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Art. XVIII.—Arabic Inscription from China

John Shakespear

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ART. XVIII. ARABIC INSCRIPTION FROM CHINA.

INTRODUCTION.

AN Inscription on fine Chinese paper was, some months since, presented to the Society by one of its Members, John Romer, Esq., to whom it had been given by the Captain of a vessel returning from the East, who did not remember how or where he had obtained it. It is four feet eight inches in length, by two feet four inches in width ; and a reduced copy of it is herewith given. After it had been suspended a short time in the Society's Meeting Room, a letter was received by the Director from John Shakespear, Esq., with a transcript of this singular document in the ordinary character, and a translation. It is not easy to account for the origin of this inscription. It was certainly done in China, as appears from the stamps attached to it, which were made before the inscription was written, unless room was purposely left for placing them. The characters are drawn with freedom, as though executed by one accustomed to such writing. They are, however, so distorted, that some time elapsed before it was even suspected that they were Arabic.

TO PROFESSOR WILSON, DIRECTOR R. A. S.

London, 5th Jan., 1838.

SIR,

Happening, a few days ago, to observe a scroll of rather extraordinary characters, suspended in the meeting-room of the Royal Asiatic Society, I have attempted a transcript in more usual characters, as well as a translation, both of which I beg leave to transmit to you. There are, however, still some few Chinese characters, with which I am unacquainted, and of which in my papers no notice is taken.

From the translation it will appear that the original consists of various invocations on the Divinity, in which the Mohammedan *asmá husna*, glorious names or attributes, are chiefly introduced. It

Large decorative header line in a stylized, calligraphic script.

Line 1 of the main text block.

Line 2 of the main text block.

Line 3 of the main text block.

Line 4 of the main text block.

Line 5 of the main text block.

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Line 7 of the main text block.

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Line 9 of the main text block.

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Line 11 of the main text block.

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Line 13 of the main text block.

Line 14 of the main text block.

Line 15 of the main text block.

Line 16 of the main text block.

Large decorative footer line in a stylized, calligraphic script.

was probably designed as a *taawiz*, or amulet. The paper, however, seems a matter of curiosity, rather for the unusual manner in which the Arabic is written, apparently with a Chinese pencil or brush, than for its intrinsic meaning.

The translation is given in columns, corresponding to the original; because, from the context, it is not clear whether it is designed to be read from right to left throughout, in the Arabic way, or from top to bottom of each column separately, in the customary manner of the Chinese.

I remain, Sir, with great respect,
Your very obedient, humble servant,
JOHN SHAKESPEAR.

The Rev. Mr. Kidd, Professor of the Chinese language, has favoured us with the reading of the Chinese words on the inscription. These are in the ancient seal character, and, as much latitude exists in their formation, he speaks with some uncertainty respecting the exact identity of one or two of them. Those on the right side he would read, "Tsun she yih tang," and those on the left, "ma gan ping yin—ming chih keung." They are probably proper names; *tang* refers to the public courts or palaces of the empire, and that part may be translated "the palace of the illustrious age." The words following immediately after *ma* mean, "tranquil; luminous; official seal." The last three words mean, "intelligence," "uprightness," and "a desert," but there can be little doubt that they are proper names, intended to be read in the following order: "sealed by Ma gan ping, in the district or town of Ming chih keung, at the court or palace of Tsun she yih."

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم ❦

(First Column.)

الهي انت الكحي القيوم فلك الحمد ❦
 الهي انت المبد المبين فلك الحمد ❦
 الهي انت الشافي فلك الحمد ❦
 الهي انت المحي المميت فلك الحمد ❦
 الهي انت الكاشف الفارغ فلك الحمد ❦
 الهي انت الاحد الصمد فلك الحمد ❦
 الهي انت الشهيد المعيد فلك الحمد ❦
 الهي انت الباطن الطاهر فلك الحمد ❦
 الهي انت الغفور الشكور فلك الحمد ❦
 الهي انت الرحمن الرحيم فلك الحمد ❦
 الهي انت الباقي المؤخر فلك الحمد ❦
 الهي انت القاهر المقسط فلك الحمد ❦
 الهي انت الواسع السميع فلك الحمد ❦
 الهي انت الجامع المامع فلك الحمد ❦
 الهي انت الملك القدوس فلك الحمد ❦
 الهي انت العزيز الجبار فلك الحمد ❦

My God, thou art

In the name of God, the merciful, the merciful.

(1.)

The (ever) Living, the (self) Existent ;

The Manifester, the Manifest ;

The Healer ;

The Life-giver, the Death-causer ;

The Revealer, the Completer ;

The One, the Eternal* ;

The Present (in all), the Restorer (to life) ;

The Hidden, the Pure† ;

The most ready to forgive, the most Grateful ;

The Merciful, the Merciful ;

The Lasting, the Last ;

The Conqueror, the Just (distributor) ;

The vast in Beneficence, the Hearer ;

The Gatherer (together), the‡

The King, the Holy ;

The Glorious, the Mighty ;

therefore, to Thee (be) the praise.

* Or Lord (to whom all have recourse).

† Instead of الطاهر which appears in the original, and is here rendered Pure, perhaps الظاهر *Evident, manifest*, may be intended.

‡ The original, here, has المانع which is not known as a single word ; it is, therefore, left at present untranslated.

(Second Column.)

الهى انت زى لازىّ الا
 الهى انت ستار العبوب فلك الحمد
 الهى انت الرقيب الحسيب فلك الحمد
 الهى انت المغيث المقيت فلك الحمد
 الهى انت الغياث المغيث فلك الحمد
 الهى انت الواجد الماجد فلك الحمد
 الهى انت الهادي الرشيد فلك الحمد
 الهى انت القاهر الظاهر* فلك الحمد
 الهى انت الخالق الباري فلك الحمد
 الهى انت البر الكبير فلك الحمد
 الهى انت العز الاعظم فلك الحمد
 الهى انت الحفيظ الحافظ فلك الحمد
 الهى انت الرفع النافع فلك الحمد
 الهى انت الرافع المانع فلك الحمد
 الهى انت السالم المؤمن فلك الحمد
 الهى انت المالك الملك فلك الحمد

* A word not Arabic : and الظافر seems most likely intended.

(2.)

My God, Thou art

Form, not form (the rest effaced) ;
 The most ready to hide (our) faults ;
 The Inspector, the caller to account ;
 The Aider, the Preserver ;
 The Aid (of the distressed), the Aider ;
 The Inventor, the Glorious ;
 The Guide, the Unerring ;
 The Subduer ; the Victorious* ;
 The Maker, the Creator ;
 The Good, the Great ;
 The Glory, the Greatest ;
 The Protector, the Guardian ;
 The Exaltation†, the Profitable ;
 The Exalter, the Prohibiter (of evil) ;
 The Safe, the giver of safety ;
 The Possessor, the King ;

therefore, to Thee (be) the praise.

* This word is doubtful. The original appears to be الظاهر which does not exist in the Arabic ; it is, therefore, translated as if intended for الظافر

† Or Repulsion, or Removing.

(Third Column.)

(Two lines effaced.)

الهى انت التّوابّ الوهابّ فلك الحمد
 الهى انت الباعث الوارث فلك الحمد
 الهى انت الرازق الواسع فلك الحمد
 الهى انت المجيد المجيد فلك الحمد
 الهى انت الغفور الودود فلك الحمد
 الهى انت الغافر الغفار فلك الحمد
 الهى انت الرافع النافع فلك الحمد
 الهى انت النور المنور فلك الحمد
 الهى انت المكيط الباسط فلك الحمد
 الهى انت الرفيع البديع فلك الحمد
 الهى انت المعافي فلك الحمد
 الهى انت الكافي فلك الحمد
 الهى انت الملك المالك فلك الحمد
 الهى انت فائق الصّباح فلك الحمد

الهى انت الاول الاخر فلك الحمد وصلى الله على رسوله

(3.)

My God, Thou art

* * * * *
 * * * * *
 The most Propitious, most Munificent ;
 The Raiser (from the dead), the Inheritor ;
 The Provider (of food), the most ample in beneficence ;
 The Praised, the glorified ;
 The most ready to forgive, the most kind ;
 The Pardoner, the most disposed to pardon ;
 The Exalter, the Profiter ;
 The Light, the Light-giving ;
 The Surrounding, the (all) Provider ;
 The (most) High, the Marvellous ;
 The ready to excuse ;
 The (all) Sufficient ;
 The Sovereign, the Possessor ;
 The Creator (divider) of the morn ,

therefore, to Thee (be) the praise.

My God, Thou art the First and the Last ; therefore to Thee (be)
the praise.

And the blessing of God rest on his Messenger.