

A SINO-FRENCH MEDICAL MANUSCRIPT OF 1730

By C. R. BOXER

THE LILLY LIBRARY recently acquired (March 1973) an interesting and valuable manuscript, which can be termed without exaggeration one of the landmarks in the history of the contacts and interactions between Chinese and Western medicine. It came, via Alain Brieux of Paris, from the library of the late Paul Pelliot, famous French sinologue. A penciled note in the latter's hand, written on a piece of paper loosely inserted in the manuscript reads: "Milieu de XVIII^e siecle. Peut-etre par Van der Monde. Cf. ma note a la *Bibl. Sinica*² (col. 1478)." This reference to Henri Cordier's *Bibliotheca Sinica* is to Pelliot's own profusely annotated copy of this work, which is likewise in the possession of Alain Brieux. The manuscript comprises 111 numbered folio pages of extracts in French translation from the *Pen-ts'ao chang-mu*, a vast encyclopedic work on Chinese medicine and *materia medica*, compiled by the celebrated Ming physician, Li Shih-chen (died 1593).¹ This section is followed by two blank pages numbered 112 and 149, and then by eighteen folio pages numbered 150-168, dealing with *cholera morbus* and related diseases. Pages 113-148 are either missing or else never existed in this codex, which is bound in a recent vellum binding.

A careful study of this manuscript convinces me that Pelliot's tentative identification of the translator is correct, as can be seen by the following sketch of his career, compiled from French and Portuguese sources.

Jacques-François Vandermonde was a Fleming from Landreçies in French Flanders, where he was born at an unascertained date in the late seventeenth century. He received a degree from the medical faculty at Rheims in August 1720, shortly before leaving for the Far East in the service of the French East India Company. He served first at the island of Pulo Condore off the southern tip of Vietnam, and then in the city of Canton, where he was offered the post of municipal surgeon and doctor to the Portuguese city of Macao (*Fízico e Cirurgiãõ do partido desta Cidade*) in March 1723. He was formally appointed to this dual position on May 19 of the same year, receiving an annual salary of 500 *patacas* (pataca being the Portuguese term for the Spanish-American *peso-de-a-ochó-reales*, or real-of-eight). He was expected to treat the poor citizens free of charge, and to maintain his own pharmacy, from which he would supply medicines to other patients "at reasonable rates."²

Vandermonde practiced for six years in Macao, being highly praised by some of his patients and much criticized by others. Among the former was the Jesuit missionary, Polycarp de Sousa, later bishop of Peking, who declared that "under God" he owed his life to Vandermonde, for having cured him when he was seriously ill at Macao in 1726. However, the municipal councilors resolved to dismiss Vandermonde in July 1729, partly on the grounds that he was a foreigner and partly for his alleged misbehavior with some female patients, including the nuns of the Franciscan convent of Santa Clara, "addressing them with very ugly and indecent words." He protested his dismissal, and he was upheld by the viceroy of Goa, who granted him Portuguese nationality and ordered the City Council to reinstate him.

The dispute was carried to Lisbon, where the crown likewise took the side of Vandermonde; but the municipal councilors ignored these orders and appointed a Portuguese to the post at the much lower salary of 150 *taéis* yearly.

Jacques-François Vandermonde had married a local Eurasian girl, and a son, Charles-Augustin, was born to the couple on June 18, 1727. His wife having died at an unascertained date, Jacques-François returned with his young son to Paris in 1732. He died there in 1746, and his son was brought up by the de Jussieu family, becoming a doctor and a professor of surgery at the faculty of Paris. Charles-Augustin also became a royal censor, founder, and editor of the *Journal Général de Médecine*, author of a compact *Dictionnaire de Santé* (1760), and a minor figure in the Enlightenment, as exemplified by his *Essai sur la manière de perfectionner l'espèce humaine* (2 vols., Paris, 1756), in which he advocated inter-racial marriages, among other things. His promising career was cut short by a sudden and fatal illness in 1762, just when he was about to make "a very honorable marriage."³ As indicated above, Jacques-François Vandermonde had brought back from Macao a translation of the mineralogical section of Li Shih-chen's *Pen-ts'ao chang-mu*. This was accompanied by some eighty "samples of Chinese minerals, packed in jars or canisters labeled with their respective Chinese names, sometimes in characters and sometimes in romanisation," according to Edouard Biot, writing in 1839.⁴ After the death of Charles-Augustin Vandermonde, this material became successively the property of Antoine-Laurent de Jussieu (1748-1836), and of the latter's son, Adrien de Jussieu (1797-1853), whence it passed into the collection of the Jardin du Roi. It has since disappeared or been mislaid, according to Huard and Wong, writing in 1966;⁵ but I

cannot say at what date the mineralogical specimens became separated from the accompanying manuscript.

Although Biot utilized the de Jussieu manuscript in his 1839 article, he only reproduced very brief extracts, which however, coincide with the wording of the same passages in the Pelliot-Lilly manuscript. The Chinese characters of all names in this last text are neatly written in the corresponding margins, evidently by a Chinese and not by a European, judging from the caligraphy. The bulk of the text, beginning with page 17, deals with mineralogical and metallic substances, but the opening sections deal with water (pp. 1-11) and fire (pp. 12-16). There is no title page, but page one of the text is headed (in English translation): "Translation from the Chinese into French of a history of drugs which is entitled *Kan Mo*, or principal extract from the authors who have written on medicine." After stating the Chinese author's name ("Li Chi tsin"), date, and scope of the work, the actual translation begins with the fifth book. I append an English version of the French text in order to give an idea of Vandermonde's third-person style.

Book the Fifth.

The author treats herein of the waters. He distinguishes thirteen different kinds which fall from the sky. The first is rain-water. It is beneficial, and has no harmful quality, but tastes a little salty. If a man and a woman, being desirous of working for the propagation of the human race, each drink immediately before beginning the act, a good glass of rain-water collected at the beginning of the spring-time, which the Chinese call *Li Tchuan* [Chinese characters are supplied in the margin], the woman will become pregnant. This rain-water from the same season is excellent for dissolving and serving as a vehicle for remedies which are given for strengthening the vital parts. The reason which

the [Chinese] author gives for this, is that at this time the rain-water is imbued with a certain kind of nitrous salt which fosters the growth of all the plants.

The mineralogical section ends on page 104 of the manuscript ("End of the Minerals"), and is followed by a section (pp. 104-111) headed: "The author treats here of the herbs which grow in the forests, the mountains, and thereabouts." Page 112 is blank, and the numeration then jumps to page 149, which is likewise blank. The final section (pp. 150-168) is not the least interesting part of the manuscript. It is headed: "The disease which the Portuguese of India call *mordexin* is an indigestion of the stomach, of which there are several kinds which differ from each other, and which originate from many causes." He proceeds to describe and analyze five such "kinds of indigestion," their causes, treatment, and cure, followed by a similar disquisition on various types of dysentery (pp. 150-168). Pages 150-168 deal with the causes, treatment, and cure of other diseases which afflicted Europeans in the Far East, including bilious colics, inflammation of the liver, the *vento* or sudden obstruction of the pores, smallpox, asthma, pleurisy, etc.

The writer nowhere mentions his own name, but he writes in the present tense and refers to his personal experiences and clinical observations at Canton in 1728 and at Macao in 1729-30. He can, therefore, only be Jacques-François Vandermonde. We know that he retained his interest in Chinese medicine and *materia medica* after his return to France, acting as an informant to Jean Astruc (1684-1766) and other sinophile French doctors and surgeons.⁶ Unfortunately, there is no indication of the name of the Chinese who supplied the neatly-written characters

in the margins, and who was presumably the original translator or co-translator, as it is highly unlikely that Vandermonde himself had more than a smattering of the language.

NOTES

¹ The extract from the *Pen-ts'ao chang-mu* which is discussed here is quite different from the abridged summary of the contents of this work given by Père Jean-Baptiste Du Halde, S.J., in his classic *Description Géographique, Historique, Chronologique, Politique, et Physique de l'Empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie Chinoise*, 4 vols. and atlas, vol. III (The Hague, 1736), pp. 538-66, which was derived from Jesuit missionary sources.

² For the wording of this contract and for details of Vandermonde's checkered career in Macao, see Padre Manuel Teixeira, *Os Médicos em Macau* (Macao, 1967), pp. 7-11.

³ See the entry under his name in the *Biographie Universelle*, Tome 47 (Paris, 1827), pp. 433-34.

⁴ Edouard Biot, "Mémoire sur divers minéraux chinois appartenant à la collection du Jardin du Roi," in the *Journal Asiatique*, vol. VIII (Paris, 1839), pp. 206-30.

⁵ Pierre Huard and Ming Wong, "Les Enquêtes Françaises sur la science et la technologie chinoises au XVIII^e siècle," in the *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient*, Tome 53 (Paris, 1966), pp. 137-223, and especially pp. 165-67.

⁶ Pierre Huard and Ming Wong, *Chinese Medicine, translated from the French by Bernard Fielding* (New York, 1968), pp. 122, 126-27, where, however, the dates relating to Vandermonde's stay at Macao are erroneously given as 1720-31.

I may add that the manuscript utilized by E. Biot in 1839, and later by F. de Mély, who gives copious extracts from it in his *Les Lapidaires Chinois* (Paris, 1896) is not the same one as this Pelliot-Lilly manuscript, since the Biot-Mély version was of a completely different format and it comprised 23 leaves or 46 pages, averaging some 45

lines to a page. Presumably, Vandermonde made two copies and retained what is now the Pelliot-Lilly version for himself, after giving the other (Biot-Mély) version to de Jussieu. Cf. *Les Lapidaires Chinois*, pp. xv, xvi, and 152 *et seq.*

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