

*You cannot think what figs  
My teeth have met in,  
What melons icy-cold  
Piled on a dish of gold  
Too huge for me to hold,  
What peaches with a velvet nap,  
Pellucid grapes without one seed . . .*

—Christina Rossetti, *Goblin Market*

## Introduction

THE CHARM of exotic goods is potent in our own times. Any American magazine will provide dozens of examples: perfume from France—"the love fragrance"; shoes from Belgium—" . . shoe artisans for over three hundred years"; automobiles from Sweden—"symbol of superb Swedish engineering and craftsmanship"; sherry from Spain—" . . tastes exactly the same as in Queen Victoria's reign"; recorders from Switzerland—" . . made of the choicest Swiss pear, maple, cherry"; gin from England—"a closely guarded recipe and age-old skill . . ."; teak flooring from Siam—"quality untouched by time"; after-shave lotion from the Virgin Islands—" . . captures the cool, cool freshness of true West Indian limes in handsome, native-wrought packages"; macadamia nuts from Hawaii—" . . all the fabled richness of the Islands." Not to mention Scotch whisky, German cameras, Danish silverware, Italian sandals, Indian madras, Indonesian pepper, Chinese damasks, and Mexican tequila. We may want these magical wares because we do not have anything like them at home or because someone has persuaded us that they are better than our home-grown goods, or, most of all, because they come to us from enchanted lands, whose images are divorced in our minds from the assumed "realities" of practical diplomacy, trade balances, and war. Their real life is in the bright world of the imagination, where we take our true holidays.

This book's title, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*, was chosen because it suggests simultaneously the Golden Apples of the Hesperides, the Peaches of Immortality placed by Chinese tradition in the distant West, James Elroy Flecker's *Golden Journey to Samarkand*, and Frederick Delius' music for the "Golden Road to Samarkand" in Flecker's play *Hassan*. Despite these allusions to myth and music, the golden peaches actually existed. Twice in the seventh century, the kingdom of Samarkand sent formal gifts of fancy yellow peaches to the Chinese court. "They were as large as goose eggs, and as their color was like gold they were also called 'The Golden Peaches.'" <sup>1</sup> Some specimens of the trees which bore this royal fruit

were brought by the ambassadorial caravan all the way across the deserts of Serindia, and transplanted into the palace orchards in Ch'ang-an. But what kind of fruit they may have been, and how they may have tasted, cannot now be guessed. They are made glamorous by mystery, and symbolize all the exotic things longed for and the unknown things hoped for by the people of the T'ang empire.

How T'ang China contributed her arts and manners to her neighbors of the medieval Far East, especially to Japan, Korea, Turkestan, Tibet, and Annam, is a rather well-known story. To mention the arts of xylography, city planning, costume design, and versification is only to hint at the magnitude of the cultural debt which these peripheral countries owed to T'ang. We are also familiar with the material goods sought by foreigners in China or taken abroad by the Chinese themselves: luxuries like silk textiles, wine, ceramics, metalwork, and medicines, as well as such minor dainties as peaches, honey, and pine nuts,<sup>2</sup> and, of course, the instruments of civilization, great books and fine paintings.<sup>3</sup>

China also played the role of cultural go-between, transmitting the arts of the countries of the West to those of the East, through such agents as the Buddhist Tao-hsüan, who went to Japan in 735 with the returning ambassador Tajihino Mabito Hironari, accompanied by an Indian brahman, a Cham musician, and a Persian physician.<sup>4</sup> The contributions to T'ang culture itself which were made by these aliens who thronged the great Chinese cities have been the subject of much study. The influence of Indian religion and astronomy, of Persian textile patterns and metalcraft, of Tocharian music and dancing, of Turkish costume and custom, are only a small part of a stupendous total.

The *material* imports of T'ang are not so well known, and it is these which form the subject matter of this book. The horses, leather goods, furs, and weapons of the North, the ivory, rare woods, drugs, and aromatics of the South, the textiles, gem stones, industrial minerals, and dancing girls of the West<sup>5</sup>—the Chinese of T'ang, especially those of the eighth century, developed an appetite for such things as these and could afford to pay for them.

Even with this emphasis the book will not provide any useful statistics on medieval trade nor propose any fascinating theory about the tribute system. It is intended as a humanistic essay, however material its subject matter. There is no paradox or mystery in finding what is most human through what is most corporal and palpable. "The past," wrote Proust (in Scott Moncrieff's translation) in his "Overture" to *Swann's Way*, "is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) which we do not suspect." A cockatoo from Celebes, a puppy from Samarkand, a strange book from Magadha, a strong drug from Champapura—each took hold of the Chinese imagination in a different way, altered the pattern of T'ang life, and was ultimately embodied in a poem, an edict, a short story, or a memorial to the throne. In some one of these literary forms the exotic object found a new and extended life and

became, in time, even after its physical death, a kind of ideal image. It achieved a Platonic reality that it had lacked when it first arrived at the frontiers of China destitute of mental clothing, having lost on the way most of what it had once possessed in its native land. So, whatever it may have exemplified in the Sunda Isles, the cockatoo became a visible symbol of wisdom, the puppy gladdened childish hearts in stories and pictures, the sutra astonished students seeing its abominable script for the first time, and the medicine gave a new flavor to the wine in which it was mixed, and became an ingredient in the drink of a connoisseur.

It is for the same reason that this book is named *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*. Though they once had some kind of “real” existence, these fruits have become partly enigmatic entities, whose only true life is literary and metaphorical. In short, they belong to the mental world even more than to the physical world.

In the remarks which follow, I have tried to explain conceptions and names which are important in the book but may not be obvious to the nonspecialist.

### Poetry

In translations of poems and fragments of poems, I have preferred to err on the side of faithfulness to the language of the original, even at the risk of obscurity when trying to preserve strange images, rather than to use paraphrase for the sake of poetic grace or a familiar image.

### Old Pronunciations

In giving the medieval names of non-Chinese persons, places, and things, I have usually used a hypothetical but reliable reconstruction based on the work of Bernhard Karlgren, even though the diacritics and phonetic symbols make awkward reading—but sometimes I have arbitrarily simplified them. These reconstructions are prefixed by an asterisk. It is important to remember that a *-t* at the end of a syllable in medieval Chinese often represented a foreign *-r* or *-l*, and hence “myrrh” is *\*muɹt*. The conventional “Mandarin” pronunciation (that is, standard modern Chinese) used by many writers gives little or no idea of the phonetic shape of these old loan words. To follow this unfortunate custom would be like calling C. Julius Caesar “C. J. Czar.” For instance, the Old Cambodian name for a pre-Cambodian nation on the Gulf of Siam is *Bnam*, “Mountain,” since the kings of that country were conceived to be godlike beings reigning on the summit of the holy world-mountain.<sup>6</sup> Thus the modern “Pnom” of Pnom-Penh. In T’ang times this name was transcribed as *\*B’iū-nâm*, but we will hardly recognize it in Modern Chinese *Fu-nan*.

### Archaeology

The names “Tun-huang” and “Shōsōin” appear frequently in these pages. They are the chief repositories of T’ang artifacts. Tun-huang is a frontier town in Kansu Province, officially called *Sha-chou* in T’ang times, where a hidden library was dis-

covered early in this century. Large numbers of medieval manuscripts and scroll paintings were taken from this treasure to the British Museum by Sir Aurel Stein, and to the Bibliothèque Nationale by Professor Paul Pelliot, where they may now be studied. The Shōsōin is a medieval storehouse attached to the temple called Tōdaiji in Nara, near Kyoto, Japan. It contains rich objects of every sort from all over Asia, but especially, it seems, from T'ang China. Some Japanese scholars regard them, or some of them, as native products; in any case, they are usually congruent with known T'ang work, and at worst can be styled "pseudo-T'ang."

*"Ancient" and "Medieval"*

In reference to China, "medieval" here refers to approximately the same time interval as it does in Europe; "ancient" is almost synonymous with "classical" in my usage, denoting especially the Han dynasty, along with the last part of the Chou. "Archaic" refers to Shang and early Chou. Unfortunately, the traditions of Chinese philology require that "Ancient Chinese" refer to the pronunciation of T'ang and what I call "medieval China," and "Archaic Chinese" to the language of what I call "ancient China" or "classical China." \**Muṛt*, "myrrh," is "Ancient Chinese," as we in the profession say, but it is a *medieval* form, used in T'ang. I have tried to avoid these linguistic expressions.

*Hsüan Tsung*

If we disregard the "tone" of *Hsüan*, two T'ang monarchs had this posthumous title, by which they are known in history. By far the better known of the two had a long and famous reign in the eighth century. He is also sometimes called Ming Huang ("Luminous Illustrious"). Both he and his "Precious Consort," the Lady Yang (Kuei-fei) are frequently mentioned in this book. The other Hsüan Tsung enjoys much less fame, though he was a good ruler in difficult times in the ninth century. To distinguish him, I have given his title as Hsüan<sup>(1)</sup> Tsung.

*Rokhshan*

The traditional but very real villain of the age of Hsüan Tsung is now generally known by the "Mandarin" transcription of his name, which was not Chinese. This modernized form is "An Lu-shan." I shall always call him Rokhshan, following the reconstruction of his true name by Professor E. G. Pulleyblank. He was "Rokhshan" to his contemporaries; our "Roxana," of Persian origin, is a closely related name.

*Hu Barbarians*

In T'ang times, persons and goods from many foreign countries were styled *hu*. In ancient times, this epithet had been applied mostly to China's Northern neighbors, but in medieval times, including T'ang, it applied chiefly to Westerners, and especially to Iranians, though sometimes also to Indians, Arabs, and Romans. A Sanskrit

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equivalent was *sulī*, from *Sūlikā*, in turn from \**Suydik* “Sogdian” broadened to “Iranian.”<sup>7</sup> I have often translated it badly as “Western” or “Westerner.”

### *Man Barbarians*

*Man* was a name for non-Chinese peoples on the southern frontier of T’ang and also of aboriginal enclaves in Chinese territory. It was also given to certain specific Indo-chinese tribes, now difficult to identify.

### *Lingnan*

The great southern province of Lingnan corresponded fairly exactly to the modern provinces of Kwangtung and Kwangsi. I use the name freely.

### *Annam*

*Annam* meant “Secured South” or “Pacified South,” a rather imperialistic term given to a T’ang “protectorate” in Tongking, or Northern Vietnam, immediately south of Lingnan and north of Champa.

### *Chinrap*

The Cambodian nation which absorbed Bnam (Fu-nan) was named Chen-la (in modern “Mandarin” pronunciation), whose etymology was ingeniously explained by Professor Pelliot as \**Chinrap*, “The Chinese Vanquished,” like the modern town Siemreap, “The Siamese Vanquished.”<sup>8</sup>

### *Qočo*

The great T’ang garrison at Turfan was officially styled *Hsi-chou*, “Island of the West,” and to many peoples it was Činančkānt, the “City of the Chinese.”<sup>9</sup> The Chinese themselves called it Kao-ch’ang, which became Qočo locally. I have generally used the last of these forms.

### *Serindia*

The immense area between T’ang and Transoxania is variously known as “Chinese Turkestan,” “Eastern Turkestan,” “Tarim Basin,” “Central Asia,” and “Sinkiang.” I call it “Serindia,” using the name given it by Sir Aurel Stein.

### *Rome*

The men of T’ang knew something of the Eastern Roman empire, which they called by a corrupt version of “Rome,” derived from some Oriental tongue in a form like “Hrom.” I have used this, and sometimes “Rūm,” and sometimes “Rome.” The modern pronunciation of the old transcription is “Fu-lin.” This is so different from the T’ang version that I have not used it at all, despite the sanction of custom.

*Chou*

The T'ang empire was divided into practical administrative units called *chou*, much like our counties. *Chou* means "land bounded by water," hence "island," "continent." An important myth told how the hero Yü drained the flood waters from the Chinese lands and marked out the nine primitive *chou*, raised places on which men could live. These were the first counties. The word *chou* continued to be used in this way for areas of varying size for many centuries. We might translate it "island-province," or even just "island"; this will not surprise an Englishman, for whom the "Isle of Ely" is comparable to "Essex County" and "Cambridgeshire." "Île de France" is also comparable. But I have usually given such forms as Ch'u-*chou* and Lung-*chou* instead of "Isle of Ch'u" and "Isle of Lung."

*Szu*

Traditionally, the first Buddhist establishment in China, in Han times, was housed in a government office building, called a *szu*. Therefore all Buddhist monasteries and religious foundations ("temples," if we understand this word to include many buildings, galleries, and gardens in a large complex) were called "offices." I have translated *szu* as "office" or "temple-office" or "office-temple." Some government offices were still called *szu* in T'ang.

*Plants*

Identifications of plants in this book are based primarily on the following works: G. A. Stuart, *Chinese Materia Medica: Vegetable Kingdom* (1911); B. E. Read, *Chinese Medicinal Plants from the Pen Ts'ao Kang Mu A.D. 1596* (1936); and I. H. Burkhill, *A Dictionary of the Economic Products of the Malay Peninsula* (1935).