke open. From inside it came out a man called A-ch'a 阿槎, who was able to speak from birth. He dwelt inside a cave in the ground. One day he went to Ma-ta-p'o 麻達坡 to hunt, and saw a plum tree hanging from which was a female wolf, resembling a dog. They became man and wife, and their descendants are the Yi夷 clan.” Liu adds that the Yi clan venerated the bamboo, and suggests a link with the Bamboo King (of the P'u clan), but points out that the Yeh-lang aboriginal people are not connected to the Yi clan of Yun-nan and Kuei-chou.

To sum up:

1. The semi-historical marquis and king of Yeh-lang among the southwestern Yi tribes, who was in contact with Emperor Wu of Han in 111 BCE, cannot be Moses. The legendary or semi-legendary Bamboo King, on the other hand, might be based on the biblical Moses.
2. Elements in this story, the finding of a baby in the river, and the striking of the rock to produce water, almost certainly do derive from the Moses story in the Bible.
3. It is likely that this story was introduced into the area by travellers, not necessarily Jews, and was adopted as part of the local tradition concerning the founding of Yeh-lang.