

Homer Dubs (1892–1969)

Homer H(asenpflug) Dubs (March 28, 1892–August 16, 1969) was born in Deerfield, Illinois, but spent his earliest years in Hunan province, where his parents were missionaries. Returning to the United States about 1902, he eventually studied at Oberlin College (1910–11) and graduated from Yale in 1914, majoring in philosophy; he was elected there to both Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Xi. He continued his education in New York, acquiring the A.M. degree in philosophy at Columbia University (1916) and the B.D. at Union Theological Seminary (1917). The succeeding years were spent in China as a missionary, first at the Language School in Nanking (it was here that Dr. J. Leighton Stuart, Dubs once told me, urged him to take up the study of Hsün-tzu) and next in Hunan. After a term of service he returned to study at the University of Chicago, where he acquired the Ph.D. degree in 1925, submitting a dissertation on his favorite thinker, later published in two volumes under the title *Hsüntze, the Moulder of Ancient Confucianism* (London, 1927, 1928), with a foreword by Dr. Stuart.

During the next few years, Dubs taught philosophy at the University of Minnesota (1925–27) and at Marshall College (1927–34). About this time the American Council of Learned Societies was looking for some scholar who might initiate a translation of one or more of the Chinese dynastic histories. Dubs was the one selected, and during the years 1934–37 he gave himself unstintingly to the translation and annotation of the basic annals of the *Han shu*, with the collaboration of Jen T'ai, C. H. Ts'ui, and P'an Lo-chi. In due course this work, entitled *History of the Former Han Dynasty*, appeared in three volumes (Baltimore, 1938, 1944, and 1955), published under the auspices of the American Council. Not surprisingly, the first two volumes received the Stanislas Julien prize of the Académie des Belles-Lettres et Inscriptions, Institut de France, in 1947.

From 1937 on, Dubs taught successively at Duke University and its Divinity School (1937–43), Columbia University (part-time, 1944–45), and Hartford Seminary Foundation (1945–47), and during the year 1943–44 he worked on the Chinese History Project of the Institute of Pacific Relations, then established at Columbia University. Finally (1947), Oxford University, at the suggestion of Professor J. J. L. Duyvendak of Leiden University, invited him to occupy the chair of Chinese, made famous by James Legge and his successors. In 1958 Oxford honored him with the degree of D. Phil.—he had already received the M.A. (Oxon) on the occasion of his appointment. Dubs retired in 1959, but he spent the academic year 1962–63 as a visiting professor at the University of Hawaii and lectured in Australia on his way home. He lived on in Oxford until his death.

Homer Dubs was a man of many parts. A glance at his bibliography gives some idea of his widespread interests and of his special competence. With his classical, philosophical, and theological training he was well equipped to deal with many problems encountered in his study of China's antiquity. More unusual perhaps was his ability to write on astronomical and celestial phenomena. He developed a working knowledge of Th. von Oppolzer's *Canon der Finsternisse*

(Vienna, 1887), together with corrections made by F. K. Ginzel (Berlin, 1899) and P. B. Neugebauer (Berlin, 1929). Beyond this he worked on such diverse subjects as Chinese alchemy, the ancient crossbow, Han "hill censers," the economic reforms of Wang Mang, and a possible military contact between the soldiers of Rome and Ch'ang-an. Only in one respect did his fertile imagination carry him beyond where most students of the Chinese language wanted to go: a novel system of romanization. He loved good music and played the bassoon. He was an able teacher, a good conversationalist, and a staunch friend. In closing I may report that the indexes, prolegomena, and other matter with which he hoped to conclude the translation of the *Han shu*, have been assembled by Professor David Hawkes, Homer's successor at Oxford, and shipped to the United States. The publication of this material will be a fitting tribute to a worthy scholar.

The Works of Homer Dubs

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